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**Italian Film Avant-gardes, 1960-70:  
Ontologies of the Archive**

By  
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For the Degree:  
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)  
(Film, Media and Cultural Studies)  
Birkbeck, University of London

**Declaration of Original Work:**

This is to acknowledge that the work presented in this thesis is  
Donatella Valente's own.

Signed: .....

Date: .....

## Abstract

This thesis situates Italian experimental films made between 1960 and 1970 within the historical landscape of film avant-gardes. A historical and theoretical methodology underpins my research, which identifies a coherent and sustained aesthetic and conceptual deployment of the archive (in the broadest sense) and its materials. I contend that this avant-garde, overshadowed by the international prestige of the Italian auteurs of the same period, and overlooked by most histories of Italian cinema, provides valuable material for critical and philosophical reflection on the cultural role of the archive.

Each strand of this work opened up a dialogue between the past and the present, thus foregrounding both a historical and aesthetic attitude. Hence, my claim that ‘ontologies of the archive’ shows how experimental film practices of this period developed a pluralistic approach to the past, which entailed re-purposing the fabric and materials of audiovisual archives, revealing their versatility and generative potential.

‘Ontologies of the archive’ also questions how archival material relates to the film as a whole, how its meaning has been re-shaped, and how various segments and aphorisms relate to one another. Essentially, I explore the varied re-purposing of certain materials and formats in Italian experimental films, which to some extent anticipated the better-known Arte Povera movement and contributed to it. My conceptual framework draws mainly on Adorno’s essays ‘The Idea of Natural-History’ (1932) and ‘The Essay as Form’ (1958), and on Umberto Eco’s ‘Form as Social Commitment’ (1962).

Italian avant-garde film of this period looked back to the historic as well as contemporary avant-gardes, sharing a critical aesthetic that invoked anti-illusionistic, reflective modes of engagement with film form and content. Drawing on Peter Wollen’s 1975 essay ‘The Two Avant-Gardes’, I argue that the heterogeneous and transformative nature of the archive was formally poised between abstraction and naturalism. Thus, these films constitute a ‘third avant-garde’, arguably invoking the ‘essay film turn’ in the Italian avant-gardes of the 1960s. This aesthetic approach contributes to valued research conducted over the last twenty years on the archival nature of the essay film.

## Table of Contents

Declaration of original work	
Abstract .....	3
List of figures .....	8
Introduction .....	9
1. Why avant-garde?.....	10
2. A dominant film industry .....	12
3. The Avant-gardes .....	16
4. A ‘third avant-garde’? The ‘natural-history’ of the archive.....	19
Existing literature on Italian avant-garde cinema and the essay film .....	22
Chapter Summaries .....	25
Chapter 1. ‘Form as Social Commitment’ and the ‘Natural-History’ of the Archive..	30
1. Cultural Anthropology .....	30
2. The Frankfurt School of Critical Theory in Italy .....	36
3. Umberto Eco’s ‘Form as Social Commitment’ .....	43
4. The ‘Natural-History’ of the Archive.....	46
Chapter 2. The Cooperative of Italian Independent Cinema and <i>Tutto, tutto nello stesso istante</i> ( <i>All, all at once</i> , 1968-69) .....	56
1. An Independent Film Culture.....	58
2. The Cooperative of Italian Independent Cinema (La Cooperativa del Cinema Indipendente Italiano, “CCI”) .....	62
3. <i>Tutto, Tutto nello stesso istante</i> ( <i>All, all at once</i> , 1968-69) .....	67
3.1 A textual analysis .....	73
4. Towards an <i>essay</i> film form .....	83

Chapter 3. Cine-portraiture and Cinephilia in the Archive .....	88
1. Silvio and Vittorio Loffredo: <i>Le Court Bouillon (Part IV, 1960)</i> .....	90
2. Cioni Carpi: <i>Voglio, Non Voglio (I will... I shan't: A Study of Human Behaviour, 1961)</i> .....	95
3. Rosa Foschi and Luca Patella: <i>Amour du Cinéma (1969)</i> .....	99
4. The Archive: <i>Il Re è Un Feticcio. Un Romanzo di Cose (The King is a Fetish. A Romance of Things, Gaspare Barbielini Amidei and Bachisio Bandinu, 1976)</i> .....	101
4.1 The methodology of the historian and collector.....	104
4.2 Cine-portraiture and ‘aesthetic ruining’ .....	107
4.3 Cinephilia .....	111
Chapter 4. Massimo Bacigalupo: the Personal Archive and Myth .....	116
1. Dreaming with a personal camera .....	117
2. <i>Quasi una Tangente (Almost a Tangent, 1966)</i> .....	118
2.1 Life and death.....	121
3. <i>Ariel Loquitur (Ariel Speaks, 1967)</i> .....	122
3.1 Natural magic: technology and nature.....	125
4. <i>60 metri per il 31 marzo (200 feet for March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1968)</i> .....	128
5. <i>Versus (1968)</i> .....	132
6. A film-tetralogy: <i>Fiore d’eringio (The Eryngium cycle, 1969-1970)</i> .....	134
6.1 <i>L’ultima Estate (The Last Summer, 1969)</i> .....	136
6.2 <i>Né Bosco: una conversazione (Nor Wood: a conversation, 1970)</i> .....	136
6.3 <i>Migrazione (Migration, 1970)</i> .....	137
6.4 <i>Coda (Coda, 1970)</i> .....	139
7. Citations from the personal archive.....	140
7.1 The ‘magic’ of natural history.....	142

7.2 Myth in the archive.....	145
Figures: 1-4 .....	149
Chapter 5. The Avant-garde <i>Cinegiornale</i> .....	150
1. Historic <i>cinegiornali</i> : <i>Cinegiornale Luce</i> and <i>La Settimana Incom</i> : (1927-1965)	152
2. Avant-garde <i>cinegiornali</i> .....	156
3. Cesare Zavattini: <i>Cinegiornale della Pace</i> (1963) and <i>Cinegiornali Liberi</i> (1968-70) .....	158
4. Alfredo Leonardi: an experimental <i>Cinegiornale</i> (1967).....	165
Figures: 5-6 .....	173
Chapter 6. <i>Buongiorno, Michelangelo</i> (Ugo Nespolo, 1968-69). <i>Azioni Povere</i> and ‘ <i>Film Povero</i> ’ .....	174
1. Ugo Nespolo: <i>Buongiorno, Michelangelo</i> (1968-69).....	175
2. <i>Azioni Povere</i> and the de-materialisation of the archive .....	177
3. ‘ <i>Film Povero</i> ’: ‘play’ and ‘gesture’ with the archive .....	184
Figures: 7-11 .....	193
Chapter 7. Perceptual Strategies and Cognitive Approaches.....	195
1. Claudio Cintoli: <i>Più</i> (1964).....	196
1.1 Cultural obsolescence.....	199
2. Giorgio Turi and Roberto Capanna: <i>Voy-age</i> (1964).....	203
2.1 Anthropomorphising technology.....	206
3. Adamo Vergine: <i>Ciao ciao</i> (1967) .....	212
4. Giorgio Turi: <i>Scusate il disturbo</i> (1968) .....	214
4.1 Interruption aesthetics .....	217
Chapter 8. <i>Verifica Incerta (Disperse Exclamatory Phase)</i> (Gianfranco Baruchello, Alberto Grifi, 1964-65): A ‘Cinema of Gesture’ .....	223

1. <i>Verifica Incerta (Disperse Exclamatory Phase)</i> .....	226
2. New avant-garde strategies.....	228
3. Reclaiming the archive: towards a ‘cinema of gesture’ .....	231
4. Dispersing the film’s materiality .....	237
5. Revitalising found film footage.....	242
5.1 Mimesis and the aporetic text.....	246
5.2 The dialectical image.....	250
5.3 ‘Repetition and stoppage’ .....	252
6. A ‘cinema of gesture’ .....	254
Figures: 12-34 .....	258
Chapter 9. For a Critique of Violence with the Archive .....	262
1. Alfredo Leonardi: <i>Indulgenza Plenaria</i> (1964).....	263
2. Mario Schifano: <i>Vietnam</i> (1967).....	266
3. Giorgio Turi and Roberto Capanna: <i>Non permetterò</i> (1967).....	267
4. Mario Lombardi and Anna Lojolo: <i>A Corpo</i> (1968).....	269
5. Alberto Grifi: <i>L’occhio è per così dire l’evoluzione biologica di una lacrima /</i> <i>Autoritratto Auschwitz</i> (1965-1967/2007) .....	271
5.1 The film’s structure .....	271
5.2 The film’s aesthetics.....	274
5.3 The archive as testimony .....	277
6. For a critique of violence with the archive .....	280
Figures: 35-58 .....	290
Conclusion .....	294
Appendix A: The London Underground Film Festival (1970) .....	300
Bibliography.....	305

## List of figures

	<b>Page</b>
Figures 1: <i>60 metri per il 31 marzo (200 feet for March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1968)</i>	148
Figure 2: <i>Versus (1968)</i>	148
Figure 3: <i>Fiore d'eringio (The Eryngium cycle, 1969-1970)</i>	148
Figure 4: <i>Migrazione (Migration, 1970)</i>	148
Figures 5-6: <i>Bombardamento Alleato su Roma (Allied Bombardment on Rome, 1943) – Cinegiornale Luce</i>	172
Figures 7-8: <i>Buongiorno, Michelangelo (Ugo Nespolo, 1968-69)</i>	192
Figure 9: <i>Buongiorno, Michelangelo (Ugo Nespolo, 1968-69)</i>	193
Figures 10-11: Michelangelo Pistoletto, <i>Tate Long Weekend (2009)</i>	193
Figures 12-34: <i>Verifica Incerta (1964-65)</i>	258-261
Figures 35-36: <i>Vietnam (1967)</i>	290
Figures 37-58: <i>L'occhio è per così dire l'evoluzione biologica di una lacrima / Autoritratto Auschwitz (1965-1967/2007)</i>	290-293

## Introduction

The fluctuating Italian economy of the sixties encompassed an ‘economic miracle’, which lasted from 1958 until early 1963, followed by a recession between 1963 and 1964.<sup>1</sup> The country’s fast-changing economy affected many aspects of Italian society, including its cinema’s attitude towards the representation of everyday reality, which had been the central focus of the neorealist cinema of the post-war years. One aspect of the legacy of neorealism could be found in the cinema’s continuing concern for the human condition, in a society which appeared to be increasingly materialistic, sceptical and estranged.

The emerging Italian cinema of the 1960s incorporated more varied perspectives on the country’s social and cultural status than had been typical of neorealism, and tended to represent the poetics of a bourgeois anomie, as well as a more naturalistic sensibility towards social inequalities. Its internationally renowned auteurs testified to the effects of the country’s economic and cultural changes of those years, and historicised their view of Italian society by looking at the present from varying perspectives. For instance, Michelangelo Antonioni examined social alienation among the upper class through his ‘trilogy of alienation’; *L’Avventura* (1960), *La Notte* (1961) and *L’Eclisse* (1962); Federico Fellini offered satirical and disenchanting social portrayals in his *La Dolce Vita* (1960) and *8 ½* (1963); and Luchino Visconti depicted the rise of a newly enriched class of landlords displacing the old aristocracy in *Il Gattopardo* (*The Leopard*, 1963).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David Forgacs, *Italian Culture in the Industrial Era 1880-1980* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1990), p. 133.

<sup>2</sup> ‘However, the international prestige of Italian cinema during these years depended primarily upon a series of important works directed by Visconti, Antonioni, and Fellini, all of whom by this time had transcended their neorealist origins to develop highly personal cinematic styles.’ Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema from Neorealism to the Present*, Third Edition (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 196.

However, overshadowed by the Italian auteurs' international prestige, and neglected in most histories of Italian cinema, independent strands of filmmaking had been developing throughout the sixties. Movement, rhythm and composition were part of a newly textured aesthetic sensibility which was very different from the 'new Italian cinema' of the great auteurs, and closer to the avant-gardes of the New American Cinema, and the New York and London Film Cooperatives. As this thesis will demonstrate, many Italian experimental filmmakers travelled to, and lived for some time in the United States, and were also in contact with some of the most influential independent filmmakers.

By providing an historical and theoretical account of a carefully selected range of Italian avant-garde films of the 1960s, I offer a wider perspective on Italian cinema of the decade, long dominated by the reputation of the great film masters of a more commercial art cinema. Italy's avant-garde film activity proposed a bold, often visionary poetics, which had more in common with contemporary art than with mainstream or 'art' cinema. The substantial contribution that this thesis offers to academic research in Italian film studies and the history of the film avant-gardes lies in its theoretical framework, which posits 'the archive' as central. My reference to 'ontologies of the archive' reflects a plurality of approaches, and aesthetic attitudes, to archive materials, and the reasons why these mattered.

### **1. Why avant-garde?**

The filmmakers researched here can be considered 'avant-garde' because of their common desire to create an independent film culture, as an alternative to the dominant commercial film industry, which was committed to communicating an aesthetic critical of consumerism through innovative experimental film language. On the one

hand, their films often engaged with both modernist and ancient aspects of the traditional arts: painting, sculpture and literature. On the other hand, their images exceeded, not only the painter's canvas but also the diegetic frame, and engaged with performance art. Most of these filmmakers were painters, who may have experimented with film only briefly, exploring its possibilities in the encounter with other arts. Their films were often aesthetically influenced by the historic avant-gardes: Italian Futurism and Russian Constructivism, Cubism and Dada; also by more specifically Italian movements, such as Arte Informale and Spazialismo, Arte Povera and neorealism. At the same time, they were aware of other contemporary international avant-garde practices: Fluxus and Happenings, the New American Cinema (from Maya Deren and Gregory Markopoulos to Hollis Frampton, Stan Brakhage and Jonas Mekas), and the Living Theatre. Only few shared some of the aesthetic concerns of the Anglo-American film cooperatives.

However, it is not only because the Italian experimental filmmakers made use of such techniques as collage, montage, and compilation that they can be considered avant-garde. I argue that their films can also be considered so because they used these techniques in conjunction with the incorporation of archival materials and found footage. By making these aesthetic choices, they continued the legacies of 'the essay film', which, despite its more recent prevalence, Timothy Corrigan has suggested can be traced back as far as *A Corner in Wheat* (1909).<sup>3</sup> The study of these films also complements Laura Rascaroli's historiographic perspectives on Italian essay films, which I discuss on page 24. I maintain they should be considered a significant part of the history of Italian cinema, and of the international film avant-garde, on account of

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<sup>3</sup> Timothy Corrigan, 'Introduction: of Film and the Essayistic', in *The Essay Film. From Montaigne, after Marker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 2.

their desire to communicate cultural changes and critical meanings, and for addressing cultural memory and the legacies of history.

Distinctively, I suggest that the materialities of the archive, together with specific avant-garde techniques, were key to activating an innovative experimental film language, opening up new historical approaches to film. To explore this, I lay out a range of theoretical arguments which cast light on the ways in which these filmmakers engaged with the role of the mass media in contemporary life.

## **2. A dominant film industry**

Italian independent filmmakers faced a tradition of state directives regulating film production which had started under Fascism. Since the Liberation, and the arrival of the Christian Democrats in government, with Giulio Andreotti as Undersecretary for Press, Entertainment and Tourism in 1947, Italian and American business interests had developed a strong cultural bond, which reached into the film industry. It was Law 958 of December 29, 1949, 'Disposizioni per la cinematografia' ('Regulations for the Cinema'), popularly known as the 'Andreotti law', which sanctioned a close collaboration with the American film industry until 1954.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the Andreotti Law consolidated the tradition of a state-controlled cinema market that had prevailed under Fascism, replaced by the *dubbing tax* of 1947, which gave way to Andreotti's control through censorship over the film industry.<sup>5</sup> Both the Andreotti Law and the American Production Code (1930-1968) determined the box office success, or otherwise, of Italian films in the United States. However these controls operated with different

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<sup>4</sup> 'Within the broad principles insisted on by the Americans after the war, it [Andreotti Law] gave rise to the partial rebirth of state control over the cinema and the state-regulated cinema market that had prevailed under Fascism'. David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), p. 132.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Wood, *Italian Cinema* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), p. 13.

criteria. Thus the PCA (Production Code Administration) regulations were so stringent that they initially rejected Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di Biciclette* (*Bicycle Thieves*, 1948) and Giuseppe De Santis's melodrama *Riso Amaro* (*Bitter Rice*, 1949), on the basis of their alleged lack of taste and morality, causing both a delayed release in America.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, The Legion of Decency in New York also condemned other neorealist films including Rossellini's short *The Miracle* as part of the film trilogy *L'Amore* (*Ways of Love*, 1948).<sup>7</sup>

In reaction against these restrictions, experimental filmmakers were motivated to form independent collaborations and create innovative forms of expression aiming to challenge the segregation of non-feature length film productions. Since the 1945 Repeal Law of the Monopoly Law (1938), regulations favoured substantial foreign film imports, at the expense of independent non-commercially driven cinema.<sup>8</sup> Mussolini's Monopoly Law had made the powerful, vertically-integrated American cinema much less influential:

The so-called Monopoly Law of 1938 gave the Italian industry control over the distribution of imports. This provoked the anger of the four Hollywood majors who had their own distribution operations in Italy – Twentieth Century Fox, Metro Goldwyn Mayer, Paramount Pictures and Warner Brothers – and they pulled out. Their disappearance left a gap in the rental market, which had thrived for up to 80 per cent of its activities on American films, and this gap was filled by an increased output of domestic production.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> 'The rejection of the neorealist masterpiece *Ladri di biciclette* caused outrage in Italy and was seen as deliberate discrimination. [...] Without the PCA's approval, the film could only be shown with local approval.' Forgacs and Gundle, p. 143.

<sup>7</sup> 'The Legion of Decency, which had previously condemned *Open City*, *Paisan*, *Shoeshine*, and *Bicycle Thieves* and would shortly condemn *Umberto D*, *I Vitelloni* and *La Strada*, now condemned all three *Ways of Love* and lambasted *The Miracle* as a "sacrilegious and blasphemous mockery of Christian and religious faith."' Tag Gallagher, *The Adventures of Roberto Rossellini* (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1998), p. 368. However, Gallagher also states that *The Miracle* was not submitted to the same censorship in Italy where the Vatican ignored the film probably due to scarce attendance in the cinemas.

<sup>8</sup> Forgacs wrote: 'In reality neorealist films [ ] only constituted a fairly small proportion of all Italian productions and an even smaller proportion of films actually seen in Italian cinemas in the post-war years, which, with the repeal in November 1945 (under pressure from the Americans) of the Monopoly Law, saw a returning flood of imports, mostly from Hollywood, but also from Britain, France and other smaller film-producing nations.' Forgacs, p. 117.

<sup>9</sup> Forgacs, p. 90.

Following the post-war Repeal Law, Italian film producers started to adopt the commercial model of the American system, with the comedy and drama genres dominating the domestic cinema market.

The founding of ANAC (Associazione Nazionale Autori Cinematografici) in 1950, presided over by the famous neorealist screenwriter, Cesare Zavattini, was proof of such a problem persisting in the Italian film industry. ANAC advocated cinema's freedom from censorship and supported the ethical and material rights of film directors and screenwriters.<sup>10</sup> Its statute encompassed cultural and political objectives defending the freedom of expression in cinema.<sup>11</sup>

Encouraged by the founding of cultural associations such as ANAC, and club-cinemas such as the historic Filmstudio '70, experimental films strove to find ways to build an identity that would challenge the prevailing commercial interest of the industry.<sup>12</sup>

During the process of modernisation of cultural markets in Italy in the decade after 1952,<sup>13</sup> when Aldo Moro's centre-left government (1963)<sup>14</sup> gave increased autonomy to the broadcaster RAI, film industry structures allowed only a minor presence of social realist films in its market.<sup>15</sup> Politically and socially committed films such as Francesco Rosi's *Mani sulla città* (*Hands over the City*, 1963) and Elio Petri's

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<sup>10</sup> 'La Storia/History', in *Anac Autori* [http://www.anac-autori.it/online/?page\\_id=10](http://www.anac-autori.it/online/?page_id=10) [accessed 17 February 2012].

<sup>11</sup> 'Its aims, as the statute testified, included cultural and political objectives directly connected to the broad theme of freedom of expression, seriously undermined by the first government with a majority of Christian Democrats.' My translation. The original text reads: 'Le finalità, espresse nello statuto, comprendevano obiettivi culturali e politici direttamente collegati al grande tema della libertà di espressione, seriamente osteggiata dai primi governi a maggioranza democristiana.' 'La Storia/History', in *Anac Autori*: <http://www.anac-autori.it/online/anac/la-storia/> [accessed 07 May 2012].

<sup>12</sup> '[...] Filmstudio '70 – founded in October 1967 by Annabella Miscuglio and Amerigo Sbardella – was also the main distribution and exhibition centre of Italian underground films.' My translation. The original text reads: '[...] Filmstudio '70- fondato nell'ottobre 1967 da Annabella Miscuglio e Amerigo Sbardella – punto di diffusione per eccellenza dell'underground italiano e non [...]'. Bruno Di Marino, *Sguardo Inconscio Azione – cinema sperimentale e underground a Roma* (Roma: Lithos Editrice, 1999), p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> 'The American-style bar, the motor scooter and, towards the end of the decade, the introduction of supermarkets, frozen food and electrical domestic appliances [...] juke-boxes, pinball machines, pony tails, pleated skirts, [...] the photoromance.' Forgacs, p. 124.

<sup>14</sup> Forgacs, p. 135.

<sup>15</sup> Forgacs, p. 149.

*Indagine su un cittadino al di sopra di ogni sospetto* (*Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion*, 1970) were not financially successful, but were critically acclaimed in film festivals.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, while foreign film imports (mainly American) still dominated,<sup>17</sup> the 1965 Corona Law aimed to encourage the production of ‘quality films’, designated as culturally desirable on account of their creative contributions.<sup>18</sup>

Against this background, the experimental films of the 1960s provided a cultural arena within which to open up debates and reflections on the contemporary climate of discontent that would culminate in the events of 1968. They did not represent filmmaking as a commercial enterprise, but rather aimed to attract audiences’ attention by aesthetic strategies dealing with symptoms of alienation, thereby addressing a concern with cultural memory and the legacies of the past. I argue that these concerns found support in the materialities of the archive, often multi-layered and woven through the textures of avant-garde films, through the gaps of montage and fragmented narrative, thus aiming to mobilize a more critical spectatorship.

These concerns raise the question of the ‘ontologies of the archive’, that is, its heterogeneous nature and its relationship to history and cultural memory. During the 1960s, Italian experimental film displayed a marked desire to address, and even confront, the past. I consider the archive not only as a repository of heterogeneous materials, a selection of which was re-integrated into new films, but also as a historic cultural object in itself, whose structures and formats the new avant-garde films adopted, in order to transform its original meanings into allegories. I explore the relationship between these films’ anti-illusionist narratives and the nature of the

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<sup>16</sup> *Mani sulla città / Hands over the City* won the Golden Lion at the XXIV Venice Film Festival, which earned international critical acclaim. Wood, p. 18.

<sup>17</sup> Forgacs, p. 148.

<sup>18</sup> Wood, p. 19.

archive, which generated essayistic modes of engagement with the past. By drawing on the work of Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, then becoming influential in new translated editions, I suggest that these films invoked the archive re-purposed as ‘second nature’, formed of ‘petrified commodities’, potentially open to being reawakened by the filmmaker’s technical expertise and the viewers’ critical engagement with their meanings.

Because my research noted the significant role occupied by the archive in a large number of films of the Italian avant-garde of the 1960s, it will be helpful to contextualize this significant development within the wider spectrum of post-war avant-gardes and the influential international debates that were taking place at the time, later addressed in Peter Wollen’s seminal 1975 essay, ‘The Two Avant-Gardes’.

### **3. The Avant-gardes**

The International Forum on Avant-garde Film, which took place at the Edinburgh Film Festival in 1976, provided a substantial platform for discussions on the relationship between form and content in experimental films. According to the artist filmmaker Malcolm Le Grice, there were productive interactions amongst key figures within the avant-garde world at large, such as the critic Annette Michelson and the experimental filmmaker Hollis Frampton. Wollen’s ‘The Two Avant-Gardes’ was also one of the key texts being discussed, while the Italian film historian and critic Adriano Aprà was a participant, and Ian Christie and Claire Johnston chaired various sessions.<sup>19</sup> The significance of this event lay not only in its international character, bringing important North American and European figures together, but also in its

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<sup>19</sup> David Curtis, *A History of Artist’s Film and Video in Britain*, (London: BFI, 2005), p. 19, and pp. 48-49 fn28.

timely exploration of issues related to the moving image at a time of transition, from analogue to electronic media, from film to video, thus emphasising debates on medium specificity, and also the emergence of new aesthetic concepts.

The essay 'The Two Avant-Gardes' is highly relevant to surveying the landscape in which my research is situated. Wollen traced the complicated histories of the film avant-gardes, based on a binary framework, yet with complex inter-relationships, which I argue rely on a formalist and abstract approach on the one hand, and a photorealist and naturalistic approaches on the other hand. Thus, I theorise a 'third avant-garde'.

By identifying the European and New York Film Cooperatives as largely sharing a structural/materialist sensibility to film, and a similar approach to self-reflexivity and anti-realism, Wollen argued that these were the displaced results of artists' modernist interest in painting as process, which, as many of them moved into filmmaking, became an interest in 'film as film', with its varied structures and materials. These filmmakers' aesthetic sensibilities were steeped in the modernist avant-gardes' interest in creating fragmented and multi-dimensional perspectives on the real world, hence achieving in formal and semiotic terms the mis-alignment between audio-visual 'signifiers' and 'signifieds'.

On the other hand, as Wollen wrote, the 'Dziga Vertov group' of Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin and the Jean-Marie Straub-Danielle Huillet partnership shared with the Soviet film formalists, such as Eisenstein and Vertov, an interest in naturalistic and realistic narratives complemented by formalist approaches, such as montage and image juxtapositions. However, Wollen also argued that both avant-gardes, the European and North American cooperatives, as well as Godard/Gorin and Straub-Huillet, naturally borrowed from each other, so that their innovations in film

aesthetics and narratives overlapped, as had also been the case with the historic avant-gardes.

The Italian experimental filmmaker Massimo Bacigalupo participated in these debates, and wrote a survey of European experimental cinema, (“Ragguaglio sul cinema sperimentale europeo”, published in 1979), in which he discussed such diverse works as Birgit and Wilhelm Hein’s ‘expanded cinema’, Stephen Dwoskin’s *The Silent Cry*, Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen’s *The Riddles of the Sphinx*, Werner Nekes’s *Makimonio e Lagado*, and Valie Export’s *Unsichtbare Gegner*. Bacigalupo also edited for the Italian film journal *Bianco & Nero* an important volume titled ‘Experimental Film’, published in 1974, where he gathered a considerable amount of theories and sources about experimental filmmakers of the 1960s, on which I have drawn throughout the current research.

Another filmmaker, Edoardo Bruno, also contributed to these debates, describing the polarisation he saw between a militant cinema, more ideologically and socially motivated, and experimental film that worked on the material transformation of the moving image in his article ‘Ragguaglio sul cinema sperimentale di Knokke’ (‘A Survey of Experimental Film in Knokke’, 1971).<sup>20</sup> This ‘materialist cinema’, according to Bruno, showed the influence of ‘Markopolous and Straub, Snow and Dwoskin, Tsuneo Nakai and Dore O on Nekes, who won the Knokke competition in that year’.<sup>21</sup>

Bruno noted that the Knokke film festival celebrated a new tendency in experimental cinema, shared at an international level (and beyond Europe), which was of a materialist nature. There seemed to be a widespread desire to transpose memory

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<sup>20</sup> Edoardo Bruno, ‘Ragguaglio sul cinema sperimentale di Knokke’, *Ind Under Off – Materiali sul cinema sperimentale 1959-1979*, ed. by Nuccio Lodato (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 1981), pp. 247-256. Originally published in *Filmcritica*, n. 251, 1971.

<sup>21</sup> Bruno, ‘Ragguaglio sul cinema sperimentale di Knokke’, *Ind Under Off*, ed. by Lodato, 247-256 (p. 249).

and impressions into physical facts, objective data. Thus, Bruno's survey recognised the coming of age of a 'materialist cinema', reflexive in its use of heterogeneous materials. In 1976, Peter Gidal famously theorized a 'structural/materialist film', which supported reflexive practices: 'Structural/Materialist film attempts to be non-illusionist. The filmmaking process deals with devices that result in demystification or attempted demystification of the film process.'<sup>22</sup> However, the impact of the New American Cinema and the New York Cooperative on Italian avant-garde film was stronger than that of any European film cooperative. Indeed, most Italian experimental cinema was influenced by American poetics and structural aesthetics, as variously created by Stan Brakhage, Gregory Markopoulos, and Jonas Mekas, and codified by P. Adams Sitney.<sup>23</sup> The decisive influence may well have been the screening of New American Cinema programmes in 1961 at the "Festival dei due Mondi" in Spoleto (Umbria), which contributed to the formation of European cooperatives in the 1960s.<sup>24</sup>

#### **4. A 'third avant-garde'? The 'natural-history' of the archive**

Especially relevant to a study of the experimental aesthetics of the Italian film avant-garde is Wollen's comparison of the narrative aesthetics of Godard's and Eisenstein's films, and their shared formal interest in photographic realism and naturalism. Wollen argued that Godard was influenced by Eisenstein's dialectical montage. However, even within the Soviet avant-garde of the twenties there appeared to be a formal ambiguity between Eisenstein's dialectical montage based on a succession of signifieds, which positioned him closer to 'naturalism', and the Suprematist painter

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<sup>22</sup> Peter Gidal, 'Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film"', in *Avant-Garde Film. An Anthology of writing*, ed. by Michael O'Pray (London: The Arts Council of England/John Libbey Media/University of Luton Press, 1996), p. 145.

<sup>23</sup> 'The structural film is in part a synthesis of the formalistic graphic film and the Romantic lyrical film.' P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film. The American Avant-Garde (1943-1978)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 370-71.

<sup>24</sup> Di Marino, 1999, p. 22.

Malevich's superimposition of shapes, as another form of montage of signifiers, hence closer to formalism and abstraction. As Wollen noted:

Clearly Godard was influenced by Eisenstein's theory of dialectical montage, but he develops it in a much more radical way. In the last resort, for Eisenstein, conflict occurred primarily between the successive signifieds of images. Although he recognizes a form of dialectical montage in the suprematist paintings of Malevich, he himself remains within the confines of 'naturalism'.<sup>25</sup>

In his 1929 article 'A Dialectic Approach to Film Form', Eisenstein identified 'a middle road between naturalism and abstraction' which he related to paintings by the Italian Futurist Giacomo Balla.<sup>26</sup> Overall, there seemed to be a formal dialectic at work in avant-garde films and their interest in challenging fixed perspectives on reality, and thus hinged between a purely photographic apprehension of the real world, and a more conceptual approach to it. The 'polimaterismo' of Balla's paintings, where he sought to impart motion to images, was a practice that art historian Maurizio Calvesi noted (according to Robert Lumley's study) in relation to Balla's 'experiments with different materials', anticipating Arte Povera's interest in generating 'the encounter between the normal and the mythical, everyday life and art', also through 'the experimental juxtaposition of materials'.<sup>27</sup> This formal paradigm arguably stemmed from Balla's 'plurality of research' in his analytical and precise attempts to engage with, and emblematised on canvas, a variety of aspects pertinent to the real world (from motion and materials, to light and the re-creation of an atmosphere).<sup>28</sup>

This is part of the legacy of Italian futurism for the film avant-garde of the sixties, the analytical interest of modernist painting in its constitutive components, with

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<sup>25</sup> Peter Wollen, 'The Two Avant-Gardes', *Readings and Writings. Semiotic counter-strategies*. (London: Verso, 1982), p. 99.

<sup>26</sup> Wollen, 1982, p. 99.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Lumley, 'Spaces of Arte Povera', *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962-1972*, ed. by Richard Flood and Frances Morris (Minneapolis: Walker Art Centre, 2001), pp. 41-66 (p. 48).

<sup>28</sup> Enrico Crispolti, *Giacomo Balla - Art Catalogue*, ed. by Enrico Crispolti and Maria Drudi Gambillo (Torino: Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna, 1963), p. 18.

fragmentation and juxtaposition as the outcome of analytical observation; an approach that brings a conceptual approach to photographic naturalism and figurative representation. The re-purposing of archive materials, divorced from their original context, yet not stripped of their reference to the real, supported a similar tendency towards rumination and conceptual narratives. Naturalistic representations of the real world, a past re-integrated as fragments and shards of a collective memory, started a dialogue with the present, thus invoking critical reflection.

For these reasons, it seems plausible to claim that Italian experimental films of the 1960s raise the question of ‘the ontology of the archive’ through self-reflexive and conceptual narratives, and therefore belong to a ‘third avant-garde’. I suggest that this ‘third avant-garde mode’ was characterised by a strong desire to interrogate cultural memory and the importance of the past for the present. I identify this tendency through the framework of the intertwining of nature and history in relation to our being in the world, as espoused by Adorno’s ‘idea of natural-history’ and by Benjamin.

I argue that this theoretical framework feeds into the porous binary model of structural/materialist cinema of the European Film Co-operatives and Godard and Straub-Huillet’s films, as explained by Wollen. The ‘poor’ materials of these Italian films include re-purposed found footage and heterogeneous archival materials which offered experimental filmmakers multiple ways to move beyond the spatial dimension of the canvas and diegetic space. Most of the filmmakers discussed in this thesis – Gianfranco Baruchello, Vittorio and Silvio Loffredo, Ugo Nespolo, Cesare Zavattini, Claudio Cintoli, Rosa Foschi, Luca Patella, Cioni Carpi, Alfredo Leonardi – were already painters before turning to film. They found a different way to explore pictorially the conceptual and reflective dimensions afforded by experimental

filmmaking. Their films' heterogeneous materialities, whilst evoking a poetics of the historical fragment rupturing daily life, invoked profound ruminations, and raised compelling questions regarding the 'ontology of the archive'. Indeed, they contribute to histories of the 'essay film', and complement Godard's idea of the cinema as the 'form that thinks and thought that forms'.<sup>29</sup> They share the two main modes of the essay form that Laura Rascaroli has identified: reflectivity and subjectivity.

### **Existing literature on Italian avant-garde cinema and the essay film**

There is no critical literature on Italian avant-garde films of the 1960s that has either theorized or historicised the Italian experimental filmmakers' re-purposing of archive materials and formats; the aesthetic and cultural significance of a new film language.

This thesis intervenes in existing literature on the Italian avant-gardes written by P. Adams Sitney: *Vital Crises in Italian Cinema. Iconography, Stylistics, politics* (1995); Bruno Di Marino: *Sguardo, Inconscio, Azione. Cinema sperimentale e underground a Roma (1965-1975)* (1999); Robert Lumley: 'Spaces of Arte Povera', in *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962-1972* (2001); and, Laura Rascaroli's writings on the essay film in *The Personal Camera. Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film* (2009).

This study foregrounds experimental and essayistic approaches to film, which existed in parallel with the Internationally-renowned Italian art cinema of the 1960s, and to which Sitney paid homage in *Vital Crises in Italian Cinema. Iconography, Stylistics, politics*, focusing on their stylistic and iconographic qualities. Also visiting Italy, for the first time in 1963 – 'as the director of an exposition of American Avant-

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<sup>29</sup> Laura Rascaroli, 'The Essay Film: Problems, Definitions, Textual Commitments', *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, Vol. 49, no. 2, 2008, 24–47 (p. 25).

garde films'<sup>30</sup> – and subsequently in 1967 and 1968, Sitney discovered stylistic continuities between the neorealist cinema and the cinema of the mature auteurs of the 1960s. Interestingly, he also valued the influence of literary works, such as Cesare Pavese's and Umberto Eco's innovative experimental narratives, on the formal aspect of the cinema of the Italian mature auteurs. He mentioned the allegorical disposition of much of the canonical art cinema of the 1960s; films based on recurring iconographies, and producing a coherent style. However, when looking at Sitney's book as one frame of reference to the Italian film avant-gardes of the 1960s, my research can be situated precisely within its historical and theoretical hiatus.

Importantly, Bruno Di Marino placed on the historical map of Italian art cinema, experimental and underground films made by film artists based in Rome in his *Sguardo, Inconscio, Azione. Cinema sperimentale e underground a Roma (1965-1975)*; however his account is not centred on the role of the archive if present in any of the films discussed in his book. However, his critical analyses of films provided some context for my research at the National Film Archive and Library at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome. The volume *Experimental Film (1974)* edited by experimental filmmaker Massimo Bacigalupo, collects writings by independent filmmakers about their work of the 1960s, and pointed me toward valuable material in the journal *Bianco e Nero*.

This thesis pays homage to the influence of Arte Povera on a few experimental filmmakers, also through the perceptive study undertaken by Robert Lumley, whose writing testifies to the encounter of innovative expressions in the Italian avant-gardes. Thus, I noted important parallels in terms of methodology and aesthetic sensibility

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<sup>30</sup> Sitney, P. Adams, *Vital Crises in Italian Cinema. Iconography, Stylistics, politics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), p. ix.

between Arte Povera artists and experimental filmmakers. Despite it not being about the Italian film avant-gardes, the whole art catalogue *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962-1972*, to which Lumley contributed, was very valuable for my research for its historical details on innovative approaches to art forms, events and exhibitions that populated the landscape of avant-garde art in Italy in the 1960s.

Lastly, this research has taken into account existing perspectives on the historiography of the essay film. Regarding Italian art cinema, it has complemented Laura Rascaroli's substantial writings on the essay film in *The Personal Camera. Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film*, more specifically her exploration of renowned Italian filmmaker Cesare Zavattini's 'cinema in the first-person' with his *cinegiornali* of 1963 and 1968-1970. In her book she also explores a variation on the essay film such as the 'notebook film', through Roberto Rossellini's television series *L'India vista da Rossellini (India as Seen by Rossellini, 1957-58)*, Federico Fellini's *Block-notes di un regista (Fellini: A Director's Notebook, 1969)*, and four of Pier Paolo Pasolini's works made between 1965 and 1970. Rascaroli's study, however, does not engage with the aesthetics of the use of archival material in Italian experimental essay films.

This thesis thus aims to contribute to a historiography of relatively neglected avant-garde films that were selected on the basis of their distinctive use of archive materials and formats. Having identified and analysed a significant number of Italian experimental films whose varieties of engagement with the archive, poised between naturalism and abstraction, I suggest amounts to an 'essay film turn' in the films of the 1960s, which I argue can be linked to the idea of a 'third avant-garde'.

## Chapter Summaries

*Chapter 1, 'Form as Social Commitment' and the 'Natural-History' of the Archive,* considers the relevance of cultural anthropology for the Italian film avant-garde of the 1960s, especially in relation to the archive. It engages with critical debates on the influence of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory in shaping a critical awareness of the role of the mass media towards consumerism, obsolescence and alienation. In adopting the idea of 'form as social commitment', as formulated by Umberto Eco in 1962, and in Adorno's essay 'The Idea of Natural-History' in 1932, it elicits the defining role of the archive as that cultural object starting a productive tension between fixity and transition, naturalism and abstraction. I contextualise a central paradigm of the archive hinged on the concept of *physis*, which stands for the nature of the archive, woven together with history and in perennial transition.

*Chapter 2, The Cooperative of Italian Independent Cinema and Tutto, tutto nello stesso istante (All, all at once, 1968-69)* maps a conceptual trajectory towards an 'essay film' form, and the idea of the 'essayistic experimental film', which arguably started many years earlier. My textual analysis of the collaborative film *Tutto, tutto nello stesso istante* finds that it epitomises thematic concerns and aesthetic attitudes of many of the Italian experimental films made since the early 1960s. This Chapter contextualises the film within the wider landscape of an independent film culture, especially the Italian Cooperative of Independent Cinema, which has been largely neglected, and should form a more important part of the histories of the avant-gardes.

*Chapter 3, Cine-portraiture and Cinephilia in the Archive,* formulates these notions as bound up with the impermanence and ephemerality of the cultural object in transition in a new anti-illusionist narrative poetics. It focuses on Benjamin's view of the archive

as steeped in the fervent devotion of the archivist as historian and collector. Thus, I propose that experimental filmmakers are like archivists who take a collector's approach to their repurposing of fetishized cultural objects (fragments and ruins), which they have subjected to semantic rupture and 'aesthetic ruining' in order to activate a critical awareness of obsolescence. From this, I invoke the idea of cinema itself as a fetishized object.

*Chapter 4, Massimo Bacigalupo: the Personal Archive and Myth*, explores first-person filmmaking and the role of the personal archive through the filmmaker's early lyrical films, influenced by key protagonists of the New American Cinema (Anger, Markopolous and Brakhage). It focuses on the subjective and poetic approach of Bacigalupo's 'cinema of quotations', sampling portions of his archive. Thus, this Chapter considers the transience of the audio-visual archive, from modernist literary texts and ancient scriptures transported through the camera's 'quotations' into his contemporary poetic, dream-like film compositions. In engaging with such universal themes as migration and travelling, Bacigalupo's early films foreground the question of 'the ontology of the archive' through the concept of cultural transition.

Photographic images are closely related to historical transience, and performance art crosses the divisions between arts. Archival materials are seen as displaced, and as allegorical tropes to reveal the 'fossil nature' of the archive. By adapting historical literary formats and structures, Bacigalupo's lyrical films unravel throughout the cyclical movement of history.

*Chapter 5, The Avant-garde Cinegiornale*, introduces the idea of the archive as structure and format in continual mutation. It proposes that Cesare Zavattini's compilations of avant-garde *Cinegiornali* (cine-newsreels) particularly well exemplify

Eco's theory of 'form as social commitment'; the older, conventional format of the *cinegiornale* 'transits' through modern film composites, thus proposing historic film forms in a new key. Leonardi's *cinegiornale* differs from Zavattini's, and recalls Bacigalupo's personal camera with its 'archival quotations', and the Loffredos' 'aesthetic ruining'. Leonardi's rapid montage of archive film footage underscores his dictum, 'seeing as a way of thinking', thus suggesting a different way of making newsreels for the cinema through which to lay bare the essential constructed nature of their narratives. Exploring both of these forms of *cinegiornali* reveals the effectiveness of the archive in promoting a speculative mode of engagement in relation to historic formats.

*Chapter 6, Buongiorno, Michelangelo* (Ugo Nespolo, 1968-69). *Azioni Povere and 'Film Povero'*, analyses how Nespolo's experimental documentary *Buongiorno, Michelangelo* explores the porosity between film, sculpture (Arte Povera) and performance art (Azioni Povere). Through interaction with the oversized sculpture The Atlas (a form of anti-commodity art), made by Arte Povera artist Michelangelo Pistoletto, the film staged a symbolic 'de-materialisation' of the archive. Therefore, this Chapter studies a specific example of film in late modernism, influenced by Fluxus and Happenings, for the purpose of manifesting their conceptual link, which the 'rolling archive' was capable of activating in a variety of topographies (the gallery space and the streets of Turin) and temporalities (the object in the film, and the sculpture for the art exhibition *Con temp l'azione*). Thus, it theorises the aesthetic features of what I have termed '*film povero*', at the crossroads of the material specificity of Arte Povera (its primary, 'poor' art materials) and 'azioni povere' (performance art, considered an extension of Arte Povera), which effect the symbolic

de-materialisation of The Atlas's newspapers archive. Lastly, it argues that through the recording of the art event, Nespolo's experimental documentary reproduced the aesthetic of a new perceptual experience of the object, a 'performance image', which recast obsolescence and ephemerality.

*Chapter 7, Perceptual Strategies and Cognitive Approaches*, contextualises cultural obsolescence through the analysis of cognitive approaches to moving image work and its multiple uses of archive film and television newsreel combined with a variety of filming techniques. It focuses on experimental audio-visual aesthetics as perceptual strategies adopted as valid tools for scientific analyses in media communication. In this sense, this Chapter continues the discourse of reawakening the 'second nature' of technologies, stemming from the perceptual strategies in these experimental films, what I have termed 'interruption aesthetics' and 'anthropomorphised technology'.

*Chapter 8, Verifica Incerta (Disperse Exclamatory Phase) (Gianfranco Baruchello, Alberto Grifi, 1964-65). A 'Cinema of Gesture'*, provides a close critical reading of the internationally renowned found footage film made by Alberto Grifi and Gianfranco Baruchello, *Verifica Incerta*. It suggests that while the film is also steeped in 'interruption aesthetics'; the rapid montage of repurposed images from Hollywood 1950s films was in fact deployed with no scientific intent. As its title suggests, the film is indeed about 'uncertain verification', the impossibility of maintaining that the language of film can only be linear and that it communicates one simple story. This Chapter argues that, triggered by 'repetition and stoppage', the discontinuity of causal narratives and the interruptions of characters' movements and actions, as found footage illustrates, have a 'messianic' purpose. Thus, the film's montage articulates

the poetics of a 'cinema of gesture' that, while critiquing alienation, reveal it as a symptom.

*Chapter 9, For a Critique of Violence with the Archive*, analyses experimental films which addressed violence and cultural memory through the use of archive materials. The archive is here contextualised as a repository of traces of past abuses on humanity, both physical and psychological. In providing a stark reminder of 'bare life', through the biopolitics of Giorgio Agamben, this Chapter argues that the integration of the audio-visual archive may serve the purpose of warning against the repetition of such crimes. By showing factual events occurred in the past through harrowing imagery repurposed from the archive, this Chapter analyses films which, while critiquing violence, call into question the notion of 'the archive as testimony'.

## **Chapter 1. ‘Form as Social Commitment’ and the ‘Natural-History’ of the Archive**

This Chapter lays out the cultural context and the theoretical framework that will inform this entire research. It considers the relevance of studies in cultural anthropology for the Italian film avant-garde of the 1960s, especially in relation to the deployment of archive materials considered as cultural objects. It engages with some critical debates on the influence of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, in shaping a critical awareness of the role of mass media communication towards consumerism, obsolescence and alienation. Thus, this Chapter outlines the significance of archive materials for Italian experimental filmmakers. Consequently, it opens up a philosophical approach to the notion of ‘the archive’, firstly through Umberto Eco’s dictum ‘form as social commitment’, espoused in his eponymous 1962 essay, and secondly through considerations regarding the ontology of the archive which, on the basis of Adorno’s 1932 essay ‘The idea of natural-history’, I propose is grounded in the notion of *physis*. Thus, I start paving the way for the focus of this thesis on the formation of an essayistic mode of filmmaking whose experimental poetics based on archive materials has the aim of providing new means of reflection and engagement for audiences.

### **1. Cultural Anthropology**

In 1962, Gillo Dorfles, a painter, philosopher and art historian, and founder of the Movimento dell’Arte Concreta (Movement of Concrete Art, “MAC”), conducted a study of the consequences of commodity culture and the fetishisation of daily objects

through the ubiquity of the mass media in consumer society.<sup>31</sup> In *Simbolo, comunicazione e consumo* (*Symbol, communication, and consumerism*), he noted how obsolescence had become the prevalent cultural discourse, where cultural objects often became the surrogate of well-being and social validation.<sup>32</sup> Dorfles also studied the consequent phenomenon of fetishism in collecting historical ephemera.

Another relevant study of modern society was Vittorio Fagone's *Il Momento Artigiano – Aspetti della cultura materiale in Italia* (*The Artisanal moment – Aspects of a materialist culture in Italy*, 1976).<sup>33</sup> This signalled a new interest in cultural anthropology, and in an archaeological revaluation of the old artisanal objects, which become signs of cultural validation and affluence. In his introduction to the book, the renowned literary critic, semiotician and philosopher Umberto Eco wrote about 'the language of objects', of how they speak not only about the men who use them, but also about their role, and their past.<sup>34</sup> From this cultural-anthropological perspective, Eco suggested that the role of the artisanal object in everyday communication amounted to a language of its own, with its historical and cultural identity. He argued: 'If there is an affluent society, this is because society does not buy objects for their use, but for their meaning. Consumer surplus is not related to a biological necessity but to social interaction, communication.'<sup>35</sup> I discuss in Chapter 3 this cultural tension between historical objects having a meaningful role in daily life in agricultural society, and the symbolic relevance they take instead once dislocated and re-

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<sup>31</sup> Gillo Dorfles, *Simbolo, comunicazione e consumo* (*Symbol, communication, and consumerism*) (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1962).

<sup>32</sup> '[...] if we were in the future, we would hear that our century was the age of communication or, perhaps also, that it was the century of obsolescence, of rapid consumerism, in addition to being the age of relativism, psychoanalysis, or phenomenology.' My translation. The original text reads: '[...] se potessimo trasferirci ad un'età futura [...] forse sentiremmo parlare del nostro secolo, come del "secolo della comunicazione" o, forse anche, come del "secolo dell'obsolescenza", del "rapido consumo", oltre che come quello della relatività, della psicanalisi, o della fenomenologia. [...]' Dorfles, p. 15.

<sup>33</sup> Vittorio Fagone, *Il Momento Artigiano - Aspetti della cultura materiale in Italia* (Milano: Silvana Editoriale D'Arte, 1976).

<sup>34</sup> Umberto Eco, 'Introduzione', in Fagone, 1976, pp. 1-14 (p. 7).

<sup>35</sup> My translation. The original text reads: 'Se esiste una società dei consumi (o una affluent society) questo avviene perché i membri del corpo sociale non comperano gli oggetti per quel che servono ma per quel che significano. Il surplus di consumo non ha fini di sopravvivenza biologica bensì di interazione comunicativa.' Ibid.

contextualised into a different spatio-temporal dimension for the modern consumer, through the concept of ‘the fetish is king’. What matters is that the repurposed object found in the archive is an historical and essential element in human life, with the potential to promote cultural reflection.

Nostalgia for the pre-industrial figure of the artisan and the artisanal object also assumed a meaning that exceeded its own specificity, going beyond the boundaries of the tangible and sometimes acquiring ‘magical’ and mythical qualities, which could be seen as a form of resistance to, and criticism of, materialist culture. As Vittorio Fagone pointed out, the word ‘artisanal’ hinges on a tension between the work of the historian, who by combining material culture and economic development speaks of a ‘materialistic civilisation’, and the ethnologist who studies material culture in relation to sociology and the spiritual and ‘magical’ characteristics of diverse cultural practices.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, my own research may be compared to the archaeological drive of the cultural anthropologist who, like the filmmaker sourcing their archival material, recovers older films and other media from either personal or institutional archives, seeing these as cultural texts and objects expressing a wide range of cultural and historical identities. Observing how contemporary culture has paid considerable attention to society’s inability to communicate and the consequent phenomenon of alienation, Eco suggested how objects as signs of communication have become valuable, from an archaeological and anthropological perspective, laying bare thousand-year-old material stratifications and constructing a formerly unknown world to be read. Not only do objects tell us what they are and about their use, but also about the people who

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<sup>36</sup> Eco, in Fagone, 1976, pp. 1-14 (p. 13).

used them and why they did so. They speak of their social status, their society's economic and technological level, and whether this society was agricultural or pastoral, bellicose or peaceful. Eco argued that, like physical anthropology, which can trace back to the whole organism by starting with a found bone, cultural anthropology can also re-construct from found objects forms of social life.<sup>37</sup> The taxonomies that the anthropologist creates are imbued with the same passion and meticulousness as those of the archivist.

Eco's archaeological and romantic perspective on the expressiveness of objects leads us to consider Walter Benjamin's account of the collector's 'anarchistic and destructive' fervour in dealing with excavation and memory. Benjamin conceived the archive as a historical depository, which can be deconstructed and re-assembled into a multiplicity of stories. I believe that the filmmaker's work can parallel the collector's and the archivist's approach, able to re-construct and propose new ideas based on collective or personal memory. For its speculative impulse, it could take the form of an experimental poetics and resolve into an essayistic filmmaking style. I compare it to Benjamin's idea of the collector's passion for resolving chaos by de-constructing memories and re-writing the present.<sup>38</sup> Eco explored this cultural transformation in his assessment of the changed anthropological value of the artisanal 'poor' object of agrarian times, which in post-industrial society can become the surrogate of wealth

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<sup>37</sup> Eco, in Fagone, 1976, pp. 1-14 (p. 7).

<sup>38</sup> 'Benjamin's mode of working is marked by the techniques of archiving, collecting, and constructing. Excerpts, transpositions, cuttings-out, montaging, sticking, cataloguing and sorting appear to him to be true activities of an author. His inspiration is inflamed by the richness of materials. Images, documents, and perceptions reveal their secrets to the look that is thorough enough. Benjamin was interested in the incidental. His capacity for immersion and his preparedness to make connections allowed him to discover essential things in details. Fragments recombined into new things; this researcher converted them into something distinctive. [...] Peculiar to the collector is a "relationship to objects which does not emphasize their functional, utilitarian value – that is their usefulness – but studies and loves them as the scene, the stage of their fate.' Erdmut Wizisla 'Preface', in *Walter Benjamin's Archive. Images, texts, signs*, ed. by Ursula Marx, Gudrun Schwarz, Michael Schwarz and Erdmut Wizisla, trans.by Esther Leslie. (London: Verso, 2007), pp. 1-6 (pp. 4-5).

and social validation.<sup>39</sup> I argue that while experimental filmmakers of the 1960s shared an archaeological drive, the collector's and archivist approach to historical artefacts, they re-contextualised these in order to emphasise both the meaningful potential of cultural memory for present times, and the inherent transformative nature of, and life energy buried within, the archive. Their practices have a philosophical value, as out of the mass media they raised questions such as: what is essential to life, and what is not? How 'raw', 'poor' matter, the primary materials from the past and modern media, can become relevant for audiences enabling them to reflect on cultural vulnerability.

Another cultural landmark was marked by Eco's book *Apocalittici e Integrati* (*The Apocalyptic and the Integrated*), published in 1964. This also provided a timely reflection on a cultural shift that had been under way for some time, which saw the integration of so-called 'low culture' into 'high culture', and revealed how this phenomenon was depicted in and received by the mass media. While the experimental writers of avant-garde literary circles, such as Gruppo '63 (of which Eco was the co-founder, together with poet Edoardo Sanguineti), welcomed this trend, it met with some resistance in mainstream media. In an introduction to the 1977 edition of his book, Eco stated that his observations on the Italian cultural scene stemmed from criticism of Elémire Zolla's *L'eclisse dell'intellettuale* (*The Eclipse of the Intellectual*), published in France in 1959, which had started the discussion on mass culture in Italy. Furthermore, the book's title itself became a popular slogan in mass culture. 'The Apocalyptic and the Integrated' encapsulated Eco's socio-cultural assessment of a widespread discontent with the hybridisation of intellectual culture

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<sup>39</sup> The original text reads: 'Di qui, mentre nell'artigianato tradizionale l'oggetto povero si affannava a sembrare almeno un pò più ricco, oggi nel design di avanguardia l'oggetto ricco si affanna a sembrare un pò più povero.' Eco, in Fagone, 1976, pp. 1-14 (p. 9).

following the ‘incursion’ of the mass media. Writing a decade later, he observed that the cultural divide between ‘low and high’ culture, as experienced back in the early sixties, seemed to be merely between ‘two much closer, however distinct, positions’.<sup>40</sup> While his position in 1964 could have taken cultural circles by surprise, writing about the integrated position of the ‘aristocratic’ figure of the intellectual within mass culture, in reality his work managed to attract the attention of the mass media and popular culture in general.

This shift in the perception of cultural texts also reflected how the so-called ‘Apocalypitics’ of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, namely Theodor W. Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, were received at the time. Marcuse had become ideologically important to the student movement in Italy, which attacked the invasiveness of the mass media (but also attracted the interest of ‘non-aristocratic’ intellectuals). On the other hand, Adorno, whose conservative origins embodied a ‘lofty’ intellectualised perspective on the culture industry, was also absorbed by Italian mass culture. Hence, while stemming from the same hybridised cultural context, Eco’s book criticised Marcuse and Adorno’s ‘apocalyptic’, or radically critical, perspectives on individual and mass culture, which fed many stalwart conservative separatists, including some of the journalists writing for national broadsheets.<sup>41</sup>

Through his term ‘integrated’, Eco envisaged a different view of mass culture, which supported the optimism of the influential Canadian communication and media theorist Marshall McLuhan. The latter’s slogans ‘the global village’ (in *The*

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<sup>40</sup> Umberto Eco, *Apocalittici e Integrati* (Milano: Gruppo Editoriale Fabbri, Bompiani, Sonzogno, 1964), pp. XIV-XV.

<sup>41</sup> In 1964, the national broadsheets *Il Corriere della Sera* published satirical articles such as ‘Dall’estetica a Rita Pavone’ (‘From aesthetics to Rita Pavone’), and *Il Giorno* ‘La Pavone e Superman a braccetto di Kant’ (‘Pavone and Superman arm in arm with Kant’). Eco, 1964, pp.V-VI.

*Gutenberg Galaxy*, 1962) and ‘the medium is the message’ (in *Understanding Media: the extensions of man*, 1964), stemming from his analysis of the revolutionary impact of print and electronic media, as popular in Italy as elsewhere. Eco argued that the human condition was shaped by this continuous productive tension between innovation and adaptation.<sup>42</sup>

## 2. The Frankfurt School of Critical Theory in Italy

The 1960s saw the translation and publication in Italy of key works in critical theory which provided a fertile textual ground for cultural commentators to discuss critical theory, and thus popularise especially Adorno’s and Marcuse’s more critical attitudes toward the culture industry.

The Frankfurt School of Critical Theory had been influential for Italian culture since the mid-fifties, after Adorno’s *Minima Moralia* was published in Italy in 1954.<sup>43</sup> According to Emilio Agazzi, Adorno shook the foundations of an orthodox Marxism, still based on the Hegelian idealist discourses that had been propagated by Benedetto Croce since the early twentieth century, and somewhat ambiguously underpinned by Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*.<sup>44</sup> Agazzi stated that the Frankfurt School’s

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<sup>42</sup> Eco, 1964, p. 76.

<sup>43</sup> Originally published in 1951, translated in 1954. Many other texts of critical theory by some exponents of the Frankfurt School had a strong relevance in the Italian cultural context of the 1960s, such as: *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (also by Theodor W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer), originally published in 1947, translated in 1966; Walter Benjamin’s collection of essays *Angelus novus*, originally published in 1920, translated in 1962. *Saggi e Frammenti*, translated in 1962; ‘The Author as Producer’, originally published in 1934, translated in 1969; and ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Reproduction’, originally published in 1936, translated in 1966. Herbert Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man*, originally published in 1964, translated in 1967. According to Diego Giachetti, there was not a single student who had not read Marcuse’s *One-dimensional man*, and he was the most known author of the Frankfurt School in Italy, especially around the years 1968-69. Diego Giachetti, ‘Giugno 1969: I “Caldi” Giorni Italiani di Herbert Marcuse’ (‘June 1969: The “Hot” Italian Days of Herbert Marcuse’), in *Il Protagora*, n. 4, luglio-dicembre 2004. [http://www.marcuse.org/herbert/booksabout/00s/69ItalyLecturesDGiachetti04z.htm#\\_ftnref4](http://www.marcuse.org/herbert/booksabout/00s/69ItalyLecturesDGiachetti04z.htm#_ftnref4) [accessed 12 March 2012].

Furthermore, the first Italian monograph about the Frankfurt School was written by Gian Franco Rusconi and published in 1968 by the Bolognese publishing company Il Mulino.

<sup>44</sup> Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* were published in Italy between 1948 and 1951. Robert Lumley argues that the intellectuals of the Left in the sixties formed a New Left, which, despite being a minority, created a political culture that aimed to break with the heritage of philosophical Marxism and Gramscianism. The ‘Intelligentsia’ of the sixties had become sensitive to a critical re-reading of both Marx and Gramsci. Robert Lumley, *States of Emergency. Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978* (London: Verso, 1990), p. 34.

theorists and sociologists critically re-introduced Marxist notions such as alienation and commodity fetishism, thus provoking a seismic reaction and some hostility.<sup>45</sup> In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno denounced the Enlightenment as intrinsically an instrument of capitalism, having broken with historicism, and espousing the theory through which ‘Marxism could be seen as the continuation of the most advanced traditions of bourgeois thought, from the Enlightenment to German Idealism’.<sup>46</sup> In ‘The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception’, Adorno attacked the passivity of bourgeois individuals living in a naturalised state of false consciousness, whose life was constantly controlled by the media and manipulated by a hedonistic ideology. Adorno and Horkheimer wrote:

The stronger the positions of the culture industry become, the more summarily it can deal with consumers’ needs, producing them, controlling them, disciplining them, and even withdrawing amusement: no limits are set to cultural progress of this kind. But the tendency is immanent in the principle of amusement itself, which is enlightened in a bourgeois sense. [...] But the original affinity of business and amusement is shown in the latter’s specific significance: to defend society. To be pleased means to say Yes.<sup>47</sup>

Adorno also argued that the masses lived under the ‘terror’ of participation in mass culture. ‘Participation in mass culture itself stands under the sign of terror. [...] This anxiety, the ultimate lesson of the Fascist era, is already harboured within the very medium of technological communication.’<sup>48</sup>

Benjamin’s theories on radical historical materialism were also becoming influential, especially in counter-information practices. Visual and aural images sourced from television war newsreels, Hollywood genre movies and national

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<sup>45</sup> Emilio Agazzi, ‘Linee fondamentali della ricezione della teoria critica in Italia’, in *L’impegno della ragione. Per Emilio Agazzi*, ed. by Mario Cingoli, Marina Calloni, and Antonio Ferraro (Milano: Unicopli, 1994), pp. 311-389 (p. 314).

<sup>46</sup> Stefano Petrucciani, *La Dialectica dell’illuminismo cinquant’anni dopo. Note sulla ricezione italiana* (Genova: Tilgher, 1998), in Petrucciani, *Nuova corrente online only*. 45 (1998) - N. 121-122, 1998]. - Permalink: <http://digital.casalini.it/10.1400/23055> - DOI: 10.1400/23055, pp. 133-154 (p. 135).

<sup>47</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, ‘The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception’, in Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1997), p. 144. Originally published in 1944.

<sup>48</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry. Selected essays on mass culture*, ed., with an introduction, by Bernstein, J.M. (London: Routledge classics, 2001), p. 96. Originally published in 1972

conservative magazines, were starting to be deployed in new films to attack and subvert the detrimental impact of mainstream fictional narratives on daily life.

A series of publications by Italian critical and cultural commentators were often igniting influential debates around the popularity of these cultural theorists. Renato Solmi, a young philosopher and literary critic working for the publisher Einaudi, introduced and translated the ‘apocalyptic’ Adorno’s *Minima Moralia – meditazioni sulla vita offesa* (*Minima Moralia – meditations on offended life*), which helped to temper readers’ reception of his harsh criticism of consumer society and mass culture.<sup>49</sup> The ‘apocalyptic’ Adorno had a ‘scandalous’ reputation in the fifties, and increasing in the sixties amongst orthodox Marxist circles of the Italian Left, with his resulting ‘popularity’ in the mass media.

Adorno’s critique of North American society in the fifties created a consensus amongst the Italian readership already critical of both the impact of an American way of life on society and the economic boom of the late fifties and sixties. However, in his reply to the scholar Cesare Cases, who denounced the misplaced popularity of a ‘scandalous Adorno’, Solmi argued that the critical theorist attempted less to address orthodox Marxist thought on the close relationship between substructure and superstructure, as historically determining human ‘evolution’, or between the economy and daily life, than to reconcile the differences between psychology and history, or human nature and historical process.<sup>50</sup> For this reason, Solmi defended Adorno’s critique of the bourgeoisie, which he considered driven by positivism and

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<sup>49</sup> The publishing company Einaudi was founded in 1933. In 1960, Renato Solmi also translated György Lukács’s *Il giovane Hegel e i problemi della società capitalistica* (*The Young Hegel. Studies in the Relationship between Dialectics and Economics*, 1938), and Walter Benjamin’s *Angelus novus* in 1962. In 1968, he was also involved in the student movement. Ruggero D’Alessandro, *La teoria critica in Italia. Letture italiane della scuola di Francoforte* (Roma: Manifestolibri, 2003), pp. 36-37.

<sup>50</sup> The letters exchanged with Solmi represented another notable source of tension between more conservative Marxist constituencies, leaning towards nostalgia and the past, and those open to engage with current cultural tendencies in late-capitalism. Cases particularly criticised Adorno’s aphoristic style (less precise than Hegel’s) and his privileging a close analysis of American society. He wondered whether *Minima Moralia* was but a private diary turned public while trying to confront outdated existentialist philosophies. D’Alessandro, p. 39.

the ‘supreme’ value of Reason, as represented by *le siècle des Lumières*, and eventually revealing inherent totalitarian attributes. Solmi introduced the discourse of bourgeois deviations from civilisation, thus sharing Adorno’s warning about the violent and pre-fascistic spirit of the so-called enlightened bourgeoisie. Thus, the Enlightenment’s contradictions were viewed as having determined late industrial consumerism, with meaningless materialist production swallowing human life and regurgitating it in alienated form.<sup>51</sup>

Another component of Adorno’s thought discussed by Solmi, which may have impacted on the Italian arts of the sixties, was the importance of ‘immediate life’ for raising critical awareness in the alienated individual. As Solmi pointed out, Adorno addressed the cultural and social environment that shaped life in actuality: ‘Adorno fights the concept of the constant sub-structure of historical process, which is at the most subjugated to external pressure or deformation.’<sup>52</sup> According to the German scholar ‘there is no true life within a false life’;<sup>53</sup> thus follows the necessity for the entire society to emancipate itself. Beside the economic sub-structure, there is the individual’s ‘substance’ and human relationships that constitute the essential social base. Here lies the Freudian analysis of a repressive structure and its influence on the individual’s psyche.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> ‘What philosophy once called life, has turned into the sphere of the private and then merely of consumption, which is dragged along as an addendum of the material production-process, without autonomy and without its own substance. Whoever wishes to experience the truth of immediate life, must investigate its alienated form, the objective powers, which determine the individual existence into its innermost recesses. [...] The gaze at life has passed over into ideology, which conceals the fact that it no longer exists.’ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima moralia* (Torino: Einaudi, 1979), p. 3. Originally published in 1954. My translation. The original text reads: ‘Quella che un tempo i filosofi chiamavano vita, si è ridotta alla sfera del privato, e poi del puro e semplice consumo, che non è più se non un appendice del processo materiale della produzione, senza autonomia e senza sostanza propria. Chi vuol apprendere la verità sulla vita immediata, deve scrutare la sua forma alienata (...) Lo sguardo aperto sulla vita è trapassato nell’ideologia, che nasconde il fatto che non c’è più vita alcuna.’ D’Alessandro, p. 32.

<sup>52</sup> My translation. The original text reads: ‘Adorno combatte, in altri termini, la concezione di un substrato costante del processo storico, che sarebbe sottoposto, tutt’al più, a compressioni o deformazioni esterne.’ D’Alessandro, p. 41. Originally published in Cesare Cases and Renato Solmi, ‘Il caso Adorno’, *Notiziario Einaudi*, Torino, 12 dicembre 1954.

<sup>53</sup> Hauke Brunkhorst, *Adorno and Critical Theory (Political Philosophy Now)* (Wales: University of Wales Press, 1999), p. 64.

<sup>54</sup> D’Alessandro, p. 43.

Unlike Adorno, Solmi emphasised society's false consciousness, grounded in the lack of awareness of a co-existence between theory and praxis. He attacked the lack of a clear vision by both the intellectuals of the New Left, whose illusionary pragmatic views defended the autonomy of culture from its economic substructure, and the Marxists whose cynicism towards the status quo could be deemed a reason for their accepting the existing laws of production.

Solmi acknowledged that Adorno concentrated his critiques of North American society without any awareness of a social realism, and that his lack of a concrete criticism risked offering a 'mere contemplation of possibilities'.<sup>55</sup> In the last pages of his introduction, Solmi stated that the most worrying problem left by Adorno's oeuvre was his inferring the possibility of a transition to a new society through the frail relationship between dialectics and hope, which supplanted the historical materialist connection between dialectics and certainty. Thus, Solmi was one of the influential voices in Italian criticism of the Frankfurt School through his writings on Adorno's *Minima Moralia*.<sup>56</sup>

Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), in contrast, took an open approach to media technologies and their effect on society and mass culture. He emphasised the condition of 'technological societies' and their naturalised state of conformity, and how changed modes of production and consumption restructured man's labour and leisure. According to Marcuse, the life of man in the industrial society of the sixties was characterised by a threat to human freedom, individuality and original creativity.

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<sup>55</sup> 'Considering the impossibility of giving oneself "true life within false life" entails a radical leap into the hollow recesses of the "totally other"; however, Marxism was to be regarded as the theory of the necessary transition. Thus, it becomes impossible to reach a way out of the *Minima moralia*, in the pursuit of praxis.' My translation. The original text reads: 'Il considerare l'impossibilità del "darsi vera vita nella falsa" implica un salto radicale nel vuoto del "totalmente altro"; ma il marxismo si dà come teoria del passaggio necessario. Dai *Minima moralia* diventa allora assurdo poter trarre delle vie d'uscita, delle indicazioni di *praxis*.' D'Alessandro, p. 47.

<sup>56</sup> D'Alessandro, p. 46.

His involvement with the American radical student movement and his faith in the positive role of technology were combined with a harsh criticism of consumer society. By 1966, his book had already circulated widely amongst the students of the University of Trento, site of the only Faculty of Sociology in Italy.<sup>57</sup>

From Marcuse's critical perspective 'progress goes hand in hand with a repressive organisation which imposes a continuous race towards new productive objectives based on an exploitative system of a universal scale'.<sup>58</sup> As a decisive political shift it remained frustrated by the homogenisation of all class divisions, and by the absence of any class action. Marcuse was interpreted by his critics in Italy as being unable to envision a way to overcome the obstacles posed by the ideological apparatus of capitalist administrations. However, when he joined the student movement in North America, his faith in the capacity of a group of individuals grew as did his popularity through the mass media. Regarding the student movement as truly avant-garde for their commitment to fighting for social change, his *One-Dimensional Man* acquired the status of a 'Bible'.

In the introduction to an anthology of Marcuse's writings published by Feltrinelli in 1968, collecting works he had written between 1965 and 1967, titled *Critica della società repressiva (Critique of repressive society)*, Cristiano Camporesi stigmatised the myth built by the mass media around Marcuse's influential oeuvre. He invited readers to focus on the writings and switch off their television and radio. While Marcuse's essays were absent from Italian philosophy journals, his interviews featured frequently in national newspapers and popular weeklies.<sup>59</sup> Compared with the 'apocalyptic' Adorno, for Camporesi Marcuse enjoyed a far more 'integrated' position

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<sup>57</sup> D'Alessandro, p. 152.

<sup>58</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 128. Originally published in 1964.

<sup>59</sup> D'Alessandro, p. 154.

within the Italian cultural fabric, to the extent that his thinking had become ‘a commodity’, absorbed by the same late-capitalist culture he set out to dissect and criticise.

Varied and often contradictory responses to mass culture from the New Left emphasized internal discrepancies and fractures, posing the question of what it meant to be a ‘post-Marxist’. One example was the long-lived *Quaderni Piacentini* (*Piacenza’s Notebooks*), or ‘A laboratory for the New Left’. This series of publications between 1964 and 1985 commented on the cultural influence of the Frankfurt School in Italy, with essays dedicated to Benjamin and Eric Fromm. Following the publication in 1966 of *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Piacioli commented on the critical theorists’ critique of the obsession of enlightened civilisation to dominate nature. He could not avoid noting a confused stance, resulting in the utopia of reading history, not according to a Marxist articulation of phases, but as a realisation of the unchanged, according to the single principle of ‘*ratio*’. Indeed, for Piacioli, this reflected Adorno’s contradiction in his criticism of bourgeois tolerance of ‘the always identical’.<sup>60</sup>

Another cultural commentator, Augusto Vegezzi, published his review of Marcuse’s 1958 book *Soviet Marxism* in 1964, arguing that Marcuse exposed the consequences of the transition from a pre-capitalist phase to state capitalism that had caused productive forces to become subordinated to a centralised administration. In this sense, the *Notebooks* introduced, even ahead of the mounting political discontent of ‘68, heterogeneous views about socio-economic models. They also focused on

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<sup>60</sup> D’Alessandro, p. 105.

issues around economic and political centralisation, market competition, the role of the mass media, and the culture and 'leisure' industries.

As this survey of significant debate has emphasised, the terrain for the development of criticisms of the critical theorists' most widely diffused texts in Italy offered a variety of often contrasting and complementary responses.

### **3. Umberto Eco's 'Form as Social Commitment'**

Together with the concept of obsolescence, the theme of alienation is also particularly relevant for the concept of a new avant-garde film language involving the archive. In 1962, Eco undertook an analysis of alienation in society and the role of an avant-garde language with his essay 'Form as social commitment' ('Del modo di formare come impegno sulla realtà'), influenced by his critical reading of Hegel and Marx.

Originally published in the avant-garde literary journal *Menabò*, and also forming part of his landmark book *Opera Aperta (The Open Work)*,<sup>61</sup> this essay (along with the book as a whole) became one of the key theoretical texts influencing the creation of a new avant-garde language, based on the idea of form as a critical tool.

In response to an influential newspaper columnist, who cautioned her readers that the word 'alienation' had gone out of fashion, Eco contextualised his analysis of the term in relation to the German philosophical tradition that considered *Entfremdung* as implying 'ceasing to be an agent in order to be acted upon'.<sup>62</sup> Eco's philosophical concerns were of a humanistic and sociological nature. In his opinion, the journalist's stance towards this condition, and the form she employed to warn her readers, proved that 'we exist *in* alienation', that this forms part of a dialectic and we cannot eliminate

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<sup>61</sup> Umberto Eco, *Opera Aperta* (Milano: Tascabili Bompiani, 2009), p. VI. Originally published in 1962.

<sup>62</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. by Anna Cancogni (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 123.

one of its poles.<sup>63</sup> Accordingly, he criticised the mass media that can maintain this state of alienation by objectifying it as a cultural term, and uncritically accepting or disposing of it, like a commodity:

Of course philosophers ought not to care whether the technical terms they use are ‘in’ or ‘out’; on the other hand, why a given word should suddenly become terribly trendy and then, quite as suddenly, lapse into disuse is certainly part of their concerns. Why did the term “alienation” become so popular at the beginning of the 1960s, so long after its first appearance? Might one say that the way in which it has been used and abused is in itself one of the most egregious yet unrecognised instances of alienation in the history of our civilisation?<sup>64</sup>

For Eco, the columnist reduced the question of overcoming ‘alienation’ to a mental attitude; and through his critical analysis of this journalistic piece, he provided an objective assessment of the faults in mass media communication by first critiquing Hegel via Marx. According to Eco, Marx’s criticism of Hegel’s approach to alienation was that:

[...] consciousness alienates itself in its object and only upon recognizing itself in the object discovers its own effectuality. But this knowledge automatically entails the negation of the object, for the moment consciousness recognizes the object, it gets rid of its alienation by negating the object itself.<sup>65</sup>

Thus, Eco’s implicit critique of Hegel and warning about a misleading ‘form’ of information, which is also at the same time the symptom of this condition (not realising that we are *in* this condition, although potentially able to escape it) is also exemplified by his critique of Marx: ‘For Marx, objectification is substantially a positive and indispensable process, whereas alienation is a historically engendered situation, a situation which can therefore find a historical solution – in communism’.<sup>66</sup>

At this point, Eco departs from Marx as well, when he argues that through an experimental avant-garde language it is possible to implicate society in the

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<sup>63</sup> Eco, 1989, p. 128.

<sup>64</sup> Eco, 1989, p. 123.

<sup>65</sup> Eco, 1989, p. 124.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

understanding of its human purpose, hence reintegrating it with its own object of creation. He argues that it is through an engagement with potential meanings and processes, after a conscious objectification and integration into the social, cultural and historical context, that members of society can re-inscribe their subjectivity in their historical reality:

[...] in order to understand the object one *must* implicate oneself in it. The object will thus be understood not as something that must be absolutely denied but rather as something that still bears the traces of the human purpose for which it was produced. Only when the object is understood in these terms, as well as in its negative aspects, will we be free from it.<sup>67</sup>

Thus Eco posited a culturally informed criticism of ‘alienation’, which I would argue did not entail negation and acceptance of the inevitable, but offered insightful engagement with the cultural context that produced it, its form as language, in order to change it from within. Thus, in the field being explored here, the experimental filmmaker may implicate himself or herself in archival texts, recognize them as having become culturally obsolescent, and thus dislocate and re-purpose them in order to generate new meanings. For the experimental filmmakers studied in the following Chapters, these cultural texts were found footage, outtakes, screen tests, archival sounds, and a variety of visual, photographic and other filmic materials which might be generically termed ‘archival’.

The foundational understanding of ‘form as social commitment’ that Eco laid out not only encapsulated the zeitgeist but was also prophetic of the heightened socio-political climate forming in the second half of the decade:

The artist realizes that language, having already done too much speaking, has become alienated to the situation it was meant to express. He realises that, if he accepts this language, he will also alienate himself to the situation. So he tries to dislocate this language from within, in order to be able to escape from the situation

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<sup>67</sup> Eco, 1989, p. 131.

and judge it from without. [...] all the artist can do is cast some light on alienation by objectifying it in a form that reproduces it.<sup>68</sup>

Eco's involvement in literary experimentation illuminates an equivalent avant-garde experimentation with the language of film and the debates among filmmakers that were taking place at the same time. In an article 'Tavola Rotonda sul cinema italiano' ('Round Table on Italian cinema'), published in the summer 1968 issue of the magazine *Cinema & Film*, Valentino Orsini initiated a discussion about the importance of history for society to change, and hence the role of the experimental filmmaker in balancing subjectivity and objectivity in filmic content. Orsini also stressed the role of the viewer in overcoming an alienating reality, through appreciating the oppressive historical moment.<sup>69</sup> For me, this discussion resonates with Eco's arguments in 'Form as social commitment', which suggested an epistemological approach to re-purposed cultural objects from the archive, in order to dislocate alienation at a formal level.

Before examining the relationship between archive material and avant-garde film form in the following Chapters, in the next Section I will explore a philosophy of 'the archive', which I believe originates in Adorno's 'idea of natural-history'.

#### **4. The 'Natural-History' of the Archive**

With regards to the philosophy of 'form as social commitment' and cultural objects in transition as discussed above, I raise the questions: what is 'the archive' in the film avant-garde?; and how can we understand it when situated in an experimental film language? To shed further light on the notion of 'the archive', it is useful to refer back

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<sup>68</sup> Eco, 1989, p. 154.

<sup>69</sup> 'Tavola Rotonda sul cinema italiano' ('Round Table on Italian cinema'), *Cinema & Film*, Summer 1968, 111-123 (p. 122). This article is based on the transcription of the original audio recordings of conversations occurred during the round table discussion. Each intervention was revised and authorised by each of the filmmakers involved, as stated in the article on page 123.

to Adorno's 1932 essay 'The Idea of Natural-History'. For, in this thesis, the answers to those questions - namely to Adorno's dialectics of 'natural-history' - may be found in the philosophy of history. Thus, I suggest that the notion of 'the archive' is related to both history (the historical moment) and nature (change and growth). From Adorno's study, which drew on György Lukács's and Benjamin's historical approaches to nature and alienated reality, I deploy the concept of *physis* in order to investigate the nature of the archive, and invoke both an empirical and ontological approach to this term, in order to propose the idea of a humanist value lying dormant within the archive, waiting to be awakened from its alienated or petrified state of 'second nature' by means of an experimental film language. Consequently, I explore the nature of the archive in relation to *physis*, its constitutive state of raw, primary matter, prone to both natural (physical) and ontological (metaphysical) change and growth, and never too far from death.

As the etymology of the word '*physis*' indicates, its meaning derives from the ancient Greek 'nature';<sup>70</sup> thus, it can be related to both the living human being and organism, and the film artefact as fossil. As Harold W. Miller stated: 'The conception of man's *physis* elaborated in 'On Ancient Medicine' is clearly, in origin and formulation, empirical.'<sup>71</sup> In research carried out in the treatise *On Ancient Medicine*, in order to acquire any knowledge of nature this ought to derive from medicine itself: 'One must learn the activities of the human *physis*, both in itself and in its relationship with *physis* as a whole'.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=physis> [accessed 24 November 2014].

<sup>71</sup> Harold W. Miller, 'Dynamis and Physis in On Ancient Medicine', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 83 (1952), 184-197 (p. 186).

<sup>72</sup> Regarding 'what man is', 'what is his ultimate nature', and in rejecting the speculative method of natural philosophy, Miller wrote: 'The method of medicine is basically empirical, exact, and accurate. And medicine and its method does involve the investigation of Nature, for [...] the physician must strive earnestly to learn "what man is in relation to what he eats and drinks, what he is in relation to his other habits, and what will be the effect of each food, drink, and habit on each individual. [...]' Underlying the method of medicine urged by the author there is, to be sure, a conception of *physis*. [...]. Miller here refers to the "Hippocratic" treatise dated c. 460-370 BC. Miller, 184-197 (pp.185-187).

From an ontological (metaphysical) perspective, natural things and artefacts may be taken to be equivalent. The analogy between film as an artefact and film as fossil, made of organic material, is also bound up with the internal and external principles of nature, change and rest, and between its active and passive potentialities operated by (internal and external) causes such as form and content, and movement and finalities, as in the case of the moving image. Studies in film restoration and preservation have underlined the natural vulnerability of photographic film stock due to ageing, hence foregrounding film as both artefact and natural thing, exposed to being-in-change. Film historian Paolo Cherchi Usai reminds us of the nature of film as artefact, its constitutive matter of celluloid and gelatine emulsion, and its being never far away from decay and death:

The fact ought to be faced that the most stable medium known by human civilisation is ceramic. Glass is all right. Stone may be affected by pollution. Canvas and wood have some problems. Something can be done about paper and frescoes, but the gelatine emulsion of a film has been for a hundred years a thin layer of organic material. Gelatine. Animal bones, crushed and melted into a semi-transparent layer interspersed with crystals of silver salts. It won't last. It can't.<sup>73</sup>

These are essential premises for the present study, as it explores the value of archive material for experimental filmmakers who may want to reclaim the importance of cultural memory prone to obsolescence and risking oblivion. Therefore, I explore the notion of archive in relation to *physis* in an innovative film language which deploys cultural artefacts, prone to growth and change, by starting with the assumption that they are primarily commodities.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Paolo Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema. History, Cultural Memory and the Digital Dark Age* (London: BFI, 2001), p. 113.

<sup>74</sup> 'Commodities come into the world in the shape of use-values, articles, or goods, such as iron, linen, corn, &c. This is their plain, homely, bodily form. They are, however, commodities, only because they are something two-fold, both objects of utility, and, at the same time, depositories of value. They manifest themselves therefore as commodities, or have the form of commodities, only in so far as they have two forms, a physical or natural form, and a value-form.' Marx, Karl, *Capital, Vol. I, The Process of Production of Capital*, ed. by Engels, Fredrick, trans. by Moore, Samuel and Aveling, Edward (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1887. Originally published in 1867), p. 16.

I argue that in order to explore the notion of the archive for experimental filmmaking, it is necessary to understand it in terms of its unstable nature, as Cherchi Usai stated, to which I would apply the ontological approach which exemplifies the filmmaker's engaging also with the conceptual indeterminacy of 'the archive'. Redeploying film as an art medium involves the re-contextualisation and transformation of its primary matter into new contexts and meanings, and through different temporalities.

For this reason, I draw on Adorno's useful dialectical argument about overcoming the antithesis of nature and history proposed by the subjectivist origins of phenomenology.<sup>75</sup> This leads back to an ontological question: what is the meaning of being, or the meaningfulness of being – where Adorno understood the term 'ontology' to mean 'nature'?<sup>76</sup> Thus I propose that in order to follow through this investigation of the nature of the archive, through the analysis of new film artefacts, one ought to be examining it in relation to 'being' and 'history', rather than merely addressing its meaning through subjective experience. Adorno's formulation is useful here as it aimed to formulate the concrete unity of 'natural-history' considered as a compound made of two, non-mutually exclusive, terms. This might also explain why the German term 'Naturgeschichte' was translated into the hyphenated 'natural-history'.<sup>77</sup> It might

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<sup>75</sup> Adorno writes about the crisis of phenomenology's first stage: 'The axis of the early phases of phenomenology produces a broadly encompassing range of problems through its subjectivistic origin. For this production of meaning is none other than the insertion of subjective meanings as they have been posited by subjectivity. The insight that the question of meaning is nothing more than the insertion of subjective meaning into the existing leads to the crisis of phenomenology's first stage. The drastic expression of this crisis is the obvious instability of fundamental ontological categories that reason has to experience in its attempt to secure an order of being.' Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Idea of Natural-History', in *Things Beyond Resemblance: Collected Essays on Theodor W. Adorno*, ed. and trans. By Bob Hullot-Kentor (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 252-304 (p. 254). 'The Idea of Natural-History' was originally published in 1932.

<sup>76</sup> 'For the question of ontology, as it is formulated at present, is none other than what I mean by "nature"'. Adorno, 'The Idea of Natural-History', in *Things Beyond Resemblance*, ed. by Bob Hullot-Kentor, 2006, pp. 252-304 (p. 253).

<sup>77</sup> In his introduction to Adorno's essay 'The Idea of Natural-History', Bob Hullot-Kentor wrote that 'A hyphen distinguishes two terms in this essay: *natural-history* and *natural history*.' pp. 234-304 (p. 298) This is an interesting footnote about the linguistic use of 'natural history'. I would argue that the English translation marks the intention to emphasize Adorno's discourse entrenched in the dialectics between these two concepts, nature and history, as in the German language it is one word only 'Naturgeschichte' which, when translated into English, without the hyphen, would provide a different meaning to the one meant by Adorno. Also, possibly interesting in this regard, is what Hullot-Kentor wrote: 'The style of Adorno's early essay can be understood from the perspective of his mature work, which is emphatically artificial. His last writings, particularly *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory*, are written at the limits of German syntax: articles are often deleted'. This might explain the

also explain Adorno's concept of a 'concrete unity' of, and mutually productive relationship between, 'real being' and 'history'. He wrote:

*A concrete unity, however, is not one modelled on an antithesis of possible and real being, but unity developed from the elements of real being itself. The neo-ontological project of history only has a chance of winning ontological dignity, of achieving an actual interpretation of being, if it is directed not at possibilities of being, but radically at the existing itself in its concrete inner-historical definition. Every exclusion of natural stasis from the historical dynamic leads to false absolutes, every isolation of the historical dynamic from the unsurpassably natural elements in it leads to false spiritualism.*<sup>78</sup>

Adorno's philosophical framework interpreted 'real being' and the 'possible' not as an antithesis but as a unity from the point of view of the 'real being' in history; and history not as a whole-encompassing unit, but as a 'historical dynamic' rather entailing the transformation and transience of its inner natural events into a structure of natural elements: 'The retransformation of concrete history into dialectical nature is the task of the ontological reorientation of the philosophy of history: the idea of natural-history'.<sup>79</sup> This is the underpinning of 'the ontology of the archive': posing questions about the inner dynamics between 'real being' and 'the inner historical definition'. This aspect can be seen in the films I explore in the following Chapters, for they evince a range of meanings and responses to the creative dynamics between *physis* (nature) and the historicised moment (history). Their experimental language, repurposing textual structures and materials from the archive, transformed archival indeterminacy, from a symptom of *aporia*, into both an object of analysis and a strategy to deploy in order to address alienation and obsolescence.

This exploration of the nature of the archive considers Adorno's 'natural-history' through his approach to Lukács' historical concept of nature in *Theory of the Novel*

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translator's replicating Adorno's cumbersome linguistic style. Bob Hullot-Kentor, 'Introduction to Adorno's "Idea of Natural-History"', *Telos: Critical Theory of the Contemporary* 1984, (60):97-110 (1984), 234-304 (p. 234).

<sup>78</sup> Adorno, 2006, 252-304 (p. 259).

<sup>79</sup> Adorno, 2006, 252-304 (p. 260).

(1920). According to Adorno, Lukács advanced the notion of ‘second nature’ as modelled on the historico-philosophical image of the ‘meaningful’ (immediate) and ‘meaningless world’ (an alienated world of commodities). For Adorno, Lukács called this ‘world of things created by man, yet lost to him, the world of convention. [...] A world that is present everywhere in boundless multiplicity and whose strict lawfulness, both in becoming and in being, is necessarily evident to the cognizant subject.’<sup>80</sup> For Lukács, this world was ‘second nature’, which like ‘first nature’ is ‘alienated nature, nature in the sense of natural sciences [...] it can only be defined as the embodiment of well-known yet meaningless necessities and therefore it is ungraspable and unknowable in its actual substance’.<sup>81</sup> The nature of the archive, which I deem as founded on *physis*, is also ‘first nature’. Hence, the ontological question arises: how can human beings escape alienation if they exist *in* an alienated world? Adorno’s criticism of ‘autonomous reason’ (steeped in phenomenological-ontological thought) recalls Eco’s predicament with the use of terms such as ‘alienation’ by the mass media. Adorno wrote:

[...] only when reason perceives the reality that is in opposition to it as something foreign and lost to it, as a complex of things, that is, only when reality is no longer immediately accessible and reality and reason have no common meaning, only then can the question of the meaning of being be asked at all.<sup>82</sup>

Lukács’s possibility of reawakening inwardness, meaningless petrified conventions, through a metaphysical act encountered Adorno’s proposition of the idea of ‘natural-history’, suggesting a solution to the impasse of ‘autonomous reason’. To my question -- what is the meaning of something petrified? -- Adorno’s idea of natural-history answers: ‘Petrified history is nature or the petrified life of nature is a mere product of

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<sup>80</sup> Adorno, 2006, 252-304 (p. 261).

<sup>81</sup> György Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. by Anna Bostock (Monmouth: Merlin, 1978), p. 62.

<sup>82</sup> Adorno, 2006, 252-304 (p. 254).

historical development.’<sup>83</sup> This is based on Lukács’s speculation about ‘second nature’:

The second nature [...] is not mute, corporeal and foreign to the senses like first nature: it is a petrified estranged complex of meaning that is no longer able to awaken inwardness; it is a charnel-house of rotted interiorities. This second nature could only be brought back to life, if ever, by a metaphysical act of reawakening the spiritual element that created or maintained it in its earlier or ideal existence, but could never be experienced by another interiority.<sup>84</sup>

According to Adorno, Benjamin’s engagement with poetry and allegory through the philosophy of history, which he espoused in his *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, can be even more useful.<sup>85</sup> Adorno quotes Benjamin:

[...] in allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history, a petrified primordial landscape. [...] This is the heart of the allegorical vision, of the Baroque, secular exposition of history as the passion of the world; it is only meaningful in the stations of its prostration. The greater the signification, the greater the subjugation to death, for death digs most deeply the jagged demarcation line between *physis* and signification.<sup>86</sup>

Benjamin’s notion of *physis* that I advance here shares with Lukács the idea of ‘second nature’, with the archive providing an alienated world of commodities (including films and media objects) that were subject to former consumer conventions and meanings. By re-casting these objects, the experimental filmmaker can dis-locate alienated meanings from within, re-activate their *physis*, hence create new meaning and growth, and thereby potentially ‘re-awaken’ the archive. The philosophy of history offers a generative approach, and marks the ontological indeterminacy of the archive; its nature changes over time, according to the new historical contexts and possibilities it shapes. Therefore, unlike Lukács’s analysis, it is not the exclusive metaphysical act that ‘reawakens’ the archive, but artistic processes that re-unite

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<sup>83</sup> Adorno, 2006, 252-304 (p. 262).

<sup>84</sup> Adorno, 2006, 252-304 (p. 261).

<sup>85</sup> ‘He brought the resurrection of second nature out of infinite distance into infinite closeness and made it an object of philosophical interpretation. Philosophy has succeeded in refining the concept of natural-history by taking up this theme of the awakening of an enciphered and petrified object. Adorno, 2006, 252-304 (p. 262)

<sup>86</sup> Adorno, 2006, 252-304 (p. 263).

thought with experimental forms of filmmaking. Working in synergy with literary, and by extension, filmic conventions, it may be possible to reawaken and activate the ‘meaningless necessities’ of the archive’s ‘second nature’. Adorno corroborates Benjamin’s notion of history and nature forming ‘eternal transience’.<sup>87</sup> Processes of signification, such as re-writing or transposing generic conventions, can re-activate intellectual and creative engagement, which humanises technology and routine techniques, and so unites the conceptual and symbolic with the practical.

In this light, the filmmakers’ social commitment through their re-contextualisation of historical material into new film forms recovers the loss of humanist value, buried within the forgotten histories of the archive. Historical documents are endowed with the significance of human life, hitherto reified, waiting to be ‘re-awakened’ by creative intervention and technology. The newly uncovered nature of the archive interweaves with history, through processes such as intercutting and montage, to give life to new film sequences.

The politics of screen narratives, encompassing both diegetic and non-diegetic space, are also central to understanding experimental cinema that uses archival materials. Both the on-screen story and discrete archival objects are part of the film composite, the result of montage techniques. William C. Wees has distinguished three kinds of montage film: compilation, collage and appropriation. However, these methods do not produce discrete modes, but often overlap, according to the cultural and historical specificity of the artist(s).<sup>88</sup> Therefore, I suggest that a predominance of archival material in Italian experimental cinema of the 1960s was an aesthetic

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<sup>87</sup> Adorno shares Benjamin’s philosophy of history, as he quotes from *The Origin of the German Play of Lamentation*, where Benjamin wrote: ‘In nature the allegorical poets saw eternal transience, and here alone did the saturnine vision of these generations recognize history.’ Adorno, 2006, 252-304 (p. 262).

<sup>88</sup> William Wees, *Recycled images. The Art and Politics of Found Footage Films* (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1993).

response to a condition of cultural control and repression that had not been explored since the beginning of the Fascist era in Italy, and through which Italian society had become alienated. Resort to the archive amounted to artists' gesture of re-engagement with the past, using images linked to diegetic and historical specificities, with the potential meaning of cultural objects in transition.

Effectively, a philosophy of the archive allows us to engage at a deeper level with the meaning of 'the archive' for film form, especially from the later perspective of the digital turn and its new ontologies, marking out a fertile terrain involving processes related to media convergence and fan culture. This outline of a philosophy of the archive has highlighted how nature and history have been woven through a fabric of cultural artefacts and conventions, opening up productive signifying tensions and intertextual references. For this reason, I invoke Adorno's concept of nature as transitory, including the element of history, so that the petrified world of 'second nature' can be read according to his philosophy:

Whenever a historical element appears it refers back to the natural element that passes away within it. Likewise the reverse: whenever 'second nature' appears, when the world of convention approaches, it can be deciphered in that its meaning is shown to be precisely its transience. [...] all being or everything existing is to be grasped as the interweaving of historical and natural being. As transience, all original history is absolutely present. It is present in the form of 'signification'. 'Signification' means that the elements of nature and history are not fused with each other, rather they break apart and interweave at the same time in such a fashion that the natural appears as a sign for history and history, where it seems to be most historical, appears as a sign for nature.<sup>89</sup>

However, the difference in their philosophical approach to nature and history consists in Benjamin's idea of a 'petrified reality' to be discovered by reading its signs, ruins and fragments, as against Adorno's essentially dialectical interweaving of nature and history. Adorno's position stands for the discontinuous structure of history, formed of

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<sup>89</sup> Adorno, 2006, 252-304 (p. 264).

the ‘mythical archaic, natural material of history’ and ‘that which surfaces as dialectically and emphatically new’.<sup>90</sup> My film analyses engage with both of these critical theorists’ philosophical approaches.

In eliciting the concept of *physis*, a philosophy of ‘the archive’ also explores its physical nature, prone to change and growth, and its ontology. As a concept, even in ancient texts, *physis* was often seen in relation to *nomos*, meaning ‘law’ or ‘custom’: hence the tension between the natural change of *physis* in the archive and the conventions and laws that regulate it.<sup>91</sup> Likewise, the etymology of the word ‘archive’ reveals something quite similar, as discussed by Jacques Derrida:

*Arkhē* apparently coordinates two principles in one: the principle according to nature or history, there where things commence – physical, historical, or ontological principle – but also the principle according to the law, there where men and gods command, there where authority, social order are exercised, in this place from which order is given – nomological principle.<sup>92</sup>

To conclude, I argue that a philosophy of ‘the natural-history of the archive’ discovers productive processes of re-signification (extrapolation, dis-location and re-contextualisation), which rely on formal restrictions and normative conventions, as well as on speculative, interactive modes of spectatorship. It also consolidates Eco’s proposition, ‘form as social commitment’, which invoked the potential of linguistic experimentation to address and overcome alienation by objectifying, and thereby historicising, cultural texts in order to create new ones.

By examining the collaborative film *Tutto, tutto nello stesso istante* (1969) in the next Chapter, I identify the techniques and archival artefacts that twelve experimental

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<sup>90</sup> Adorno, 2006, 252-304 (p. 266).

<sup>91</sup> For instance, in the case of the Greek, pre-Socratic sophist philosopher Protagoras the study of truth meant a study of nature, that is ‘*physis*’, and not of a study of social conventions, that is ‘*nomos*’. David Glidden, ‘Protagorean Relativism and *Physis*’, *Phronesis*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (1975), 209-227 (p. 210).

<sup>92</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998), p. 1.

filmmakers created in order to develop a new film form as a means of critiquing and historicising alienation.

## **Chapter 2. The Cooperative of Italian Independent Cinema and *Tutto, tutto nello stesso istante* (*All, all at once*, 1968-69)**

This Chapter provides an overview of independent artists' film and media practices forming part of the Italian avant-garde of the sixties, from the publication of *Ombre Elettriche* (*Electric Shadows*), dedicated to independent film cooperatives around the world, to art movements that had already started experimenting with film and the moving image, among other art materials, in the immediate post-war period.

It takes as its focus the brief history of the Cooperative of Italian Independent Cinema – henceforth referred to as CCI – and its collaborative ‘swansong film’ *Tutto, tutto nello stesso istante* (*All, all at once*, 1968-69), which was also shown in a unique event of the period at the London Underground Film Festival in 1970.<sup>93</sup> While placing these new artistic voices of the Italian avant-garde in the wider international circuit of independent film cultures, this Chapter considers the CCI's film not only as a landmark in independent filmmaking, but also as evidence of important formal innovation towards which Italian experimental films had been gravitating throughout the sixties.

I argue that *Tutto, tutto* constituted a prime example of ‘the essayistic experimental film’, uniting practice and theory, and placing its emphasis on a collaborative stance: ‘writing with the film camera’. This recalls Alexandre Astruc's famous 1948 essay ‘Naissance d'une nouvelle avant-garde: la caméra-stylo’ (‘The Birth of a New Avant-

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<sup>93</sup> See the entire programme of this festival in Appendix A.

garde: La Camera-Style'), which proposed the personal camera as a means for innovative creative 'writing'. *Tutto, Tutto* was composed according to a novel epistolary format, with each filmmaker 'writing' a letter, a film which in turn would invoke another artist's response, through another film. Thus all its parts complemented and resonated with one another. As a compilation of short films, and collaborative effort, *Tutto, tutto* was the essayistic expression of twelve independent filmmakers who, with their 16mm cameras, created personal 'letters' as commentaries on a variety of topics concerning post-'68 developments across the world as reported by the mass media. While each film constituted a discrete formal creation in its own right, it also formed a segment of a formally and thematically coherent film. This dialogic and multivocal relation defined the filmmakers' choice of a socially committed form through which to integrate archive material in order to impel audiences to think about their present conditions within a historical continuum.

The initial approach of the CCI filmmakers was to shape their responses to world events as news reportage, although in the form of a short film. This was an engaged practice that Cesare Zavattini had started to encourage some time earlier with *Cinegiornali della Pace* (1963), and consolidated around 1968 with the *Cinegiornali Liberi* (1968-70), which I analyse in Chapter 5. Here, I argue that *Tutto, tutto* can be considered, as Max Bense put it in his article 'On the essay and its prose', to have drawn its inspiration from 'the conditions established in the course of writing':

Thus the essay distinguishes itself from a scientific treatise. He writes essayistically who writes while experimenting, who turns his object this way and that, who questions it, feels it, tests it, thoroughly reflects on it, attacks it from different angles, and in his mind's eye collects what he sees, and puts into words what the object allows to be seen under the conditions established in the course of writing.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Max Bense, 'Über den Essay und seine Prosa', *Merkur* 1:3 (1947), p. 418, as cited by T.W. Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', trans. by Bob Hullot-Kentor and Frederic Will, *New German Critique*, n. 32, Spring-Summer, 1984, 151-171 (p. 164). Originally published in 1958.

## 1. An Independent Film Culture

The magazine *Ombre Elettriche* was one of the strongest voices of the CCI, based in the Northern industrial city of Turin. Independently run, it was short-lived, with only three issues published between 1967 and 1968. It provided news and critical analyses of avant-garde film events and the visual arts in Europe and the United States, including the Film Cooperative Festival in Munich (1968), in which many of the Italian avant-garde filmmakers participated; from New York and the West Coast to the New Cinema movement in India and the Tokyo Film Art Festival (1968).<sup>95</sup> It also published international film ephemera and contributions written in their original languages.

The editorial of the December 1967 issue bore an epigraph from Vladimir Mayakovsky's 1922 poem *Kino i kino*, which identified the magazine's cultural and artistic allegiance to the historic avant-garde, and more explicitly to Russian Futurism. Unequivocally devoted to an uncompromising left-wing film culture, it explained that Independent Cinema had two complementary souls, the experimental and the 'apocalyptic'. Contributors and filmmakers were urged to guard cinema against mass culture and Hollywood, and to fight any excessive formal complacency.<sup>96</sup> Its editorials were dedicated to the study of the national cultural past in order to arm the Italian film avant-garde: 'All of this is, we say, partly history and partly actuality'.<sup>97</sup>

The choice of the magazine's title had a rather compelling resonance with both the historic and the contemporary avant-garde. *Ombre Elettriche* carried connotations of vigour, energy, action and speed, evoking the experimentation with movement and the

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<sup>95</sup> Massimo Bacigalupo with *200 feet for March 21* and *Her*; Vittorio and Silvio Loffredo's *Le Court Bouillon*, Mario Ferrero's *Michelangelo will go to hell*, and Guido Lombardi's *Corporeality*, amongst others.

<sup>96</sup> *Ombre Elettriche – Independent Cinema Magazine*, dicembre 1967, p. 4.

<sup>97</sup> *Ombre Elettriche*, 1967, p. 5

still image of Italian Futurist cinema, and some of the tenets contained in that movement's film manifesto 'La Cinematografia Futurista', written by F.T. Marinetti, Bruno Corra, E. Settimelli Arnaldo Ginna, Giacomo Balla, and Remo Chiti, and published in the journal *L'Italia Futurista (Futurist Italy)* on 11<sup>th</sup> September 1916.<sup>98</sup>

The title *Ombre Elettriche* also drew on the psychedelic film aesthetics of 1960s underground film, with its subversive implications, and, most importantly, it recalled the pioneers of primitive cinema and even proto-cinematic intermedial devices such as shadow-play and the magic lantern. The journal's evocation of a period when proto- and early cinema were less driven by consumerist interests than by an exploration of technological innovation, and experimentation with film as medium, are also an indication of its formal and cultural commitment.

'Electric shadows' also suggested a reference to China's 'cultural revolution' of 1965-6, and consequently to the filmmakers' worker-ethic, with film as a medium enabling radical changes in society.<sup>99</sup> Turin was one of the strongest countercultural epicentres in Italy, with a strong working-class presence due to the nearby FIAT car plants. It was also one of the strongholds of the student counter-information movement, which started in the early sixties and later based itself on the Chinese model, according to which 'the factory is not a purely economic unit. It is the place where illiterate workers learn to read and write ... often houses, schools and

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<sup>98</sup> Although maintaining a very different ideological outlook, *La Cinematografia Futurista*, was also an expression of cinema's formal sensibility towards the other arts: 'In the futurist film the most diverse elements will become its means of expression: from an excerpt of real life to a brushstroke of colour, from the line to free words, from the chromatic and plastic music to the music of objects. In short, it will be painting, architecture, sculpture, words of freedom, music of colours, lines and shapes, a clash of objects and a chaotic reality.' My translation. The original text reads: 'Nel film futurista entreranno come mezzi di espressione gli elementi più svariati: dal brano di vita reale alla chiazza di colore, dalla linea alle parole in libertà, dalla musica cromatica e plastica alla musica di oggetti. Esso sarà insomma pittura, architettura, scultura, parole in libertà, musica di colori, linee e forme, accozzo di oggetti e realtà caotizzata.' Alessandra Ottieri, 'Appunti su futurismo e mass-media' ('Notes on Futurism and the Mass Media'), in *Sinestesia. Rivista di Studi sulle Letterature e le Arti Europee*, ed. by Carlo Santoli, Anno II (Napoli: Guida Editore, 2004), p. 66.

<sup>99</sup> 'Electric shadows' is the usual translation of *dian-ying*, the original Chinese term for cinema. Jay Leyda's pioneering history of 'films and the film audience in China', entitled *Dianying: Electric Shadows* (MIT Press) would appear in 1972.

recreational facilities are built around the factory by them.’<sup>100</sup> It was only during 1968-9 that students and workers joined forces, and their interaction ‘reached levels unique in Western Europe. [...] the Italian movements acquired aura and status internationally for their working-class involvement’.<sup>101</sup> Reports in the national newspaper *Corriere della Sera* referred to the media-conscious students in pejorative terms as ‘Chinese’, investing them with connotations of ‘the other’, a cultural entity to be alienated because of the threat it represented, and in some cases provoking ‘anger, scorn and, on one occasion, petrol-bombs’.<sup>102</sup>

The editorial entitled ‘UnderPolitiCinema’ of the second issue of *Ombre Elettriche*, published in December 1968, attempted to give a concise analysis of the main trends in Italian independent cinema. It defined ‘underground’ film as generally shot on 8 or 16mm in total freedom, both thematically and practically, and offering a subjective representation of reality, with no commercial intent. Such films were considered politically motivated, in that they wanted to free “repressed” topics from the shackles of a controlling consumerist culture and film industry. ‘Independent’ film was more specifically commissioned or sponsored, although not involved in any commercial business. This type of cinema, the magazine wrote, was normally affiliated with a specific cooperative that supported it financially and helped to find the relevant channels of distribution and exhibition, which were normally cultural associations or film clubs. However, *Ombre Elettriche* also strongly criticised this type of filmmaking because it kept negotiating with the system and with popular culture, which conditioned its distribution and exhibition, and so fostered an audience which might not be critical enough to appreciate its actual intentions. Therefore, according to the

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<sup>100</sup> ‘Editorial’, *Ombre Elettriche*, 1967, p. 5.

<sup>101</sup> Lumley, 1990, p. 116.

<sup>102</sup> Lumley, 1990, p. 121.

magazine's editors, independent cinema was likely to be ineffectual, since it accepted the support of a commercial system whose audience was passive and unaware of its ideology of subversion. The third type of cinema was defined as 'political' or 'didactic', aligning itself with agit-prop and propaganda film, and emphasising class struggle and the inequalities in the social system.

Non-mainstream experimental synergies at work in the arts contributed to influencing artists' films. The *Gruppo Origine*, precursor of *Arte Povera*, founded in Rome in 1950, amongst whose artists were Alberto Burri and Ettore Colla, sought to unite art and life with famous works such as discarded burlap sacks (Burri) and old found iron tools (Colla), and techniques such as suture and welding 'that would point to the human dimension and the experience of contemporary life'.<sup>103</sup> The practice of using everyday materials for art objects and performance art, called *Azioni Povere*, saw the sculptor and painter Michelangelo Pistoletto create his *Minus Objects* series in 1966 (*Oggetti in Meno*), as a concrete expression of anti-commodity art. *MAC* (*Movimento d'Arte Concreta*), and *Arte Forma*, founded in Milan and in Rome respectively in the fifties, engaged with the legacies of the Bauhaus and Constructivism. *Gruppo Monte Olimpino*, located in Como, was family-run (by the Piccardo family), and recalled the early experiments with light and sculptures by Bauhaus painter and photographer László Moholy-Nagy. The Group started working in the early 1960s with the scientific method of *Arte Programmata*, sometimes considered as another precursor to *Arte Povera*, whose activities were inspired by formal experimentation with art, science and information.<sup>104</sup> They explored the

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<sup>103</sup> Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, 'Thrust into the Whirlwind: Italian Art Before Arte Povera', in *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962-1972*, ed. by Richard Flood and Frances Morris (Minneapolis: Walker Art Centre, 2001), pp. 29-40 (p. 27).

<sup>104</sup> 'Arte Povera would incorporate and reject aspects of both *Arte Programmata* and *New Figuration*.' Christov-Bakargiev, pp. 29-40 (p. 37)

relationship between primary materials and the consumer industry, creating experimental documentaries of avant-garde artistic practices such as the first exhibition of the *Group T* (of Milan) and *Group P.* (of Padova) of arte programmata (computer art/programmed art) objects, which was made for Olivetti.<sup>105</sup> Most of *Monte Olimpino*'s film work, made between 1962 and 1966, consisted of reflexive documentaries or advertising films.

Another film cooperative, typically short-lived, was called *Cinemasí*; formed in 1966, it reflected the cultural ferment of innovative and collaborative artistic activities during the sixties. Amid this ferment, however, the work of the CCI has been unduly overlooked. Film historian Adriano Aprà maintained that Italian experimental cinema seemed to have no history and no critical context:

One could argue that there was no underground in Italy, even if films, catalogues and even a volume remain evidence of its existence. This is due to two reasons: because these films did not circulate widely, even in parallel or alternative circuits; and because they did not receive much critical attention. [...] Born not to be seen, they were neither aristocratic nor assertive in the American sense; nor did they aim to be screened in museums, perhaps merely in domestic spaces in everyday circumstances; as they were never born they never died either.<sup>106</sup>

## **2. The Cooperative of Italian Independent Cinema (La Cooperativa del Cinema Indipendente Italiano, "CCI")**

The Cooperative of Italian Independent Cinema was launched at the end of June 1967 in Naples by the brothers Antonio and Adamo Vergine, with the support of independent and experimental filmmakers from Turin and Rome, and at a time when

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<sup>105</sup> *Arte Programmata* (1962, 16mm, 10', colour, sound), <http://nuke.monteolimpino.it/arte/tabid/518/Default.aspx> [accessed 10 October 2019].

<sup>106</sup> My translation. The original text reads: 'Si potrebbe dire che l'underground in Italia non c'è stato, anche se restano dei film, dei cataloghi e perfino un volume a ricordarlo. E questo per due motivi: perché questi film hanno circolato pochissimo, anche nei circuiti paralleli o alternativi; e perché non hanno sollevato un discorso critico. [...] Questi film, nati per non essere visti, sono privi dell'aristocraticità americana oltre che della sua assertività; non avevano alcuna ambizione al museo, semmai alla casa e allo spazio del quotidiano; per non essere mai nati, non sono neppure morti.'. Adriano Aprà, *Fuori norma. La via sperimentale del cinema italiano (Outside the Norm. The Experimental Pathway of Italian Cinema)*, (Venezia: Marsilio, 2013), p. 15.

other film cooperatives were being established in Belgium, Switzerland, Britain and elsewhere in Europe.

According to Massimo Bacigalupo, one of its founders, the catalysing factors were not only the films of the New American Cinema exhibited in Italy between 1960 and 1966, but also the organisational model of the New York Film Cooperative, founded by Jonas Mekas in 1962.<sup>107</sup> The Rapallo festival of 1964, organised by Bacigalupo, was particularly fruitful in providing inspiration for Italian independent filmmakers.<sup>108</sup>

The political impetus behind the CCI was financial independence: as Alfredo Leonardi wrote in 1967, the income of the CCI was based on earnings from the films' hire. According to its statute, film productions were to be proportionate to available funding, approved by an elected committee who would consider the chosen film project as culturally interesting.<sup>109</sup> Initially, the filmmaker-producer would receive 50% before tax from each rental; but this percentage would rise to the same as the New York Film Cooperative's, which was 75%. The number of filmmakers participating in this self-financed cooperative was about forty, and all feared censorship. For this reason, they did not exhibit in cinemas, but had alternative screening spaces such as cineclubs, cultural circles, cultural associations, art galleries and bookshops, all of which guaranteed the circulation of uncensored prints.<sup>110</sup> The CCI started its distribution programme in August 1967, ahead of its formal recognition as a cooperative, and two of its films were shown at the Knokke Film

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<sup>107</sup> David Curtis wrote: 'In New York, Jonas Mekas, under whose editorship *Film Culture* (founded in 1955) had become the unofficial voice of the new movement, responded to the unsung challenge of the non-distributed East Coast film-makers by starting screenings at the Charles Theatre and founding the New York Film-makers' Co-operative in 1962.' David Curtis, *Experimental Cinema. A Fifty-Year Evolution* (New York: Studio Vista, 1971), p. 155.

<sup>108</sup> Massimo Bacigalupo, 'Introduzione', in *Il Film Sperimentale, Bianco e Nero*, ed. by Massimo Bacigalupo, maggio-agosto 1974, pp. 2-14 (pp. 4-5).

<sup>109</sup> Alfredo Leonardi, 'La cooperativa del cinema indipendente', in *Ind Under Off – Materiali sul cinema sperimentale 1959-1979*, ed. by Nuccio Lodato (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 1981. Originally published in *Filmcritica*, nn. 179/180, 1967), pp. 129-132 (p. 130).

<sup>110</sup> Leonardi, 1981, pp. 129-132 (p. 131).

Festival later in the same year.<sup>111</sup> Its first exhibition was at the legendary independent art space in Rome, Filmstudio '70, in March 1968.<sup>112</sup> But already by the end of the same year, the group had lost its momentum, moving its activities to Rome and dismantling its legal apparatus.

The CCI's filmmakers also took part in the International Underground Film Festival at the National Film Theatre in London, between 14 and 20 September 1970. This was the first international meeting of independent filmmakers after the European Underground Festival in Munich in October 1968. In Munich, there had been talks about launching a European Film Cooperative, which led to no practical decision, although, as Bacigalupo reports, Birgit Hein published a European film catalogue in the German film magazine *Film*, in February 1969, that amalgamated national film catalogues. The Italian films screened in the London festival were: *A, B, C, D* (Guido Lombardi and Anna Lojolo, 1969-70), *Medea* (Pia Epreman, 1968), *Le Opere e i Giorni* (*Days and Works*, Antonio De Bernardi, 1969), *Migrations* (Massimo Bacigalupo, 1970), *Le Court Bouillon* (Vittorio and Silvio Loffredo, 1952-62), as well as some of Gianfranco Baruchello's films (titles unspecified). These formed part of an international programme of underground and experimental films, from the Australian, European and American cooperatives, which included: from the New Arts Lab/London Film-Makers Co-op, Mike Leggett, Malcolm Le Grice, Tim Harding, Barbara Schwarts, Steve Dwoskin and David Curtis; from the American underground: Gregory Markopoulos, Hollis Frampton, Andy Warhol and Jack Smith (New York);

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<sup>111</sup> Amongst the ninety films in competition, there were Alfredo Leonardi's *Se L'Inconscio si Ribella* (*If the Unconscious Rebels*, 1967), and Paolo Menzio's and Tonino De Bernardi's *Il Mostro Verde* (*The Green Monster*, 1967). Oriani, Gabriele, 'Lettera da Knokke', in *Ombre Elettriche*, dicembre 1967, p. 22.

<sup>112</sup> Massimo Bacigalupo, *Occhio privato sul (vecchio e nuovo) mondo. Omaggio a Massimo Bacigalupo* (*A Private Look at the (Old and New) World. A Tribute to Massimo Bacigalupo*), ed. by Giulio Bursi and Massimo Causo for the 2010 Turin Film Festival Retrospective on Massimo Bacigalupo, p. 148.

William Moritz Judith Reidel, Alvin Tokunow, and John Stehura (Los Angeles); Jonas Mekas (New York), and Spanish, Austrian and German film cooperatives.<sup>113</sup>

In an article titled 'Underground a Londra' in *Filmcritica* (1971), Bacigalupo wrote about the inconclusive results of the festival, where disagreements among filmmakers on how to continue and consolidate their activity and presence at an international level increased. In London, opposition to the commercial system had forced independent film productions to stay underground, with Mekas insisting: 'underground film started underground, and will stay there'.<sup>114</sup>

The 1969 Spring-Winter issue of *Cinema & Film* published a group interview with several members of the Cooperative, including Bacigalupo, Gianfranco Baruchello, Alfredo Leonardi, Antonio De Bernardi, Guido Lombardi, and Adamo Vergine. Together with the film *Tutto, tutto nello stesso istante*, this underlined the collaborative ethos that pervaded the CCI. The interview emphasised how independent production, distribution and filmmaking practice was based on the politics of both individual filmmakers and the collective. Regarding the CCI's breakup, Bacigalupo and Baruchello explained that this was mainly a formality, due to the bureaucratic pressures of state regulations affecting the group's film distribution and production, which not only slowed down their overall production but also made it more onerous. In keeping with independent experimental film practices, it did not make sense to continue as a formally organised group, although each film artist maintained the same operational arrangements.

The initial influence of the methods and politics of the Italian cooperative on filmmakers came at a transitional time, when new cultural practices were gathering

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<sup>113</sup> For the complete programme of the London Underground Film Festival (1970), please see Appendix A.

<sup>114</sup> Massimo Bacigalupo, 'Underground a Londra', in *Ind Under Off – Materiali sul cinema sperimentale 1959-1979*, ed. by Lodato, 1981, pp. 243-245 (p. 245). Originally published in *Filmcritica*, n. 212, 1971.

momentum, between 1967 and 1968. However, films made later, in a more politically charged period, such as *Tutto, Tutto nello stesso istante*, encountered a much more muted response from the independent film culture circuit. According to Bacigalupo, this was due to the film's late completion, and the fact that it offered reflections on political events which had taken place some time earlier, and therefore it could not communicate as effectively as it had aimed to do.<sup>115</sup>

The Spring-Summer 1969 issue of *Cinema & Film* titled 'Cooperativa del Cinema Indipendente' ('Cooperative of Independent Cinema') criticised the outdated discourse of film authorship, emphasising how their group was still working together despite its official split. Bacigalupo stated: 'The intention of the CCI was to gather all Italian filmmakers who really practised the politics of financial independence, in order to strip the authority of the "established film *autore*", with a view on gathering more consensus among other established filmmakers.'<sup>116</sup>

Ironically, while legally the CCI had already dissolved, the collaborative and committed politics of *Tutto, tutto nello stesso istante* became, in all its heterogeneous diversity, all the more poignant. All the experimental films made in the earlier sixties seem to be converging naturally towards it, both formally and conceptually, showing the Italian film avant-garde as having reached its most mature artistic phase by the end of the decade.

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<sup>115</sup> More specifically, Bacigalupo stated: 'When, during the political upheavals of the '68-'69 and soon afterwards, the movement produced its best, from some uncertain works to others which founded their individuality upon a group conscience, and were most certainly more mature and articulate, the counterculture of the establishment was not interested any longer, and these works were met by a general silence. [...] It is typical of the best work which cannot communicate its *Zeitgeist* because the period it refers to is over to be consequently punished by disinterest, which is the most deplorable sin of consumer society.' My translation. The original text reads: 'Quando poi, nelle "stagioni" '68-'69 e seguenti, il movimento diede il suo meglio passando da opere ancora incerte ad esiti che fondavano la loro individualità su una coscienza di gruppo ed erano certamente più maturi e articolati, la controcultura dell'establishment non aveva più interesse ad occuparsene, e le opere incontrarono il silenzio generale. [...] È caratteristica dell'opera migliore questa sfasatura rispetto al momento cui essa si riferisce, sfasatura che è proprio il peccato imperdonabile nella società del consumo.' Bacigalupo, 'Introduzione', 1974, pp. 2-14 (p. 8).

<sup>116</sup> Bacigalupo, 'Introduzione', pp. 2-14 (p. 6).

### 3. *Tutto, Tutto nello stesso istante (All, all at once, 1968-69)*<sup>117</sup>

The design for this film was to create a ‘Circular Letter’ commemorating the collaborative effort of the CCI after its formal dissolution in 1968. Its filmmakers described *Tutto, Tutto nello stesso istante* in the group’s last catalogue as a ‘cooperative embrassons-nous’, a collaborative film made by friends.<sup>118</sup> Specifically, the intent was to provide a collective response to police repression and violence in the historic riots of Valle Giulia (Rome, March 1968), and the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago.<sup>119</sup>

The film is testament to a long period of social discontent with the economic and cultural inequalities generated by the government, which escalated into civil rights movements and workers’ strikes, provoking violent police responses.<sup>120</sup> Particularly from winter 1967 until March 1968, there had been many signs of a mounting dissatisfaction among students with the state control of higher education, and the academic and social mechanisms that allowed for such hegemony.

The student movement challenged both institutional power and the state, and by January 1968 thirty-six Italian universities were occupied. Following a Government ban, the movement organised more demonstrations and their defiance of the state escalated into further riots met by police tear-gas and truncheon charges.

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<sup>117</sup> *Tutto, Tutto nello stesso istante (All, all at once, 1969, 16mm, colour, 25’)*. Massimo Bacigalupo defined *Tutto, Tutto* as ‘un film antipoliziesco’ (an ‘anti-police film’). Bacigalupo, 2010, p. 137.

<sup>118</sup> ‘The filmmakers who contributed their short films to the compilation film *Tutto, tutto nello stesso istante* were: Massimo Bacigalupo, Piero Bargellini, Gianfranco Baruchello, Mauro Chessa, Antonio De Bernardi, Pia Epreman, Alfredo Leonardi, Guido Lombardi, Abbott Maeder, Paolo Menzio, Giorgio Turi, and Adamo Vergine.’ In his ‘Introduzione’, Bacigalupo also stated that one of the documents of the CCI’s transitional cultural and organizational phase was this collaborative film, which tested the film artists’ continued collaborative approach to filmmaking, also sustained by a shared sympathy for their artistic sensibilities. According to notes in the CCI’s last film catalogue, the film despite it being defined as a ‘circular letter’, in fact was not a short-term project as it started in June 1968 and ended in March 1969. These notes claim that this close collaboration was like as ‘a cooperative embrassons-nous’, although it did not mean to disavow the filmmakers’ subjective authorial intent. Bacigalupo, ‘Introduzione’, 1974, pp. 2-14 (pp. 8-9).

<sup>119</sup> Lumley, 1990, p. 66.

<sup>120</sup> ‘[...] Italian workers not only withdrew their labour on a massive scale, but challenged the organization of work and the system of authority within the factory system itself and its hold over their lives. [...] In Italy industrial conflict took on radical forms: [...] workers defied managements and rejected negotiation; [...] questions of pay and conditions turned into sources of a more general attack on social injustices. Industrial workers created a movement which overturned many of the rules and assumptions governing everyday behaviour and the regulation of conflict.’ Lumley, 1990, p. 167.

After more occupations and aggressive confrontations in different universities, the relationship between police and students had started to shift from the respectful treatment the police used to give middle-class children, who were aiming to gain some public sympathy, albeit peacefully. These conflicts had become the expression of a slippage in ethical values taking place in the name of power at the expense of human rights. Robert Lumley wrote:

It seems that the Centre-Left government had little to gain from violent showdowns with the student movement, and preferred compromises; following the Valle Giulia events it ordered the release of all those arrested and encouraged the university rector to negotiate with the movement. However, within the state's repressive apparatuses, conservative and right-wing opinion favoured the use of force to put down disorders. In the heat of events, the latter were able *de facto* to impose their policies of strong policing, and then to oblige the minister of the interior to defend their actions. The toll of deaths and injuries due to police charges, tear-gas canisters and use of firearms escalated as a consequence, especially from the beginning of 1969.<sup>121</sup>

While the students' motto became 'No to war, yes to riots!' ('Guerra no, Guerriglia si!'), and their most popular song was 'Violence' ('La Violenza'),<sup>122</sup> what the '68 events changed was the degree of brutality with which the authorities tackled the inflammatory situation, facing a perceived threat to their authority. The antagonism was clearly about political power, and what was at stake could be considered 'the opposition of extremes'.

The Chicago Convention was another landmark in the history of police riots taking place in 1968. It catalysed widespread dissatisfaction in the United States with how the Democratic administration had been handling its long-term war in Vietnam since 1955, challenging the Democrats to make a radical break with the past in the name of progress and change.<sup>123</sup> This Convention reflected a long-term discontent with the

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<sup>121</sup> Lumley, 1990, p. 69.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Aynes Johnson, '1968 Democratic Convention. The bosses strike back', August 2008, in <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history-archaeology/1968-democratic-convention.html>, p. 1 [accessed 6 October 2012].

American political and judicial system. High hopes for a just society, following the 1964 passage of civil rights legislation that had ‘virtually ended legal segregation of America’, were dashed by police attacks on demonstrations that included both white and black people marching side by side across the country over the following two years.<sup>124</sup> The sentiment of insurrection started to gather momentum. After Lyndon B Johnson’s intensification of the war in Vietnam in 1964, dissent escalated with the murders of Martin Luther King Jr. in April, and that of Democrat Presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy in June 1968. The Chicago Convention thus caused new waves of protests and violent riots, which were set to continue.

The collaborative ethos of the film *Tutto, tutto nello stesso istante* produced a choral, essayistic aesthetic, which arguably was the distinctive feature of the new avant-garde’s social commitment. Bacigalupo found the film’s eclectic response to violence more effective than that of the French collective film *Loin du Vietnam* (1967).<sup>125</sup> Curtis reminded us that in 1966 Fluxus had put together a collective reel that included a number of ‘single-frame and single-take films’.<sup>126</sup> As many of the CCI filmmakers visited the United States and were in contact with New American Cinema filmmakers, it is also most likely that *Tutto, tutto* was influenced by Fluxus.<sup>127</sup> Many Italian avant-garde films of the sixties were strongly influenced by American independent film poetics and forms of experimentation with the moving image.

Bacigalupo met with members of the New American Cinema through the poet Ezra

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<sup>124</sup> Johnson, 2008, in <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history-archaeology/1968-democratic-convention.html>, p. 2 [accessed 6 October 2012].

<sup>125</sup> Bacigalupo, ‘Introduction’, 1974, pp. 2-14 (p. 9). *Loin du Vietnam* was another collective film made by Joris Ivens, William Klein, Claude Lelouch, Agnès Varda, Jean-Luc Godard, Chris Marker, and Alain Resnais where, in the context of the Vietnam War, the directors expressed their sympathy for North Vietnam.

<sup>126</sup> ‘In America, some of the first film artists to consciously enter the field of Structural Cinema belonged to the Fluxus group. In 1966, they put together a collective reel that included a number of single-frame and single-take films.’ Curtis, 1971, p. 183.

<sup>127</sup> ‘In America, some of the first film-artists to consciously enter the field of Structural Cinema belonged to the Fluxus group. These included: Paul Sharits’ *Wrist Trick, Dots and Sears Catalogue*, Yoko Ono’s first bottoms film *Number 4* (a twelve-minute version), *Entrance-Exit* by George Brecht – a simple progression of frames from black through to white - and the anonymous *Ten Feet*, a stretch of film calibrated as a measuring tape (an archetypal structural film if ever there was one) lasting seventeen seconds.’ Curtis, 1971, p. 156.

Pound, a friend of his father's; he graduated from Columbia University and published his translation of Stan Brakhage's *Metaphors of Vision* into Italian (1970).<sup>128</sup> Alfredo Leonardi lived in the US between 1969 and 1970, sharing his life with the Living Theatre,<sup>129</sup> and in 1971 compiled an anthology of the New American Cinema's filmmakers, entitled *My Eye, My God (Occhio, Mio Dio)*, covering the period between 1943 and 1970). The painter and collage filmmaker Ugo Nespolo was influenced by Pop Art and Andy Warhol, and the poets of the Beat Generation, especially Allen Ginsberg. Such proximity to the American cultural arena resonated with the socio-political difficulties Italy was facing, creating a fertile common ground of countercultural artistic synergy.

*Tutto, tutto nello stesso istante* spoke of the filmmakers' perception of social vulnerability and chaos, and mainly addressed the mass media as manipulative and corrupting. But its makers also denounced the brutalities still being committed in the Vietnam War and its numbing effects on society. Experimental underground filmmakers wanted to re-capture the meaning and value of human life that they perceived had been lost.

By denouncing the invasive presence of the press, the television, the radio and Hollywood cinema, continuously promoting a consumerist lifestyle, the film's non-linear narrative structures and use of collage and archive material, and its overall pessimistic tone, conveyed a sense of potential imminent instability and uncertainty. Each contributor, in their own distinct style, addressed a commonly felt lack of engagement with the current social and human condition. Seeking to capture the

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<sup>128</sup> [...] through his personal acquaintance with poet Ezra Pound, Bacigalupo met filmmakers and associates of the New American Cinema, among them Guy Davenport, Stan Brakhage, Gregory Markopoulos, Jonas Mekas, and Abbott Meader.' Bacigalupo, 2010, p. 149.

<sup>129</sup> Alfredo Leonardi, 'Alfredo Leonardi', in Bacigalupo, 1974, pp. 111-129 (p. 124).

immediacy of simultaneous responses to historical events around the globe, the film asked its viewers to ponder on life, viewed through both micro and macro-perspectives. Moving from the lyrically subjective to the most universal sentiments, the film remains a document of its time within the history of Italian culture. The fragments of the mass-media archive deployed were historical, yet integrated into the present, they marked what was clearly perceived as a critical historical moment. A decade later, Mauro Boato would write:

The new type of mass social struggle reveals the nature of the new type of social system; it is a social system that tends to destroy independent areas of activity, subjecting them to a centralised, rigid and planned control. Distinctions between the superstructures and structures, between economy and politics, between the public and private no longer make sense ... Study, work, consumption, free time, personal relations... all of them enter into a scheme of inputs and outputs that allow conflict but will not tolerate antagonism.<sup>130</sup>

Through its stratified use of archival material, *Tutto, Tutto* held up a mirror to contemporary social discontent, conflicts and contradictions. A variety of themes reverberate through the diverse imagery combined through montage, compilation and collage; techniques that intended to ‘awaken’ the audience from passive spectatorship. While each short film stands as a discrete original contribution, on the whole, all aim at provoking different responses to cases of human rights abuse. Blending seamlessly together, they convey the united sense of an innovative approach to film language and materials. The vast array of intertextual references reveals the filmmakers’ metanarrative on immediacy, a shared desire to express more spontaneous, and therefore more authentic, depictions of the present -- hence, the title *All, all at once*. In *Cinema & Film*, Bacigalupo wrote about the film:

We started with the idea of a collaborative film project testifying to the shared sensibilities and sympathies existing within the group of the CCI (Co-operative of Italian Independent Cinema), our substantial affinities able to articulate a multitude

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<sup>130</sup> Marco Boato, *Il '68 è morto. Viva il 68*, (Verona: Bertani, 1979), p. 209.

of *potential connections* clearly originating from each filmmaker's own chosen areas of interest. The collective experiment, endowed with evident characteristics of singularity, and interweaving each single spontaneous contribution through a unique texture exceeded even the most optimistic of expectations, but also revealed a series of oppositions, tensions, evolutions of *image-gesture*. [...] The film is not a collection of film clips or discarded film footage: each filmmaker consciously tried to provide his specific response to the proposed primary themes. These responses would take into account the spectator, prompting him to engage closely with the film. Such undivided attention on the part of the audience might reveal, beneath the smooth flow of the images, something also quite painful; one clear look at each other's face, holding up a mirror to violence and feeling pervaded by it, within a system of echoes, which often does not allow [...] to distinguish what is inside from what is outside [...]. It is for this reason that *Tutto, tutto nello stesso istante* is current [...] the film illustrates a visual constellation of different yet similar, vaguely sinister responses.<sup>131</sup>

While the film's project was to provide completely subjective responses to two significant episodes in the history of police riots, *Tutto, tutto* was also the result of a tension pervading the mass media and popular culture;<sup>132</sup> a general malaise rooted in spiritual apathy and *aporia*, typical of late-capitalism, which was also being explored by the renowned Italian auteurs of the same period.

The painter and filmmaker Gianfranco Baruchello proposed the initial idea, to shoot sixty metres of Ektrachrome film inspired by the mood of the moment, and to circulate this 'letter' to the other filmmakers, prompting a spontaneous, immediate reaction. Each would in turn provide their personal response through a short film. This epistolary format finally yielded twenty-five minutes of footage, which I believe constitutes an overall essayistic argument about socio-cultural discontent. *Tutto, tutto* was finally edited by Baruchello, Bacigalupo and Giorgio Turi.<sup>133</sup>

While none of the short films were credited to any individual filmmaker, each retains a distinctly subjective style. *Tutto, tutto* could be considered an allegorical 'synecdoche', a fragmented whole encompassing distinctly shaped views, as if it was

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<sup>131</sup> My translation. Massimo Bacigalupo, 'Schede C.C.I.', *Cinema & Film*, No. 7-8, Primavera 1969, 117-131 (p. 131).

<sup>132</sup> Bacigalupo, 'Introduction', 1974, pp. 2-14 (p. 9).

<sup>133</sup> Gianfranco Baruchello, *Tutto, Tutto nello stesso istante*, in 'Schede C.C.I.', *Cinema & Film*, 1969, 117-131 (p. 130).

a cubist film, grouping various facets belonging to a whole polyphonic vision of the present. With my textual analysis, I identify thematic continuities and reveal how the film's aesthetics addressed its commitment to social change, whilst energizing a new independent, experimental film culture. The film was screened at the Tate Gallery in London, in the programme 'Film d'artista' ('Artists' film'), in 1983.<sup>134</sup>

### **3.1 A textual analysis**

The film starts by introducing the theme of alienation. This opening section presents a collage of mass media objects: superimposed sounds and voices, while the distinct sound of a voiceover repeats on a loop: 'once upon a time'. This is followed by a television war newsreel footage showing the American flag and soldiers. After this opening, with a television audio-visual montage, a tight close-up frames a pair of hands approaching a collection of small tin soldiers and toy firearms, neatly lined up on a table. Thus, the audience is catapulted from the historical reference to Italy's past with 'once upon a time' as the typical opening to a fairy tale, to the authoritative voice of a television news broadcast detailing the latest events in the Vietnam War, to a live film of toys, which are also the cultural signifiers of innocence and playfulness. Mass media information is thus turned on its head as, rather than 'only' telling us about the present, it evokes the past and its responsibility for present and future generations. Its authoritative voice, recalling the past for the sake of the present, provoked thoughts about the consequences of war for innocent people.

At the same time, by juxtaposing toy firearms and soldiers with newsreel footage and the American flag, this section takes its stand against the commodification of

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<sup>134</sup> Gianfranco Baruchello. *Archive of Moving Images. 1960-2016*, ed. by Carla Subrizi and Alessandro Rabottini (Milano: Mousse Publishing, 2017), p. 262.

violence and war through its implied criticism of an invasive American culture. The filmmaker here engages with objects of cultural significance, war newsreels and toys, making human hands visible within the frame to emphasize (and invoke) human intervention – like the filmmaker’s activation of *physis* within the re-contextualised media, thus mobilising new meanings in the minds of the spectators.

War reportage is also shown to critique the negative impact of television, as its scheduled programmes intrude into people’s domestic life, which has thus become alienated because of such relentlessly invasive mediation. The montage of archival television newsreel (from RAI, as the state broadcaster that archived news-media) and new footage strengthened the film’s interest in exploring viewers’ experience of different temporalities.

The final part of this section shows a hand spraying toy firearms and tin soldiers with golden paint. This almost ritualised slow movement suggests the filmmaker’s indictment of mainstream film which glamorises violence, drawing attention to modes of the objectification of violence, as consumers passively view television programmes and genre films. Towards the end, the soundtrack– which might be an additional contribution by a different artist – is an unidentified classical piece, which confers a tone of timeless solemnity on the images. Overall, this initial part of *Tutto, tutto* created an allegory about past and present forms of imperialism, and the objectification of war and human beings. It finishes with a close-up of hands placing the toys back into their original box as a marketable product, recalling how alienated normal life has become habituated to the commodification of violence.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> The use of toy soldiers combined with stock footage to indict real-world militarism recalls Norman McLaren and Helen Biggar’s ‘home-made’ 1936 anti-war film *Hell Unltd*, although this was not rediscovered until the 1970s.

The concept of alienation creates a link with the next theme, cultural imperialism, which emerges more distinctively and is criticised in the following section. The mass media are displayed as ubiquitous, stifling the everyday. Archive materials are gathered from a wide range of both visual and aural sources. A dense rapid montage of texts and images from popular literature is combined with a collage of comic strips and animated graphics, which are superimposed over scratched film. The use of these techniques makes visual reference to human lives imbricated with the mass media; a perspective that the filmmaker has transformed into a Pop Art aesthetic. In the Italian avant-garde landscape of the 1960s, close collaborations between film artists and curators working with international Pop artists were taking place.<sup>136</sup>

These brief opening sequences lead to a short experimental documentary on what appears to be a drab, domestic space, as if recording the everyday into which the mass media relentlessly intrude, here inducing the thought that there is a lack of authentic connection to the everyday and a pervasive alienation.

The sense of overbearing media presence continues into the next section, which particularly addresses voyeurism and the control exercised by the mass media. Its theme appears to be the threatened basic right to privacy. The sequence begins with the camera peeping through a keyhole and entering people's private spaces, as we are taken into a bedroom, and voyeuristically observe a couple in bed, with a woman reeling away from the camera's gaze. Through elliptical editing, it sketches the couple's quotidian domestic rituals: eating, sleeping, yet never truly engaging with one another. If it looks somewhat staged, at no point are we allowed to forget that this is staged for a reason. Even the simplest act of having a meal becomes a self-

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<sup>136</sup> I discuss the interconnection between techniques, influences and art schools in many of the films in the following Chapters. Although, in this particular case, the filmmaker did not credit his or her short contribution to the Cooperative film.

conscious performance, with the constant intrusion of images and sounds from the mass media -- in particular a collage of sound and dialogue from genre films playing on the television screen, and pop music from the radio -- deployed to create an overwhelming sense of crowded excess. In this sequence, the vulnerability of individual is expressed by a single shot of a naked young woman curled up in bed, with her back to the camera. This eloquent image contrasts with the idea of an accelerated modernity conveyed by a rapid montage of images, leading the viewer to reflect on private domestic spaces, personal life and the mass media. I suggest that the film here shows the ambivalence of naturalistic and abstract representation, as some of it is shot in a documentary register, while the montage of mass media imagery foregrounds an aesthetic of intimacy more typical of the 'home movie' genre.

As the film unfolds, *Tutto, tutto* continues to stress critical awareness of voyeurism by showing surveillance technologies, which by the early sixties had already become the object of a critique by avant-garde artists, experimenting with smaller film formats, portable video cameras and television monitors.<sup>137</sup> From the late 1960s, television itself had become an object of deconstruction by the first generation of video artists. These shared similar concerns with the makers of *Tutto, tutto* about the mass media, and would turn television's intrusive daily presence and real-time portrayal of world events – its 'live' images – on their head, by re-creating the aesthetic and voyeuristic presence of the CCTV camera with works intended for the television monitor. Both theme and critical approach were similar, for example, to what was known as the 'event-process' film of the British artists Mike Leggett and Ian Breakwell, who in 1971 created with pre-recorded images and a deconstructed

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<sup>137</sup> 'The first portable equipment was developed in the early 1960s by the US army for surveillance purposes in Vietnam. [...] Sony Portapak went on sale in the mid 1960s'. Catherine Elwes, *Video Art. A Guided Tour* (London: IB Tauris, 2006), p. 3.

television monitor the art-work *Moving Wallpaper in the TV Lounge*. In the flyer accompanying their workshop at Plymouth College of Art they stated:

Study and observe the piece of equipment known as a television receiver in its most common environment; the living room, the lounge, the drawing room, whatever you may call it. [...] Functioning perfectly, is it not just simply a 21” picture window? Another standard lamp in the corner? A constantly changing pattern of new wallpaper? [...] Between 20 and 30 million people watch television each night: the engaging guest who’s staying permanently, who’s impossible to ignore and won’t tolerate being turned off. For so many people to entertain such an insufferable guest is intolerable.<sup>138</sup>

From images related to the critique of the mass media invading people’s privacy and domestic space, giving rise to sentiments of fear and vulnerability, to images of men lighting a petrol bomb at night in an open field, and setting off a small fire. Through these transitional images, the audience enters another section of this film, with its direct address to violence. These images bookmark Bacigalupo’s contribution, *Her*, which is the only one that, although not formally credited, the filmmaker has discussed, and is easily recognisable within this collaborative film.<sup>139</sup> Bacigalupo mentions that the film started off as a dadaist testimony about police brutality, attesting to its influence on the whole film. *Her* is mainly a collage of cuttings from the American magazine *Newsweek* reporting on the Chicago Convention riots, with images of police rallies and violent charges, and text either written on a paper strip or paint-brushed onto magazine cuttings. Archival images shows news coverage of a girl beaten up by the police, illustrating physical violence and documenting the tension between the police, wearing gas-masks, and the demonstrators lined up facing them. The text printed on a white strip is in turn cut up and superimposed on the magazine’s photo-reportage, which continues throughout the film in a montage sequence. The text

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<sup>138</sup> David Curtis, *A History of Artists’ Film and Video in Britain* (London: BFI, 2005), p. 221

<sup>139</sup> Bacigalupo, 2010, p. 155.

spells out the woman's and the demonstrators' dread: "God: Pushed up against a wall by a // phalanx of cops, a pretty blonde begged // for mercy. No one listened. // A group of police prodded her in the stom(ach) // with their clubs, sending her to her // knees, her face in her hands, screaming: // Please God, help me. Please help me'.

Some of these words, such as 'her', 'god', 'screaming', are painted in capital letters on top of other photographs, detailing the event. Live figures and media continue to interweave with one another, thus creating the underlying fabric of nature and history in perpetual transition; a sensibility and aesthetic that pervades the entire film.

The realist aesthetic of this sequence is followed by a radically different scenario set in a relaxed, timeless landscape, with images of classical paintings and depictions of a female figure juxtaposed with those related to physical violence. The newsreel footage and glimpses of fine art imagery suggest Bacigalupo's yearning for a romantic, less corruptible human nature.

The next sequence magnifies the relationship between violence and life. An old photograph shows a child next to a door, with the word 'Wall' painted on it. The next shot shows two boys standing next to a train, with the word 'begged' super-imposed. Finally, there are two working-class men with an expression of unhappiness stamped on their faces and an accusatory look in their eyes, and the word 'mercy' painted across it.

*Her* demonstrates the form of an essay film, where the images from the media and a personal archive collection (stills from newsreels, photographs, news cuttings) combined with the superimposed text (acting like a voice-over commentary) offer a critique of contemporary humanity. By manipulating the materials of his film Bacigalupo sets up an opposition between what seem to be 'actual' historical documents, as portrayed by the media, and what he personally filmed whilst

travelling, as if he were – I refer to Benjamin – ‘brushing history against the grain’.

Benjamin argued:

There is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another. A historical materialist therefore dissociates himself from it as far as possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain.<sup>140</sup>

By re-writing the information originally conveyed by the media, and using the superimposed text as a signifier of violence written across peoples’ photographed images, with this essayistic short film he also *tries* (in the experimental meaning of the word) to express his concern that the involution of humankind will continue. While the paint-brushed text acts as a marker of separation between printed text and image, and works as a signifier of a ruptured perception of ‘reality’, the text from the news-cuttings is activated as a foreboding sign of something sinister and spectral lying in wait. The Dada influence is present in this apparently chaotic and erratic process of re-writing, although its re-making of images and texts is also bold and visionary. The formal aspect of Bacigalupo’s film may also recall Lettrisme, the art and literary movement inspired by Dada and Surrealism, which aimed at a disjointed composition of letters, images and sounds to create a new poetry of Cinema.<sup>141</sup>

The next sequence in *Her* presents an even more pronounced formal tension: it starts with the archaic past as depicted in a classical painting, and the word ‘group’ superimposed, as a reminder of ‘[a group of] police’ from the Chicago Convention violent riots. Next, a still from a home movie showing two children on the seashore, posing as if in a family photo-shoot, with the word ‘Her’ painted across it. A shot

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<sup>140</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’, *Illuminations*, ed. and with an introduction by Hanna Arendt, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 248.

<sup>141</sup> Lettrisme was an art and literary movement founded by the Romanian Isidore Isou in Paris in 1945, which owed its inspiration to Dada and Surrealism. From the film note about *On Venom and Eternity*, by *Re:Voir*, on the occasion of the presentation of this film on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2012, BFI Southbank, London.

from inside a room looking out into a garden; a chair on one side of the room and the superimposed painted word, GOD. The next shot is from what seems to be a cave, an underground, enclosed space with an opening to the outside world and the superimposed word, 'screaming'. The same music in the background (resounding and tragic) continues into the final shots, which tie in with the initial one, showing men lighting petrol bombs at night, causing explosions and starting fires. These painted cut-outs could be seen as continuing the theme of violence: a sentiment of dread that stretches beyond spatio-temporal confines. While the enunciation of this portion of *Her* speaks 'violence', its utterance is rather 'understanding', attempting to mobilize the audiences' engagement with these objects – photographs, words, text from the mass media -- and demonstrating the filmmaker's formal choice for his film as social commitment. This section embodies *Tutto, tutto*'s essentially essayistic, meditative voice in its critique of violence.

Themes such as aggression towards and attempted control over people's private lives – considered as a form of abuse of the human body – follow on from *Her* and run through to the next section. We see a man trying to eat, holding an apple in one hand while generic popular culture images are projected onto his body, which becomes like a screen. The sound comes from genre films and Disney cartoons, which have always been very popular in Italy, until new film of abstract imagery flashes against a wall. In this footage there is also both image and sound overload, although here the human body becomes the centre of representation. It is depicted as a passive receptacle, as if 'invaded and attacked' by moving images, while in the subsequent sequence it is the body that tries to 'seize control'.

Another sequence, and possibly another artist's segment (as none of these are bookmarked by any credits), opens with a fixed point-of-view shot showing in close-

up a pair of hands using a hammer to smash a tin toy police car into pieces, tearing it apart with pincers, cutting it and finally wrapping it in the national Communist Party broadsheet *L'Unità*. The metonymy the film creates at this point is based on individual agency, media control and the politics of non-violence, the core concerns of the CCI's filmmakers. This pro-active symbolic gesture is the main focus, whilst in the background voices from a Western soundtrack shout 'hell to you, assassins!', followed by the sound of gunfire, and similar extra-diegetic sounds from genre films with equally stereotypical sensationalist dialogue.

The avowed enemy here was clearly mainstream cinema, especially Hollywood, and more generally American cultural imperialism, as another voice shouts 'America is wonderful, wonderful.' By wrapping the police car toy, now reduced to scrap metal, in pages from *l'Unità*, and putting it back in the original toy box, this sequence launches a provocative dialogue on unnecessary police violence perpetrated against innocent people through the allegory of children's packaged toys. It may also suggest that police authoritarianism can leave a bitter legacy for the future. This seems to be the continuation of *Tutto, tutto*'s opening sequence, which is more clearly identifiable as having been made by Gianfranco Baruchello (although it has no title), as he stated in his book *Archive of Moving Images*. It also recalls another film he made in 1968, *Costretto a scomparire (Forced to disappear, 16mm, 14')*, where his deployment of soundtrack from genre films suggests that he adopted similar archival image-sound aesthetics in his found footage film *Verifica Incerta*, also in order to convey a detached irony towards narrative film's codes and conventions.<sup>142</sup> The image-sound

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<sup>142</sup> Baruchello made *Verifica Incerta* together with Alberto Grifi in 1964-65. As I analyse this film in Chapter 8, it invokes a parody of mainstream film generic conventions.

dialectic runs throughout the entire CCI film, showing a consistent sensitivity to images and ideas as in many of the films explored in this thesis.

*Tutto, tutto nello stesso istante* ends with an epigraph invoking Soviet Constructivism: ‘Art is dead. Long live the new machine art of Tatlin’.<sup>143</sup> This quotation proclaims the celebration of a new aesthetics, much as the modernist avant-gardes (Futurism, Constructivism and Dada) had aspired to, changing the future by giving shape to a new art form.<sup>144</sup> More specifically, this slogan was originally used by the Berlin Dada group who took part in the First International Dada Fair in the Summer of 1920 in Berlin. The reference to Tatlin was motivated by their rejection of the bourgeois art forms favoured by the old regime, and their attack on militarism and political corruption resonated with the Italian filmmakers nearly fifty years later.<sup>145</sup>

As Bacigalupo maintained, *Tutto, tutto nello stesso istante* is an anti-police violence film, a theme that dominated the consciousness of the film avant-garde of the sixties, an ethical stance advocated through their re-purposing of media sourced from television war newsreel, magazine photo reportage, mainstream narrative cinema, pop music and animation, and personal archives. This wide range of sources portrayed historic events, which, while occurring in the present, clearly showed a continuation of forms of cultural imperialism, which could be seen as damaging and aggressive – and even abusive – for their persistent intrusive presence in peoples’ lives. The CCI’s film materials are indeed valuable artefacts and records of cultural memory, both collective and personal, gathered from around the world and testimony to forms of violence. Overall, the form of this film also emphasises the artists’ common interest.

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<sup>143</sup> This slogan appeared in a 1920 German photograph, on a placard held by George Grosz and John Heartfield. See H.W. Janson, *History of Art*. 5th edn. Revised and expanded by Anthony F. Janson. (London: Thames & Hudson 1995), p. 820

<sup>144</sup> My translation. The original text reads: ‘Proposte per una esposizione sperimentale. die kunst ist tot. es lebe die neue.’

<sup>145</sup> Shearer West, *The Visual Arts in Germany. 1890-1936. Utopia and Despair* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 119.

As Eco said: ‘all the artist can do is cast some light on alienation by objectifying it in a form that reproduces it.’<sup>146</sup>

#### 4. Towards an *essay film* form

As demonstrated in *Tutto, tutto nello stesso istante*, the filmmakers’ dislocation and re-contextualisation of archive materials served as a way to trace new areas of contestation and signification. Adorno had argued in relation to the ‘essay as form’ that ‘the cultural artefact is of interest only to the degree that it serves to exemplify universal categories, or at the very least allows them to shine through [...]’.<sup>147</sup> I argue that in relation to the essayistic form of *Tutto, tutto*, which interweaves both the mediation of history and temporal contingency, the everyday and ‘real time’, Adorno’s claim that ‘all levels of the mediated are immediate to the essay, before its reflection begins’ seems particularly relevant.<sup>148</sup> As Adorno explained, the essay is built upon freely created associations amongst the chosen topics, and it does not necessarily transcend ‘all mediations which are historical ones in which the whole of society is sedimented’; rather, it ‘seeks truth contents as being historical themselves’ in order to generate further reflection on current situations. Thus, the essay’s mediations of historical truth contents do not create repetitions or copies, rather invoke exploration and expansion of what is pertinent to the present.<sup>149</sup>

In the same article, Adorno examined the meditative redemptive qualities of literary conventions, as also suggested by Lukács’s critique of the ‘second nature of

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<sup>146</sup> For the full quotation from Eco’s ‘Form as social commitment’, see Section 3 of Chapter 1.

<sup>147</sup> Adorno, ‘The Essay as Form’, 1984, 151-171 (pp. 151-2).

<sup>148</sup> Adorno, 1984, 151-171 (p. 159)

<sup>149</sup> Adorno wrote: ‘The essay abandons the main road to the origins, the road leading to the most derivative, to being, the ideology that simply doubles that which already exists; at the same time the essay does not allow the idea of immediacy, postulated by the very concept of mediation, to disappear entirely. All levels of the mediated are immediate to the essay, before its reflection begins.’ Ibid.

commodities’ in his *Theory of the Novel* (1914), and Benjamin’s ‘allegory’ in his *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928). These sources shed further light on ways in which avant-garde film had its roots in figurative literary conventions and in innovative writing. As previously discussed in Chapter 1, Eco proposed experimental linguistic means of communication in order to fight alienation; hence, I argue that his maxim, ‘form as social commitment’, complements Adorno’s ‘the essay as form’, in that both stances, and theories, address the innovative and critical potential of a creative experimental language, one which film artists of the 1960s adopted in order to promote a new sensibility and improved critical awareness. The jarring image juxtapositions and clashing temporalities often give rise to allegorical reflections on the present, giving shape to the film’s distinct yet inter-connected segments, aimed at revealing a new critical vision of the world.

The meaningless alienated world of commodities – the ‘second nature’ of cultural objects in the archive (I refer to Adorno’s sourcing from Lukàcs) – have the potential to create new meanings, also through improved participatory processes with mainstream media. In his criticism of Hegel, Eco proposed his new aesthetics of social commitment:

Hegel’s achievement was to define the range and function of human labour; the object of this labour could not be denied, however self-aware one might become and however conscious of the freedom one must acquire in relation to this object. Work must be seen not as an activity of the spirit [...] but rather as the externalization of the powers of man, who must now deal concretely with what he has created. If man wants to “resume his own alienated essence into himself”, he cannot suppress the object (through a spiritual dialectic); rather, he will have to act practically in order to suppress alienation- that is, in order to change the conditions that have brought about this painful and scandalous separation between himself and the object he has created.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Eco, 1989, p. 125.

The filmmakers' epistemological practice in *Tutto, tutto nello stesso istante* unfolded according to a methodology, which I argue consisted in re-purposing media objects, seen as commodities, in order to understand and overcome human alienation. The desire to divert the present from a potentially disastrous future would entail integrating commodities into a socially conscious committed present for social change and progress. Thus, it would not be a language encouraging contemplation, but one searching for dialectical involvement and integration between an individual and the film as a way to recover what the human being has lost to reified reality. Eco argued:

Man works, produces a world of objects, and inevitably alienates himself to them. But then he rids himself of his alienation by accepting those objects, by committing himself to them, and, instead of annihilating them, by negating them in the name of transformation, aware that at every transformation he will again find himself confronting the same dialectic situation, the same risk of surrendering to the new, transformed reality. What alternative would be more humane and positive than this?<sup>151</sup>

Throughout the fifties and sixties, similar formal strategies were espoused by the French Nouveau Roman, which founded collaborative projects in the countercultural cinema of the Left Bank with writers and filmmakers such as Alain Robbe-Grillet, Marguerite Duras and Alain Resnais; in Italy, alongside with Eco there were Edoardo Sanguineti and Italo Calvino who championed experimental formal poetics which invited the audience to think more critically; for filmmakers as well formal arrangement became their judgement of their world.

Connected to the notion of the essay film as a form of social commitment in the present, while also looking at the past, I would argue that Bacigalupo's notion of 'trying' is central to the idea of experimental filmmaking. This concept was anticipated with the epigraph he took for his 'Introduction' to the special May-August

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<sup>151</sup> Eco, 1989, pp. 129-130.

1974 volume of *Bianco e Nero*, dedicated to Italian experimental filmmaking, from T.S. Eliot's poem *East Coker* (1940): 'For us there is only the *trying*, the rest is not our business', thus opening.<sup>152</sup> Eliot's words had also opened Bacigalupo's introduction to a short film season dedicated to Italian independent cinema in early 1968. Thinking in retrospect, in 1974, the year when he wrote for *Bianco & Nero*, the filmmaker mulled over the relationship between '*trying*', 'experimenting' and the dynamics that had developed among film and art historians, film critics, practitioners and audience reception.<sup>153</sup> For him, there seemed to be neither a final objective nor any hope of salvation for thinkers and practitioners alike who were involved in the experimentation with form, other than 'research, the future, the absence', ('a noi la ricerca, il futuro, l'assenza'). Thus, a perennial striving (which he called 'uno streben Goethiano' / 'Goethe's striving') uniting theory and practice in the arts, which he associated with the terms as 'technology' and 'technique'. The moving image, he suggested, haunts the future by representing itself in the unfolding present, in an ongoing tension of anticipation, continuously looking forward.

Thus, Bacigalupo recovered the essentially experimental-modernist sense of Eliot's epigraph, which lends itself to an interpretation of experimental techniques with the moving image and film, which for the artist are both a means and an end. This is the essential proposition of Eliot's *trying*. Hence, the sense for Bacigalupo that cinema's technologies and techniques of filmmaking facilitated the union between 'reality' and

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<sup>152</sup> *East Coker* (1940) is the second poem of T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*. Bacigalupo, 1974, p. 2. The formatting in italics of '*trying*' is my emphasis.

<sup>153</sup> *Bianco e Nero* is the oldest film magazine in Italy, with its first issue published in January 1937. The magazine was the official organ of the Centro Sperimentale della Cinematografia in Cinecittà, in Rome (CSC). CSC was inaugurated as "Cinecittà" by Benito Mussolini in April 1937. To navigate the history of this prestigious film magazine see the website: <http://www.fondazioneccsc.it/search.jsp> [accessed 16 July 2019]]

materialities, and thus activated the thinking nature of the essay film in its experimental format.<sup>154</sup>

For another independent filmmaker, Guido Lombardi, ‘*trying*’ became a ‘technological striving’ towards image making and exhibition, exemplifying the historical materialities, the *dispositifs* of the film apparatus. Lombardi wrote: ‘Cinema only belongs to the technicians’. What he meant to emphasise was, firstly, the importance of hand-operated machines and generally manual labour, the unacknowledged workforce that is invisible in industrial cinema and its commercial politics. Secondly, in his opinion ‘*trying*’ would lead to ‘transformation’; therefore, to experiment meant to experience, to practise, where the meaning did not lie in the theory or explanation of a certain technique, but in the awareness of its history and materiality.

In the process of excavating archive material, nature and human life are interwoven in historical transition; hence the idea of natural-history, as Adorno argued:

According to Benjamin, nature, as creation, carries the mark of transience. Nature itself is transitory. Thus it includes the element of history. Whenever a historical element appears it refers back to the natural element that passes away within it. Likewise the reverse: whenever “second nature” appears, when the world of convention approaches, it can be deciphered in that its meaning is shown to be precisely its transience.<sup>155</sup>

Thus, I position the CCI’s collaborative film *Tutto, tutto nello stesso istante* – and the films that I examine in the following Chapters – within this perspective of experimental film artists’ *trying*, with their looking forward to the future, their striving

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<sup>154</sup> ‘[...] it is the task of the so much blamed technologies to recover without any idealism their relationship with both reality and the materialities of cinema, whilst the artwork’s image considered as anticipation, and incomplete approximation, can only make sense according to the terms established by the artwork itself which, despite being utopian, a fragment of the future, is in its entirety in the present. Therefore, the artwork as end becomes the artwork as a means, and viceversa. Therefore I think that both these meanings are clearly expressed by the epigraph.’ My translation. The original text reads: ‘[...] è proprio al tanto biasimato tecnicismo che spetta ritrovare senza alcun idealismo il rapporto con la materia e con la realtà, mentre da parte sua l’immagine dell’opera come anticipazione, approssimazione parziale, non può che svolgersi nei termini stessi dell’opera, che per quanto utopica, scampolo del futuro, è tutta presente. Così l’opera come fine diviene l’opera come mezzo e viceversa. Ritengo che questi due sensi siano reperibili nell’epigrafe’. Bacigalupo, 1974, pp. 2-14 (p. 2).

<sup>155</sup> Adorno, 2006, pp. 252-304 (p. 264).

towards a new, transformative essayistic film form. The etymology of the word ‘essay’ is also relevant, as it is semantically connected to ‘trying’. The latter term being the English equivalent of the French ‘essayer’, which derives from the Latin *exagium*, meaning ‘weight, test, trial’. This term was taken up by Michel de Montaigne’s in his *Essays*, which popularised ‘the essay’ as a literary genre in the late sixteenth century.

The following Chapter will continue my exploration of transient histories through a variety of films from the Italian avant-gardes, focusing on the experimental film artist’s anthropological approach to historical materials.

### **Chapter 3. Cine-portraiture and Cinephilia in the Archive**

In considering Italian experimental film artists’ anthropological approach to historical materials, this Chapter makes an analogy with Benjamin’s notion of ‘archive’; dependent on the devotion of the archivist as collector and historian. Thus, it encompasses a study of cinephilia and the fetishistic interest in film history, which I suggest opens up a space for reflection on filmmakers’ practices of re-integrating historical artefacts.

Considering the archive as repository of a wide range of found and fetishised objects, I explore how some Italian experimental filmmakers aimed at cultural innovation by causing a semantic and aesthetic rupture within archival taxonomies and referents. Thus, I examine how montage and aggressive photographic alteration (‘aesthetic ruining’) can mobilize a productive tension between normativity (*nomos*) and potential change (*physis*) within the archive. We can consider how these practices promoted a dialectical relationship amongst heterogeneous materials in three films, *Le Court-Bouillon* (Silvio and Vittorio Loffredo, 1952-1962), *I will... I shan’t: A Study of*

*Human Behaviour* (Cioni Carpi, 1961) and *Amour du Cinéma* (Rosa Foschi and Luca Patella, 1969), in order to create a reflective attitude towards socially conditioned behaviour.

My textual analysis and critical assessment of these films addresses the relationship between form and subject matter; revealing how the filmmakers' repurposing of cinema memorabilia and found objects ostensibly revealed a nostalgia for an authentic viewing experience of the moving image, and critiqued an imperialist culture rooted in the Fascist past. Benjamin's argument about the relation of history to its 'multiple mediations' underpins my approach to these filmmakers' practices with archive materials:

multiple mediations, however, free the work of art from acting as a mere reflection of reality. Based on its unequal levels of development, which are considered by [Benjamin] less a utopian prefiguration than a rescue of the past and therefore a construction of the historically determined subject, the work of art can become an active force in the present.<sup>156</sup>

These mediations of cultural memory involved cine-portraiture (spaces of representation revealing a colonialist past that subjugated human races) and cinephilia (a fetishistic love of cinema as a sensual artform). Thus, these artists would use the re-deployed historical records as both socio-cultural documents and objects to facilitate analytical study. Angela Madesani cites Vittore Fagone's writing in the catalogue of the 1978 Venice Biennale, where he argued that innovations in the film avant-garde were initiated by blending artists' exploration of a heterogeneous space in the visual arts:

[artists' cinema] provides useful media for the growth of vital boundaries, metalinguistic integrations, and experimental processes of analysis of space, which is not only physical, but also related to the image and the creation of images. Therefore, artists' cinema can hold within its illusory reality the utterances made by

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<sup>156</sup> Bernd Witte, 'Benjamin and Lukács. Historical Notes on the Relationship between their Political and Aesthetic Theories', *New German Critique*, Spring 1975, Issue 5, pp. 3-26 (p. 20).

both body and gesture [...] and be not only an object but also an instrument of analytical practice.<sup>157</sup>

### 1. Silvio and Vittorio Loffredo: *Le Court Bouillon (Part IV, 1960)*<sup>158</sup>

Made by the brothers Silvio and Vittorio Loffredo between 1952 and 1962, *Le Court-Bouillon* consists of five parts, and the one examined in this Chapter is part IV (1960). This is a collage of archive film and a wide range of materials: from historical images to vintage nudes, found films bought at flea markets in Paris, footage sourced from newsreels, and memorabilia from personal archives. The whole film is infused with a sentimental appeal. While at a surface level, it does not suggest any particular technical or formal research interest, in fact the subtly ironic tone that pervades it suggests a strongly subjective sensibility through nostalgic reflections on the past, which constitutes the Loffredos' idiosyncratic view of past events and changing social mores. The Happenings and Fluxus artist Giuseppe Chiari believed that the Loffredos wove through their material a personal commentary, with their film collage displaying a personal wit and playfulness based on autobiographical references.<sup>159</sup> A story about their childhood narrated by Silvio Loffredo confirms Chiari's thesis.

Shortly before the outbreak of World War II, when living in Paris, the young brothers' imagination was fired by pre-cinematic media, such as the magic lantern, which even during the early phase of cinema often substituted for costly film shows,

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<sup>157</sup> My translation. The original text reads: '[il cinema d'artista] è un utile tramite di vitali sconfinamenti, di assorbimenti metalinguistici, e una sperimentabile processualità di analisi dello spazio, non solo fisico, dell'immagine e del fare immagini. Così il film d'artista può tenere nella sua illusoria realtà le dichiarazioni del gesto e del corpo. [...] farsi oltre che oggetto, strumento di pratica analitica.' Madesani, p. 67.

<sup>158</sup> *Le Court Bouillon (Part IV, 1960, 8mm, b/w, 60')*

<sup>159</sup> 'I would therefore say that in these works, borrowing a term from painting, the 'brush stroke' is free. It is not concerned with not being so. Neither are the contents meant to shock. They are peaceful demonstrations, photographs of naked figures, autobiographical, political, historical photos. Quite rare material, and not very exciting on its own. Yet, it does have a narrative, a discourse, which is devoid of any self-complacency. It is made with irony and is absent of all contrivance. Two characteristics quite difficult to separate.' My translation. The original reads: 'Direi, dunque, che in queste opere, rubando un termine alla pittura, la pennellata è libera. Non si preoccupa di non essere tale. Né i contenuti sono choc. Dimostrazioni pacifiste. Foto di nudi. Foto autobiografiche, politica, storia. Materiale raro ma non rarissimo. Non eccitante in sé stesso... Eppure c'è un racconto, un discorso. Un discorso privo di compiacimenti. Fatto di ironia, ma dove la presunzione è totalmente assente. Due dati estremamente difficile a separarsi.' Silvio e Vittorio Loffredo, 'Silvio e Vittorio Loffredo', in Bacigalupo ed., 1974, pp. 145-47 (p. 145).

allowing cut-out figurines to take on a life of their own as they performed their shadow plays on an improvised puppet stage. Inspired by popular comic strips, their characters appeared in ironic fusions between realistic situations and impossible imaginary outcomes – ‘Man, the animal, the dream!’ (‘L’uomo, la bestia, il sogno!’).<sup>160</sup> A few years later, with his brother Vittorio, Silvio Loffredo translated their fantastic fables into film (with a ‘pathé-baby’), with part live-action filming and part found footage, and also by using old photographs and prints from the early twentieth century bought at flea markets. This material occupied a rather indeterminate temporal dimension, creating imaginary tales suspended between the past and the future.<sup>161</sup> Thus, the archival image became part memory, part wish (or dream).

Thanks to the adventurous spirit of their personal, yet partly mythic stories, infused with wonder and underpinned by their passion for pre-cinematic and recycled visual media, these film collages take on a magical character. The use of magic lanterns, optical toys, popular photographic imagery and fairground entertainment, combined with their re-creation of diorama-settings, throw the imaginary worlds of *Le Court Bouillon* into relief. A similar case would be the archival collection of pre-cinema technology and material by Bill Douglas and Peter Jewell, now held in the Bill Douglas Cinema Museum at Exeter University, which informed Douglas’ film *Comrades* (Bill Douglas, 1986).

Besides the Loffredos’ personal connection with diverse visual materials, their treatment of archival image-objects provides a compelling reading in a painterly key.

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<sup>160</sup> For instance, one of their adventurous and implausible stories was imagined out of a real incident. Outside their school, one day the brothers found a dead dog whom they re-animated through a cartoon-like character and helped vindicate the unfair treatment to which it was subjected. Loffredo, in Bacigalupo, 1974, pp. 145-47 (p. 146).

<sup>161</sup> Loffredo, in Bacigalupo, 1974, pp. 145-47 (p. 146).

Indeed, as Chiari testifies, the brothers were clearly influenced by their father Michel's paintings, which surrounded them in their parents' home.<sup>162</sup> The ostensibly improvised and fluid 'brush strokes' that give their films an internal rhythm can be seen as guiding metaphors for their cross-cutting between archive footage, historical photographs and illustrations. In Chiari's opinion, the Loffredos' films were a means to research the pictorial possibilities of the medium, drawing on the apparently anachronistic aesthetic of old materials. The idea of 'spontaneous brush strokes' also occurs in Massimo Bacigalupo's appreciation of the *Court Bouillon* series:

Their films are found objects and assemblages of a wide range of materials and subjects, from plump models to historical images, so that history lacks any rhetoric, such as the empathetic feelings of nostalgia for their childhood and painter friends. [...] Thus, by borrowing a word usually more apt in discussions on painting, I would say that in these works their "brush" is free.<sup>163</sup>

In a similar vein, David Curtis also compared Silvio Loffredo's approach to a painter's: 'His eyes are definitely those of a painter, he responds to textures in film – sometimes he "purposely ruins" the surface of the celluloid to give it a more immediately tactile quality'.<sup>164</sup> Chiari's praise of Silvio Loffredo's painterly collages also referred to the possibility afforded by this technique of 'speaking freely' about the union of life and art. Even when the images are barely visible, their archaic expressiveness may feel 'intimately violent'.<sup>165</sup> This 'aesthetic violence', which arguably lies behind the interplay between old and new, history and modernity, recalls

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<sup>162</sup> Chiari, in Madesani, p. 84.

<sup>163</sup> My translation. The original text reads: 'I loro film sono oggetti trovati ed assemblages dei materiali più vari e passano continuamente dalle modelle grassocce alle immagini della storia, che in tal modo si sretoricizza, al patetico del ricordo d'infanzia e degli amici pittori. [...] Direi dunque che in queste opere, rubando un termine alla pittura, la pennellata è libera.' Loffredo, in Bacigalupo, 1974, pp. 145-47 (p. 145).

<sup>164</sup> Curtis, 1971, p. 144.

<sup>165</sup> 'His collages are the same as his paintings; his paintings are the same as his films. [...] Painting is everything and life is everywhere. Colour is joyful, is emotion. The result is an extremely subjective body of work, autobiographical even when the image is enigmatic. Autobiographies because the sign is always given by the most immediate psychological source. Therefore, still an expressive, intimate violence'. My translation. The original text reads: 'I suoi collages sono uguali alle sue pitture; le sue pitture sono uguali ai suoi film. [...] Le pittura è tutto e la vita è dappertutto. Il colore è gioia, è emozione. Ne risultano opere estremamente soggettive, autobiografiche anche quando la figura è indecifrabile. Autobiografie perché il segno è sempre portato dal dato psicologico più immediato. Ancora violenza, dunque, espressiva, intima.' Angela Madesani quotes Giuseppe Chiari, in Angela Madesani, *Le icone fluttuanti. Storia del cinema d'artista e della videoarte in Italia*, with an introduction by Vittorio Fagone (Milano: Bruno Mondadori Editori, 2002), p. 84.

Benjamin's notion of the 'dialectical image', related to his idea of natural history, which questions and disconcerts 'the nature of commodities'. As Susan Buck-Morss reminds us: 'the principle of construction is that of montage, whereby the image's ideational elements remain unreconciled, rather than fusing into one "harmonising perspective"'.<sup>166</sup>

*Le Court Bouillon* combined historical scenes and artisanal objects as if to celebrate, rather than disavow, the chaos of life through a series of vignettes and portraits of people in their daily activities, from street musicians to self-indulgent aristocrats. Music figures as a recurrent motif in the depictions of urban life (many illustrations are of musical instruments or people playing), as well as the act of looking and contemplating, and the enduring fascination of bygone means of transport. Intercut with such modernist observations on the urban experience and other mundane activities, is war footage, illustrating bombsites and armies parading and marching. Thus the Loffredos' vibrant and lively representations of life are at times also concerned with death and violence, while for the most part organised systematically, setting out contrasts of type and history.

The film also includes Mussolini delivering speeches attended by vast crowds, and Imperial Rome (symbolised by the recurrent landmark of the Coliseum). In this respect, it depicts a specifically Italian tainted history and its fascist legacy, through the insertion of excerpts from newsreel (propaganda) films. Thus, I argue that *Le Court Bouillon* engages with cultural memory. It interlaces historical footage with images from other documentary sources, films and photographs depicting demonstrations against militarism, war and totalitarian leaders, which imply a more

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<sup>166</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *The dialectics of seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades project* (London: MIT Press, 1989), p. 67.

critical view of late modernity and urban life. Historical events also range from World War I and prisoners of war to the very popular Pope John XXIV, who died in 1963. Manifest or repressed violence is the underlying theme of such imagery, juxtaposing the sacred and the mundane. Historical footage is utilised to foreground the idea of time as cyclical, which could suggest an underlying belief in determinism and fate.

Erotic footage also serves the purpose of underlining life's sensuality through the representation of naked women, both as cinema divas and the femme fatales of genre films, as well as ordinary women in their everyday domestic realm. Thus, erotic film may have emphasised cinema as a sensual art form for the Loffredos, although also capable of turning the female subject into an object of voyeurism for patriarchal structures.

The Loffredos regularly insert footage of an elderly couple in an armchair looking out of a window. Seemingly taken from a home-movie, this serves as a reminder of both the intimacy of family life, treasuring ordinary rituals and the shared experience of life while aging, and also gestures towards a desire for the “extra-ordinary” in life, potentially provided by *Le Court Bouillon*.

Through their expressive film collage, Vittorio and Silvio Loffredo wanted not only to share their love for historical objects, but also to communicate a sense of responsibility for their participation in social life through understanding the value of the past, especially for its transience and transformative capacity. The internal rhythms of this collage film, generated by painterly ‘brush-strokes’, could be seen as committing an ‘intimate violence’ on audiences’ responses, in order to provoke a more active engagement with the object of cultural history. In this example of an experimental archive film, the collector’s and archivist’s normative use of historical records meet the historian’s passionate accounts of life’s multi-faceted reality.

**2. Cioni Carpi: *Voglio, Non Voglio (I will... I shan't: A Study of Human Behaviour, 1961)***<sup>167</sup>

A conventionally trained painter and sculptor, Cioni Carpi started working with film in 1959, inspired by meeting Maya Deren in 1957 in New York. While living in Montreal, his work was influenced less by the animation of The National Film Board's Norman McLaren than by that of Len Lye, which encouraged him to work with diverse media and techniques.<sup>168</sup> Such a diverse cultural and artistic background resulted in the eclectic display of animation, found footage, and visual experimentation in his *I will... I shan't: A Study of Human Behaviour*.

The film also offered a socio-political commentary, marked by Carpi's preoccupation with the historical legacy of totalitarian regimes, and reflecting his desire to awaken in viewers a political and social consciousness. Thus, I suggest that *I will, I shan't* confounds the conventional demarcations between artists' film, experimental ethnographic film, and the ambition to inform and motivate. From his father, Aldo Carpi, a renowned Milan painter in the thirties, and later a political prisoner in a German concentration camp, Cioni developed a strong opposition to the politics of repression and imperialism, and a desire to mobilise creatively expressive communication in everyday life.<sup>169</sup>

Since style and technique are not divorced from a socio-political critique and study of alienated modern life, this is less a narrative film than a conceptual tale about man's inability to communicate and create meaning. Carpi's 'study of human behaviour' is his attempt to understand what human life has become. The film starts with a man

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<sup>167</sup> *Voglio, Non Voglio (I will... I shan't: A Study of Human Behaviour, 1961, 4')*. This film can be seen in its entirety, from 7:11", and as part of a film trilogy, on UbuWeb: [http://www.ubu.com/film/carpi\\_three\\_short.html](http://www.ubu.com/film/carpi_three_short.html) [accessed 15 February 2013].

<sup>168</sup> One of his animations, *Point and Counterpoint* (1960) won the Jury award at the Boston Film Festival in 1961, praised for its original use of sound and exhibited worldwide with Fluxus (the American multimedia movement founded by George Maciunas in the early sixties). Madasani, pp. 166-167.

<sup>169</sup> Giuseppe Panza, *Ricordi di un collezionista (A collector's memories)* (Milano: Jaca Book, 2006), p. 141.

seen against a stark black and white background, standing next to a pile of wooden spelling blocks with carved letters, from which he makes sporadic attempts to create and deconstruct meaning. Like a wooden puppet, he has to learn, and unlearn, how to express himself, verbally and physically. The loss of his ability to communicate seems to have turned him into a 'monad' of urban modernity, unable to control speech and the technology that has overwhelmed his ability to engage with his social environment. This is why he yearns for a state of carefree child-like spontaneity and creativity. The next montage of images shows him trying to scream, with towers of lettered cubes collapsing as a likely metaphor for the breakdown of language. His horrified face and open mouth become a distorted reminder of Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, a key image of human anxiety in modernity.

This first sequence is followed by one using different types of abstract animation, accompanied by the sound of urban traffic from a crowded, claustrophobic off-screen space (a materiality which could be likened to Benjamin's notion of material nature, which he conceived as 'other than the subject', to be explained later in this Chapter). The abstract imagery is intercut with live-action footage of a woman, possibly a tailor, or even a film editor, whose accelerated image emphasises her frustration with a long string, which may be a measuring tape or a filmstrip, wrapped around her as if constraining her free movement. We see her repeatedly attempting to regain control of her physical mobility and the overall chaos. There is an allusion to her inability to control the speed of production of her work in accordance with her natural physical capabilities: a disjointed and out-of-control female body. Indeed, mechanised body movement is one of the main topics of this film. It recalls Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936), when sound became a metonym of economic power and control over

exploited human resources, who remain powerless and sound-less, with stunted gestures as the only residue of physical expression and social communication.

Intercut with this imagery are abstract animated representations of what look like organisms and cells under the microscope of a biology laboratory. This sequence provides a visual metaphor for the ‘meaning of life’, images suggesting life prior to its alienated stage, the ‘second nature’ of living organisms within society, ‘the other’ of a world of commodities (to paraphrase Benjamin). It also suggests the filmmaker’s scientific approach to art, and his attention to evolutionary theory in observing a human being’s psychological and behavioural progress and regression through life; their learning curve turned cyclical. The improvement in human behaviour is shown as potentially unravelling through a regressive trajectory; an adult man is shown as still trying to master his motor abilities like a child during his early months of life, but perhaps here as a consequence of his de-humanised, mechanised condition. Indeed, *Voglio, Non Voglio* demonstrates how the aesthetics of fragmentation engendered by an experimental film language elicit neuro-cognitive approaches to an analysis of movement and discontinuous human motor abilities, as I shall explore further in my analysis of *Verifica Incerta*.

At a symbolic level, the transition of ‘natural-history’ manifests *physis* in film, which it is possible to detect due to the expressive combustion generated by the film’s deployment of different media and techniques. These are expressions of the new challenging the old, a man’s inarticulacy in advanced capitalist society, and the dialectic among primary life-forms.

Also in *Voglio, Non Voglio*, the meeting of science and art recalls Benjamin’s ‘dialectical image’, which arguably encapsulated both *physis* (the physical origin of life and nature) and *nomos* (order and authority). *Physis*, in its historical transitivity,

encompassed both the new and old forms of life. As Adorno claimed: 'The fetish character of the commodity is not a fact of consciousness, but dialectic in the eminent sense that it produces consciousness'.<sup>170</sup> In this section of Carpi's film the interplay between figurative and abstract imagery puzzles yet startles, thus generating consciousness.

The second part of the film consists of a rapid montage of stills from historical films which concludes this survey of modern life, shaped by the speed of consumerism and the sheer capitalist force of the production-line. It begins with close-ups of political leaders, from Lenin and Hitler, to J.F. Kennedy and Fidel Castro, followed by horrific images of the ravages of war, with its suffering and death. Archive film appeals to a collective memory, which will influence the viewer's political consciousness. The last part of the montage of archival images illustrates Maya Deren's influence on Carpi's work, as he inserts footage from anthropological films, including expressive portraits of children and adults of diverse ethnicities, with a look of pain or fear on their faces. In this case, archival film is not only a commodity fetish, but also an anthropological record, exposing forms of idolatry in modern society, as represented by political leaders' portraits, some symbolic of ruthless autocracy. The anthropological perspective sheds some light on man's attempts to negotiate technological and artistic innovation, revealing an underlying anxiety due to forms of cultural imperialism. The final sequence provides a lyrical and meditative resolution to the imbalance between civilisation and nature, showing a seagull flying high above a seascape, which suggests transcendence of material limitations. Carpi's eclectic display of a variety of film techniques was clearly intended to stimulate

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<sup>170</sup> Adorno, 2006, pp. 252-304 (p. 261)

viewers' critical analysis of their current situation in history, aiming to trigger both personal and potentially collective memory.

### 3. Rosa Foschi and Luca Patella: *Amour du Cinéma* (1969)<sup>171</sup>

Made by animator and filmmaker Rosa Foschi and her partner, the Arte Povera painter, filmmaker and media artist Luca Patella, *Amour du Cinéma* is a work in praise of cinema that takes the form of a collage of lively drawings and illustrations, intercut with found footage. The film offers a celebration of their love for cinema as a sensual artform through portraits of famous screen divas representing romantic love in cinema. The epigraph 'Amore nel cinema, Amore per il cinema' ('Love in cinema, Love for cinema') is their dedication to the French writer Claude Mauriac's book *Amour du Cinéma* (1954), a clear inspiration for their film and its Proustian interweaving of time and memory.<sup>172</sup>

Foschi and Patella defined their film in its credits as a 'Zibaldone Animato', or animated notebook in a popular style. 'Zibaldone' was a literary form well known in Italy through the writings of the nineteenth-century poet Giacomo Leopardi.<sup>173</sup> This zibaldone-film style, a collection of cinema memorabilia and ephemera, aphorisms on cinema as an art- and life-form, together with some of Foschi's own footage, is imbued with a nostalgia for a lost past and the early magical cinema of Georges Méliès.<sup>174</sup> The film's fragmented, epigraphic style recalls Benjamin's own unfinished *Arcades*

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<sup>171</sup> *Amour du Cinéma* (*In praise of cinema*, 1969, 35mm, 12').

<sup>172</sup> Son of the French novelist François Mauriac, Claude Mauriac was an essayist and a literary and film critic. His 'monumental journal' *Immobile Time* (*Le Temps Immobile*) was influenced by Marcel Proust's work on time and memory. 'While he also became intellectually close to Foucault and Deleuze, his novels were for a time associated with the Nouveau Roman, the surrealists and existentialists.' James Kirkup, 'Obituary: Claude Mauriac', *The Independent*, 26<sup>th</sup> March 1996. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-claude-mauriac-1344157.html> [accessed 14 January 2013]. For an outline of the topics in Mauriac's book, please see <http://www.claudemauriac.org/lamourducinema.html> [accessed 14 January 2013].

<sup>173</sup> For a succinct biography of Giacomo Leopardi and a summary of *Zibaldone di pensieri*, see:

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/article/240554> [accessed 1 February 2013].

<sup>174</sup> Madesani, p. 76.

*Project*. In the same vein as Benjamin's collection of aphorisms and provocations, *Amour du Cinéma* also includes both witty and philosophical reflections on nature and man in modernity, set within the powerful symbolism of Christianity, Greek mythology and romantic love.

Foschi and Patella use fuchsia as the predominant background colour for their animations, cut-outs and montages of old photos of cinema divas, which associate love and cinema with -- however stereotypically represented -- femininity. There are also references to eroticism and voyeurism, themes that underpin the visual regime with which cinema is associated, and the erotic allure of the unattainable feminine, as a sequence through a keyhole reveals a naked woman in a coy sensual posture.

While the film does not seem to take itself too seriously, there is an underlying criticism of the state of commercial cinema, through the tribute paid to Charlie Chaplin, and a stylised pop-art sequence of cinema's modern divas, including Catherine Deneuve, Monica Vitti, Marilyn Monroe (with the superimposed text 'I love Marilyn') and Marlene Dietrich. The fashion and glamour associated with cinema's female stars figure prominently, reminding viewers of mainstream film as a commodity in popular culture.

The film is also a display of fantastic visual excursions through the everyday, using stop-motion animation and comic book characters. A quotation from Disney's Mickey Mouse ends the film, when Mickey declares to Minnie, '...mi piacciono le rose, il sole e le frittelle, ma il cinema e l'amore son le cose piu' belle.' ('I like roses, sun and pancakes, though cinema and love are the most beautiful things.').

In *Amour du Cinéma* archival material is adopted within the context of intermediality, aesthetically inflected not only by the artistry of early film forms, especially the magical Méliès trick films, but also by classic romantic literature and

philosophy. Foschi and Patella's formal elements, connoted with a pop-art sensibility, emphasised how social relations have turned films into commodity fetish and memorabilia. They show the influence of both French and American cinema and literature, with Godard's own ambivalent take on art and commerce in *Le Mépris* (1964) paying tribute to a modern screen diva, Brigitte Bardot. Their praise of cinema's sensual nature and use of collage imagery also frequently evoke the idea of woman as a sexual object. Their critical stance towards the objectification of women is clearly linked to the practice of collecting cinematic memorabilia and ephemera.

**4. The Archive: *Il Re è Un Feticcio. Un Romanzo di Cose (The King is a Fetish. A Romance of Things, Gaspare Barbielini Amidei and Bachisio Bandinu, 1976)***

In this Section, I argue that film artists' engagement with heterogeneous archive materials demonstrates a collector's epistemological approach to the role of objects in human relationships during crucial historical times. The book *Il Re è Un Feticcio. Un Romanzo di cose (The King is a Fetish. A Romance of Things, 1976)* by Gaspare Barbielini Amidei and Bachisio Bandinu, provides a relevant anthropological study of the meaning of objects as artefacts in the life of agrarian society during the process of industrial urbanisation of a rural region in Sardinia (Barbagia). Amidei and Bandinu focused on how the coexistence of useful everyday objects found in close proximity to archaic hand-made objects had influenced agrarian life over a period of twenty-four years, from 1950 until 1974. The introduction to this book by Placido Cherchi is particularly relevant, pointing out that the meaning of the title is not 'The King is a fetish' (as the literal translation would indicate); rather it is 'the fetish is king'. Cherchi explained how the book was concerned with the fetishization of objects which had become the dominant cultural form of social life:

The relation subject-predicate, that structures the book's title, ought not be misunderstood. It is not the king who is a fetish, but it is the fetish that is king. It is not man who dominates things, rather it is the object the condition of what a man can, or cannot say, about himself. Historically, as the production of one's own means of living has become 'a way of production', the relationship between man and objects has not changed. Men have always ended up being subjected to the symbolic-functional logic of objects which are created according to specific production requirements. Thus, everything has come to be structured as if the profanity of the Original Sin had turned the promise of a care-free natural life in Eden into the eternal Sisyphean curse.<sup>175</sup>

Amidei's and Bandinu's research on the fetishisation of objects in Italian consumer society sheds valuable light on post-industrial anxiety about cultural obsolescence and dispersal. This argument would explain why many of the filmmakers discussed here repeatedly emphasise fetishized cultural artefacts, such as found film footage and other archive materials.

Bandinu's and Amidei's book provides a thorough analysis of the cultural currency of modern objects in the life of a farmer and shepherd, living in remote areas of the Barbagia region, specifically relating to his fold, and his family home in a village. Over a relatively short period of time, an archaic civilisation had been converted to an advanced post-industrial way of life. Their research parallels Eco's anthropological study of objects as artefacts examined for withstanding the cultural transition from agrarian to modern society, while often co-existing within the same, or contiguous, spaces.<sup>176</sup> According to Bandinu and Amidei, the shepherd's point of view showed

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<sup>175</sup> My translation. The original text reads: 'Il rapporto soggetto-predicato, su cui si struttura il titolo, non deve essere equivocado. Non è il re a essere feticcio, ma il feticcio a essere re. Non è l'uomo a dominare le cose, ma sono le cose a essere condizione di quel che l'uomo, di se stesso, può dire o non dire. Storicamente, da quando il produrre i mezzi con cui vivere è diventato «modo di produzione», è andata sempre così. Gli uomini hanno sempre finito col restare assoggettati alla logica simbolico-funzionale degli oggetti creati dalla necessità del lavoro, e tutto è venuto configurandosi come se la maledizione del peccato originale avesse rovesciato in una eterna condanna sisifea l'iniziale promessa di una vita edenica garantita dal sine cura della pura naturalità.' Placido Cherchi, 'Nota introduttiva', in Bachisiu Bandinu and Gaspare Barbiellini Amidei, *Il Re è un Feticcio. Romanzo di cose* (Firenze: Lito Terrazzi, ottobre 2003), p. 5. Originally published in 1976.

<sup>176</sup> 'What it is being studied here is an abandoned and primitive-pre-industrial region in Sardinia, Barbagia, which within a few years has witnessed the transition from an archaic, farming life to consumer society: and the research is entirely conducted through a conflicting game of objects. Within the same domestic space, at brief intervals, or even in a dramatic confrontational coexistence, the objects of an archaic society and those of affluent society follow and oppose one another'. My translation. The original text reads: 'Qui si studia l'evoluzione di una zona abbandonata e primitiva della Sardegna, la Barbagia, che in pochi anni è passata dalla civiltà pastorizia arcaica alla civiltà dei consumi: e la ricerca è condotta tutta attraverso il gioco contrastante degli oggetti. Nella stessa casa, a brevi intervalli di tempo, o addirittura fronte a fronte, in una drammatica coesistenza, si avvicinano o si oppongono gli oggetti della società antica con quelli della società affluente.' Eco, in Fagone, 1976, pp. 1-14 (pp. 8-9).

resistance to accepting a new 'language' with its new system of cultural referents, which he perceived as a form of colonisation by the dominant laws of consumerism.

They explained:

There is a kind of fetishism of the object in the shepherd's traditional society: a clock, a knife, a chest can exercise an affective influence [...]. The object can acquire a sacred character because things are situated within the realm of scarcity and poverty. The object of modernity, however, is characterised by "the fetishism of the signifier, that is when the subject is involved in the fictional, differential, codified, systemic object."<sup>177</sup>

On the one hand, Bandinu's and Amidei's anthropological study reflected on the cultural transition that occurred from affective value, to the fictional, expressive value of the poor object as codified by modern social affluence; the control that they found signifiers (the appearance, and shape of an object) exercised on modern life. Hence, the value of the object lay less in its authentic usefulness than in its formal and symbolic appeal.<sup>178</sup> On the other hand, their study also revealed how the archaic primary object, providing the farmer's basic means of subsistence, had turned into mere residual value for the modern consumer:

And the phenomenon of the commodity fetish lies within its organised system, which traces a network whose strength increases with the quantity of objects and expands to occupy all sectors of one's own existential framework. The farmer's level of modernity is measured against the object qualified as sign-value, and rigorously oriented.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> My translation. The original reads: 'Nella società tradizionale del pastore esiste un tipo di feticismo dell'oggetto: un orologio, un coltello, una cassapanca possono esercitare una fascinazione affettiva [...]. L'oggetto può acquistare un carattere di sacralità perché le cose sono nella dimensione della scarsità e della povertà. L'oggetto della modernità invece si caratterizza "per il feticismo del significante, cioè coinvolgimento del soggetto in ciò che, dell'oggetto, è fittizio, differenziale, codificato, sistematizzato.'" Bandinu and Barbiellini, p. 104. (Part of the quote 'per il feticismo del significante, cioè coinvolgimento del soggetto in ciò che, dell'oggetto, è fittizio, differenziale, codificato, sistematizzato' is from J Beaudrillard, *Per una critica dell'economia politica del segno*, Milano, 1974, p. 88).

<sup>178</sup> 'Once a man asked: "What is finally deemed useful?" And he answered while correcting his question: "One should ask: useful in relation to what?" However, man ended up attributing things with criteria of usefulness: and things started a war against one another [...]. This was the beginning of the dominion of appearance. Nothing becomes more immaterial and ephemeral than things the moment they reach the alchemist's big market table.'" My translation. The original reads: 'Un tempo un uomo chiese: "Che cos'è infine utile?" E rispose correggendo la domanda: "Si deve chiedere: utile rispetto a che? [...]" Ma l'uomo finì per affidare alle cose i criteri dell'utilità; e le cose si fecero guerra fra di loro [...] Fu l'inizio di un dominio dell'apparenza. Nulla diventa più immateriale, evanescente, della materia di cui sono fatte le cose, quando esse arrivano su quell'enorme banco di alchimista che è il mercato.'" Bandinu and Barbiellini, p. 109.

<sup>179</sup> My translation. The original text reads: 'E il feticismo della merce sta in questo suo organizzarsi in un sistema che traccia una rete sempre rafforzantesi col crescere del numero degli oggetti e che si dilata fino ad occupare ogni casella del quadro esistenziale. A misurare il grado di modernità del pastore c'è sempre un oggetto che si qualifica per il suo valore-segno, rigorosamente orientato.' Bandinu and Barbiellini, p. 105.

According to Eco, this anthropological and semiotic study of things revived an interest in the history of cultural objects in transition. It provided a critical understanding of the potential phenomenon of deterioration of the artefact, and a viewpoint on consumer life steeped in ephemerality and impermanence.

#### **4.1 The methodology of the historian and collector**

This Section considers Benjamin's view of history as invariably impermanent and fragmentary. I apply this framework to a study of the cultural value of historical objects in relation to Italy's continuing commercial dependence on the American film industry since the end of World War II, which had produced a solid tradition of capitalist-oriented domestic cinema.<sup>180</sup> On this basis, I argue that the archive, in relation to the concept 'the world of commodities', departs from Marx's original perspective:

There it is a definite social relation between men that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as an independent being endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.<sup>181</sup>

Indeed, from a post-Marxist historical materialist perspective, as Susan Buck-Morss argues, Benjamin's conception of 'second nature' is also essential to explain his notion of 'otherness' in relation to commodities:

The concept of "second nature", although intentionally a Marxist category, was understood by Lukács within a strongly Hegelian philosophical frame. Second

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<sup>180</sup> 'The Americans provided the Italians with benchmarks and some technical knowhow, as well as an organizational model in some spheres, but they also proved a limiting factor, since the American industry's outreach into the Italian industry made it vampire-like presence in the Italian market, which in some respects confined the Italian industry to a provincial level.' Forgas and Gundle, 2007, pp. 127-128.

<sup>181</sup> Marx, 1887, p. 35.

nature was alienated and reified subjectivity, a world created by humans who did not recognise it as their own. For Benjamin, in contrast, material nature was “other” than the subject, and this remained true no matter how much human labour had been invested in it.’<sup>182</sup>

Benjamin’s vision of the collector and historian, based on his study of the archivist Eduard Fuchs, was combined with his idea that the preservation of cultural history entailed participation, and is therefore valuable in exploring Italian experimental filmmakers’ ambition to re-integrate history, as an inventory of cultural residues, into their present.<sup>183</sup>

As we have seen earlier in this Chapter, the activation of a range of cultural materials, deriving from a creative tension between *nomos* and *physis*, has the potential to promote awareness of the transience of life and ‘natural-history’. For this reason, I believe applying Benjamin’s approach to the filmmakers’ practice of repurposing archival objects can foreground epistemological processes of excavation, and the dis-location of earlier human values in order to encourage audiences to form a critical understanding of their past.

Benjamin’s notion of the collector and historian illustrates one way of being involved in the making of a new film language, which could become critically productive in relation to both consumerism and the fascist cultural legacy. Benjamin maintained a different view than the traditional understanding of ‘the archive’, consisting of historical artefacts and authoritative documents, which was his collector’s approach. As Erdmut Wizisla explained

Benjamin’s concept of the archive, however, differs, from that of the institutionalised archives, whose self-understanding is derived from the origin of the word “archive”. “Archive” stems from the Greek and Latin words for “town hall, ruling office”, which, in turn, are derived from “beginning, origin, rule.” Order, efficiency, completeness, and objectivity are the principles of archival work.

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<sup>182</sup> Buck-Morss, p. 70.

<sup>183</sup> Here I draw on Eco’s eponymous essay ‘Form as social commitment’ from his *Open Work*, and Benjamin’s study ‘Eduard Fuchs: Collector and Historian’, *New German Critique*, Spring 1975, Issue 5, pp. 27-58 (p. 28).

In contrast to this, Benjamin's archives reveal the passions of the collector. The remains heaped up in them are reserve funds or something like iron reserves, crucial to life, and which for that reason must be conserved. These are points at which topicality flashes up, places that preserve the idiosyncratic registrations of an author, subjective, full of gaps, unofficial.<sup>184</sup>

I compare with Benjamin's study of the collector's impulse filmmakers' desire to collect more intuitively and spontaneously fragments of film, integrating these into new works, such as are being examined here. This entails the philosophical conception of the 'natural-history' of the archive (in Adorno's sense), with its material nature and history interwoven and in transition. The Loffredos' *Le Court Bouillon* constituted an artistic expression of their devotion to pre-cinematic popular visual culture, at this time still deemed 'primitive'. We might claim that their fascination with the magical appeal of proto-cinematic media was attempting to recover the 'aura' – in Benjamin's well-known term -- of once-popular objects and processes of artisanship.<sup>185</sup> Crucially, they celebrated the magical tricks and illusory practices of popular graphic and motion-based media from the fin de siècle, alongside a multitude of cultural threads running through their archive of artefacts.

As discussed in Chapter 1, with regard to cultural and anthropological studies in post-war Italy, especially Fagone's *Il Momento Artigiano (The Artisanal Moment, 1976)*, films made in the sixties often testify to an almost archaeological desire to re-discover the past, to re-evaluate the importance of, for instance, ancient agricultural artefacts that lay outside the mainstream consumer culture of late modernity. This interest in archaic forms of life reflected the collector's impulse to gather neglected cultural material related to marginal areas of knowledge, and to challenge cultural

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<sup>184</sup> Wieszla in Ursula Marx *et al.*, pp. 1-6 (p. 1).

<sup>185</sup> Benjamin's use of 'aura' to refer to what is lost in the reproduction of high art is familiar from his essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', originally published in 1935, but widely re-published during the 1960s, as in Harry Zorn's translation in Hannah Arendt, ed. *Illuminations* (New York, 1969).

dispersal and obsolescence. Like Benjamin, the Loffredos did not collect objects to emphasise their usefulness, but to re-value them in personal, affective terms. In this sense, their archaeological drive was avant-garde, critically assessing ‘progress’ through the re-purposing of archived objects, whilst anticipating an experimental practice which would be sustained by many independent filmmakers throughout the sixties and beyond.<sup>186</sup> The Loffredos’ film was also showcase for the ‘magical power’ of collections of memorabilia and found footage, whose use challenged the overarching topology of institutionalised archives.

The collector-historian’s methodology not only uncovers and recovers neglected aspects of the past, but also creates non-canonical stories, letting new light shine through the nooks and crevices of familiar tales. In fact, its valuable impact lay in manifesting the fragmentary nature of life. While the technique of collage may have its historical roots in Cubism and the avant-garde fragmentation of classical perspectival space, the Loffredos’ collage is rather steeped in an intuitive and spontaneous method of choice and selection of pre-cinematic materials, just as Benjamin’s idiosyncratic archive offered historical remains and curiosities aimed at engaging and enticing alienated spectatorship.

#### **4.2 Cine-portraiture and ‘aesthetic ruining’**

The re-deployment of objects related to cultural memory has formed part of many attempts to resist amnesia in modern culture. One of these involved creating film-portraits as forms of iconoclasm, as in Carpi’s *I will... I shan’t*, where the Benjaminian ‘aura’ of portraits of all-powerful political leaders is reduced by

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<sup>186</sup> This tendency is perhaps best known outside Italy from Ken Jacobs’ *Tom, Tom the Piper’s Son* (1969), based on rephotographing an early American film, and has formed the basis of much subsequent avant-garde production, to notably Bill Morrison, following the success of his *Decasia* (2002), based entirely on decayed nitrate film stock.

separation from the original contexts (newsreel, documentary or journalistic photography), which had elevated them to symbols of fear and dominance. As a result of re-contextualisation and ‘aesthetic ruining’, their authority is overturned.<sup>187</sup> These portraits, which recur through his compilation film, are accompanied by other archival material, ranging from Hitler looking coldly at corpses, to various images of death, and anthropological records of tribal groups clearly suffering under colonialism.

This montage, and what I have termed ‘cine-portraiture’ within a specific section of Carpi’s film, demonstrates what Eco explained as the artist casting light on alienation by objectifying it in a form that reproduces it. I invoke ‘cine-portraiture’ as a critical aesthetic that emphasised how imperialism advocated the eradication of idolatry to erode the cultural identity of indigenous peoples. According to W .J. T. Mitchell, idolatry dates back ‘to the ancient Greek and Hebrew texts as a discourse on iconoclasm and iconophilia, law, morality, national identity and imperial destiny (the figure of Zion and the Promised Land later became the central ideology of the modern, especially Protestant, empires)’.<sup>188</sup> Thus, I argue that in *I will, I shan’t* Carpi emphasised the iconoclastic potential of the symbolic object when re-inserted into a new context. By creating a dialectical montage of statesmen’s close-ups with portraits of ordinary people, Carpi exposed the division between political authority and subjugated people, and referred to the violence perpetrated by colonialism and its violation of human rights. The animistic energy, and the mystical value of the object that the iconoclastic montage reactivates is endowed with cathartic potential.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> See again Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ (Pimlico, ed, 1999), p. 215.

<sup>188</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 163.

<sup>189</sup> ‘According to anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, the discussion of the relationship between magic or religion, the “sacred”, and science, the “profane”, was at the apex of modern anthropology’. Moira Sullivan, ‘Maya Deren’s Ethnographic Representation of Haiti’, in *Maya Deren and the American Avant-Garde*, ed. by Bill Nichols (London: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 207-234 (p. 208).

From an anthropological perspective, the cine-portraits in Carpi's film can be seen as closely related to the woman's disembodied rituals and her automated gestures in mis-handling objects; a yarn-winding analogy to the female character in Deren's *Ritual of Transfigured time* (1946). Through the thread-spooling story, which 'dates from the time of the spinning wheel and is connected to the classical image of fate, to the structure of Homer's *Odyssey*', Deren referred to the ambiguity of a conceptual narrative.<sup>190</sup> Through her reference to mythology, she commented on the missing 'vital energies of ritualistic cultures of the past, critiquing social rituals devoid of such meaningful communal expenditure of spirit in the present'.<sup>191</sup> The thematic organisation of archival materials deployed as a montage of photographic portraits follows a similar conceptual construction to Deren's and Carpi's depersonalised gestures and mechanical physical movements. The magical connotation of tribal rituals is lost, and in its place historical traces, turned into mere cultural 'sign-value' (as discussed in relation to Bandinu and Barbiellini,<sup>192</sup> and corroborated by Eco), fill in an existential framework. The allegory of the woman spinning a thread as a metonymy of capitalist society 'being out of control' is revived by the montage, potentially prompting a critical stance.

It could be argued that there is also a new aesthetic at work here, which can be traced to the re-activation of primitive temporalities, signalled by the act of film-scratching or, as David Curtis termed it in relation to *Le Court-Bouillon*, 'intentionally ruining' the film's texture. Indexical photographic specificity may be revived to enhance the historical quality which is inherent in archive material, in order to draw

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<sup>190</sup> Maureen Turim, 'The Ethics of form. Structure and Gender in Maya Deren's Challenge to the Cinema', in Nichols, 2001, pp. 77-102 (p. 95).

<sup>191</sup> Turim, pp. 77-102 (p. 94).

<sup>192</sup> See footnote 176.

the past closer to the present. However, in relation to the contemporary decay of the aura in practices of reproduction, as noted by Benjamin, and following from Curtis's concept of 'ruining', I would further add the notion of the archaeological discovery of the fossil or ruin (*physis*).

In the first instance, any purposeful scratching and 'ruining' of historical fragments is a form of aggression, whatever its aim of recuperating the tactile nature of working with the original object, which would otherwise be fated, in its consumerist life-cycle, to obsolescence. The Loffredos can be regarded as avant-garde filmmakers for anticipating aesthetic concerns with the structure and materiality of historical objects, and for pioneering anti-illusionist perceptual strategies, which other Italian experimental filmmakers of the 1960s would examine more systematically.

Secondly, the Loffredos' 'ruining aesthetic' reveals the fossilised, 'second nature' of the archive: '[...] the archaic residues, the petrified ur-forms of the present.'<sup>193</sup> Thus, it could be argued that their film allows *physis* to rupture through the normative principle of *nomos*, which is normally practised by the archivist organizing historical materials. As in Loffredos' expressive, 'intimate violence' (as Chiari called it), 'aesthetic ruining' brings to light the division between *nomos* and *physis*, and promotes the encounter between practices of classification and taxonomy and raw primary matter. This aesthetic tension involved in re-purposing archive materials may be necessary for re-enacting, and bringing back, a magical or even more authentic experience with the primitive wonder of primal spectatorship. As Rachel Moore noted: 'Magical rites are marked by their intimacy'.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Buck-Morss, p. 65.

<sup>194</sup> Rachel Moore discusses 'reenactments of naïve spectatorship'. Rachel O. Moore, *Savage Theory* (London: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 4.

### 4.3 Cinephilia

While Foschi's and Patella's *Amour du Cinéma* was clearly a celebratory form of cinephilia, declaring a fetishistic love of historical objects, the copious presence of memorabilia of screen divas set against background shades of pink illustrates an excessively connoted feminine cinema, which arguably turns the cinematic female subject into a fetishized feminine. For this reason, I discuss how the artists' use of cinematic memorabilia and ephemera also points to the lack of a feminist sensibility.

It is worth noting that the feminist movement in Italy was still at an embryonic stage in the late sixties. Foschi's and Patella's ambivalence towards the representation of women and their characterisation of cinema as feminine may have been influenced by American attitudes and the 'bourgeois feminism' of the Italian Left, the latter stemming from the post-war economic miracle. Italian women had only started resisting the influence of American post-1968 feminist liberationist culture. Victoria De Grazia found:

Insofar as it actively promoted the rapid and pervasive changes in custom and culture following in the wake of the economic miracle of the 1950s and 1960s, the Left... fulfilled the historical role of bourgeois feminism by modernizing the status of Italian women. In the process, the stage was set for the neofeminist associationalism of the early 1970s; its precedents were not so much early twentieth-century Italian feminist as post-1968 American liberationist.<sup>195</sup>

This historical perspective highlights how women were on a course to consolidate a specifically Italian feminist identity. As the 1970s drew to a close, the women's movement looked quite different from what it had been at the beginning of the decade. Hundreds of new feminist collectives were active throughout Italy and beginning to push the women's movement in new directions. Although many groups continued to

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<sup>195</sup> Victoria De Grazia, *Journal of Modern History* 59, 1987, pp. 396-8. Quoted in Lumley, 1990, p. 315.

work for specific political and social rights, they also turned their attention increasingly toward cultural issues.<sup>196</sup>

Through notions such as cinephilia and the fetish-feminine, I would argue that in *Amour du Cinéma* Foschi and Patella sought to negotiate aesthetically the American influence of Pop Art, with its objectification and serialisation of the fame and glamour of screen divas, with their more critically conscious approach to the objectification of woman in mainstream cinema.<sup>197</sup>

The etymology of the word “fetish” goes back to colonial pidgin language of the seventeenth century; hence, its history lies in commerce and Empire.<sup>198</sup> Thus, I would argue that the fetishistic character of the historical object and the feminine in *Amour du Cinéma* can be associated with a cinema-going experience which was itself influenced by consumerist practices generated fascination and desire. The social character of this experience endowed the feminine with a mystical and almost sacred value, which may be seen as a cultural metaphor for female objectification, but also a token of genuine love for cinema, which cinephilia represents. By giving value to their materials, Foschi and Patella reflected the ambiguity of Italian artists towards American culture, delivering a Pop Art rendition of their personal love for cinema, while also suggesting the right of the emancipated woman to be connoted with desire.

In her essay ‘Close-ups and Commodities’, Laura Mulvey drew a comparison between Marilyn Monroe’s ‘mask’ and the ‘ethnic image’:

Marilyn’s own form of cosmetic appearance is particularly fascinating, because it is so artificial, so mask-like, that she manages to use her performance to ‘comment on’ or ‘draw attention to’ or ‘foreground’ both its constructedness and its vulnerability and instability. But there is a further point. Marilyn’s image is an

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<sup>196</sup> Wendy Pojmann, ‘Emancipation or Liberation. Women’s associations and the Italian Movement’, *Historian*, Spring 2005, Vol. 67, Issue 1, pp. 73-96 (p. 95).

<sup>197</sup> In relation to Pop Art, Barthes claimed: ‘origin was replaced by citation’. Roland Barthes, ‘That old thing, art’, in Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms* (California University Press, 1989), pp. 201-202 (p. 201).

<sup>198</sup> Mitchell, p. 164.

ethnic image; her extreme whiteness, her make-up, her peroxide blonde hair bear witness to a fetishisation of race.<sup>199</sup>

Mulvey's account casts further light on *Amour du Cinéma* and its encoded discourse on the politics of sexuality and desire in mainstream cinema and commodity culture. As a cultural fabrication, the image-fetish not only conceals, but also disregards and erases the authentic cultural identity of the individual. In this film, the female celebrity as 'mask' is the object of compelling praise, and as such performs an act of revelation and subversion of the fetish as concealment of the hidden; it could be seen as a formal exorcism of the fetish. The portraits of screen divas turn into objects of analysis, and objects through which to analyse spaces of subjugation of women, where primitive rituals of patriarchy take hold. However, by turning the invisible social character of the 'mask' of the fetish into the visible, self-contained topology of portraiture, the film suggests a possible departure from forms of fetishism of a celebrated 'whiteness', where iconic divas' photographs hold up images for the coloniser's own curiosities -- spaces of a phantasmagoria where industrial cinema and cinephilia find their own uniform, non-dialectical topology.

The feminine fetish in *Amour du Cinéma* reveals rather than conceals. Hence, in its overstated form, femininity takes on a life of its own and shines in its own peculiar light as 'second nature'. In overstating itself it reveals its material and transformative nature, hence stating its wish to remain 'other than the subject' in social life. This formal excess may in fact disclose an act of 'anti-fetishism' on the filmmakers' part.

As D.N. Rodowick has observed:

Anti-fetishism [...] aimed to exorcise: the cinema's conventional investment in willing suspension of disbelief and denial of its own materiality; [...] the erasure of labour processes in the society of the spectacle; the glamour of Hollywood cinema in which fascination with the erotic erases the machinery of cinema and filmic

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<sup>199</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity* (London: BFI, 1996), p. 48.

processes. All these motifs could criss-cross, especially in the politics of an aesthetic avant-garde that questioned the mechanical, mass, eroticised but censored, commercial cinema.<sup>200</sup>

The glamorised spectacle of femininity can be seen in light of another influential concept, Benjamin's notion of phantasmagoria, which Susan Buck-Morss described in relation to the spectacle of Paris as: 'a magic-lantern show of optical illusions, rapidly changing size and blending into one another [...]'.<sup>201</sup> In his 'Notes on Gesture', Agamben has discussed the erasure of labour processes in Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967). He mentions 'phantasmagoria' in relation to Marx, who came to London in 1851 on the occasion of the inauguration of the Universal Exposition in Hyde Park: 'The first great triumph of the commodity thus takes place under the sign of both transparency and phantasmagoria'.<sup>202</sup> In the case of *Amour du Cinéma*, the fetish feminine is a transparent sign-value within the cinematic world of phantasmagoria, although Foschi and Patella did not clearly develop a conscious feminist discourse and aesthetic.

This Chapter has examined film artists working with archive materials as historical objects in transition. I have thus deployed Benjamin's notion of the archivist, as both collector and historian, working with ruins and fragments. All of the filmmakers, in effect, made use of their personal archives, quite separate from the official archives; and all engaged in anti-illusionary practices, critical of a 'naïve spectatorship', a term that Rachel Moore noted in relation to Tom Gunning's 'primal scene'.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> In her essay 'Fetishisms', Laura Mulvey discusses Rodowick's 'political modernism'. Mulvey, p. 9. Originally published in Rodowick, D. N., *The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory*, Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1988.

<sup>201</sup> Buck-Morss, p. 81.

<sup>202</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End. Notes on Politics*, trans. by Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 74. Originally published with the title *Mezzi senza fine. Note sulla politica*, in 1996.

<sup>203</sup> Moore claimed: 'Despite critical and anthropological efforts to dispel the myth of a primitive audience outdone by visual trickery, images of shocking first contact with the cinema that take the film image as real persist in film theory as well as in cinema itself'. Moore, 2000, p. 3.

Also through Bandinu's and Barbiellini's notion of 'the fetish is king', in this Chapter I have engaged with a cultural anthropological perspective on the past, and have explored the role of the fetishized object in experimental cinema. I have thus aimed to demonstrate how experimental filmmakers could be regarded as collectors and historians who have re-purposed cinematic objects as fragments and ruins from 'the archive', connoted with indeterminacy and transience. Through their love for found objects such as cinema memorabilia, the Loffredos' painterly collage techniques and 'aesthetic ruining' aimed to re-awaken the past for its transformative quality. Carpi's compilation of artefacts of personal and collective memory suggested an interest in staving off cultural oblivion, with a critique of conditioned social behaviour. And finally, Foschi and Patella's praise of cinema conjured up a critical attitude towards obsolescence and disposal. Arguably, they pioneered rethinking cinema as object, with their feminist approach to the depiction of the female screen star.

In order to continue my discourse on ontologies of 'the archive', I turn next to Massimo Bacigalupo's essayistic meditations on life and the arts viewed through his 'first-person' camera.

#### **Chapter 4. Massimo Bacigalupo: the Personal Archive and Myth**

While the previous Chapter examined ‘archivist’ approaches to experimental filmmaking, entailing the collector’s sensibility towards the archive, here I argue that Massimo Bacigalupo, through the use of his personal archive, created profound philosophical meditations on the relationship between life and the arts through the experimental essayistic films which he shot with his 8mm and 16mm cameras. The results could often be described as dream-like diary or self-portrait films, by means of which he would record with a subjective eye his impressions of the world, as a young man attempting to engage with the chaos and upheavals of modern life.

As this Chapter seeks to demonstrate, some of Bacigalupo’s experimental films of this period can be placed at the crossroads of a strand of artistic and experimental cinema defined by Laura Rascaroli as ‘first-person filmmaking’, which foregrounds autobiography and authorial subjectivity: ‘the personal cinema of the avant-garde, that of auteur and art cinema; and that of the first-person documentary’.<sup>204</sup> Distinguished by an eclectic sensibility, Bacigalupo’s approach to filmmaking entailed a profound dedication to cinema, imbued with a quietly intense wish for the fusion of not only the old and new world, but also life and art. Thus, his poetic and impressionistic images often seem like citations from, or intertextual references to imagery sourced, not only from urban daily life and the popular media, but also from his personal archive: a rich repertoire of ancient scriptures, sacred texts, and modernist literature.

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<sup>204</sup> Laura Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera. Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film* (London: Wallflower Press, 2009), p. 106.

## 1. Dreaming with a personal camera

Bacigalupo's early films traced a response to the profound social discontent animating a changing world. He integrated depictions of the ancient past into both contemporary daily life in Northern Italy (Rapallo, in the Liguria region) and his travels abroad.

These provide a richly interwoven textual tapestry of oneiric visions of grand mass migrations crossing immense geo-cultural spaces. Above all, these films illustrate the humanist vigour and artistic breadth of Bacigalupo's vision, encompassing ancient myths from both Eastern and Western philosophies. He made compilations and collages of his heterogeneous impressions of life and the arts, treating these as if these were literary and visual 'citations' which, while re-activating the magical and the mythical of the past, form a seamless continuum between past and present. Through his dream-like vision and imagination, but also in actuality, Bacigalupo travelled back to the roots of human life and civilisation in order to explore human consciousness and ponder the conflicts animating modern society. Most importantly, the many intertextual references to his archive, created through montage and collage techniques, suggests his thoughts about the pervasive presence of images from a variety of media within people's daily lives.

The formal and experimental core of his body of work made during the sixties and examined in this Chapter is represented by his diptych *60 metri per il 31 marzo* (1968) and *Versus* (1968). These films' dialectics are between a mythical past and temporal contingency, the archive and Happenings, technology and organic life. As experimental films, they express his philosophical ruminations on history, a landscape shaped by stratifications of cultural texts and debris in perennial transition, but also on nature in its primordial form before it enlivens allegorical texts.

I suggest that Bacigalupo's films encapsulate the idea of an 'historical present' with natural science. They are infused with themes based in natural magic and forming allegories, which take him on a search for the meaning of life in its primary form. They also look at the primary organic matter of the filmic image, or *physis*, which he has termed 'the restless mollusc' ('il mollusco che si agita') in *Versus*, the origins of conscience, 'naked life'.<sup>205</sup> To further explore this philosophical approach, I draw on Benjamin's notion of natural history, as illuminated by Susan Buck-Morss, and identify Bacigalupo's 'dialectical image' to be found in his deployment of his personal archive. This process illustrates both the pre-historical and timeless present of humanity, and the contemporary Happenings that he filmed.

## 2. *Quasi una Tangente (Almost a Tangent, 1966)*<sup>206</sup>

One of his earliest films, *Quasi una Tangente*, captures the deep-seated discontent and existential angst of students in the sixties. In his synopsis, Bacigalupo explained that by 'tangente' he meant the tangential line in relation to a point on a curve. The motif of a paint-brushed shape is repeated throughout the film, the symbolic figure of thoughts of rebellion, and the mark of a gesture towards the intention to flee, the wish of the film's protagonist, the young student Paul, to escape from a claustrophobic present.<sup>207</sup> With 'quasi' ('almost') Bacigalupo referred to Paul's ambivalence over his desire to flee, even if by the end of the film he has decided to commit suicide. Thus, geometrical symbolism is the expression of Paul's figural thinking, as *Quasi una Tangente* exemplifies a student's desire to move beyond imposed constraints, his intention to 'take flight' at the cost of leaving life behind.

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<sup>205</sup> Donatella Valente, 'Interview with Massimo Bacigalupo, 8 April 2013', unpublished.

<sup>206</sup> *Quasi una Tangente (Almost a Tangent, 1966, 8mm, b/w, 34')*

<sup>207</sup> Massimo Bacigalupo, 'Quasi una Tangente' ('Almost a tangent'), *Cinema & Film*, Primavera 1969, n. 7-8, 117-131 (p. 117).

The opening sequence immerses the audience in a dark interior that mirrors the protagonist's inner turmoil, which the camera illustrates by showing first Paul's bedroom and then the gas stove in the kitchen from different angles, before revealing glimpses of his books and the sleeves of records. Bacigalupo edited this first montage of still-life shots of Paul's apartment as a stylish compilation of shapes, forms and lines, the figural leitmotifs of the film. It recalls the opening sequence of Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Eclisse* (1962) where close-ups of geometrical objects expressed the individual's stifled emotions and inability to communicate.

The image of a child crouched down, painting in white the shape of a circle and a tangential line on top, punctuates the film at various points, which may signify Paul's moments of existential crisis and aspiration to leave. This visual motif marks Bacigalupo's film not only symbolically but also pictorially, as if to say that the camera is like a paintbrush manifesting Paul's desire for freedom.

As it progresses, the film catches up with the momentum of life in a day, following Paul's spontaneous excursion and revealing the cultural backdrop against which his existence looks only like a ghostly trace: we only see the dark shadow of Paul as he moves across the streets and in his apartment. While this invisibility is palpable, his journey through the urban spaces provide a fully sensorial experience of the archive of mass culture in this film-diary montage, accompanied by a soundtrack of the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan and Harry Belafonte. In a stream-of-consciousness mode, we accompany him into a classroom, where he talks to a friend perusing *Playboy*, while newsreel extracts of the first unmanned trips to the moon punctuate his daydreaming to a soundtrack of John Coltrane, with the musician's name visible on a record sleeve. These visual and aural samples from contemporary popular media are accompanied by the voice of a teacher, recalling the record of Mussolini's colonial enterprises in

Greece in 1940. Underpinning the history class is Mussolini's voice announcing the start of Italy's involvement in World War II, played off-screen from either the radio or television, while shots of the classroom contextualise the gravity of the past and its legacy in the present for the younger generation. As Paul wanders the streets, catching glimpses of electoral campaign posters, sounds of war films reverberate in the background, echoing past conflicts and voicing the socio-political turbulence of the everyday.

The first part of the film continues with a visual and aural collage of quotations sourced from films, radio programmes and music from the Beatles, marking the presence of the mass media. Their abundance implies the absence of a well-defined character, apart from a 'chiaroscuro' portrait of Paul's confused and dreamy mindscape. The film's subtext is that humanity is in danger, with Bacigalupo's interest in discovering a wealth of human culture apparently lost amid the indifference of Western consumer society. He attempts to re-evaluate an eclectic mixture of images from Eastern philosophies, classical literature, modernist art and contemporary painting, design and popular art, including Liechtenstein's comics-inspired pictures and Disney animation.<sup>208</sup>

This wide-ranging cultural and media tapestry continues in the second part of the film, where the intricate imagery alternates in rapid montage with close-ups of fleeting, ghostly faces moving absent-mindedly in the streets. Paul meets a blonde woman, his girlfriend Mara, who he takes back to his place at night. She switches on a torch, and Paul's studio is lit with a stark contrast of light and darkness. The double-exposed image of Mara and Paul, intercut with shots of a gas cooker, and with the

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<sup>208</sup> Film historian Bruno Di Marino mentions the Vorticist Wyndham Lewis's sketches left with the Bacigalupo family by Ezra Pound also forming part of this film montage, as well as *Charlie Brown* comics. Di Marino, 1999, p. 73.

8mm camera image becoming increasingly unstable, convey their inner turmoil, accompanied by a dizzying jazz soundtrack by Ornette Coleman and Thelonious Monk. The symbol of a circle and a tangent is superimposed with the word 'fine' ('the end'), at which point it is clear that Paul has switched on the gas in order to die.

## 2.1 Life and death

The succession of open and closed lines and shapes throughout *Quasi una Tangente* creates a formal tension between an ambiguous beginning and ending, the symbolic life/death circularity and repetition of a constricted daily life. Paul lives with determination in the immediacy of the now, while gesturing towards death as his only way to 'accept life' in the present.

A variety of influences shaped the mood and style of Bacigalupo's film. He owed the claustrophobic vision of modern life to Marco Bellocchio's *Pugni in Tasca (Fists in the pocket, 1965)*, where the young male protagonist nurtured a profound discontent with the decadence and inertia of his aristocratic Catholic family's lifestyle. Another contemporary new wave classic, Jean-Luc Godard's *A bout de souffle (Breathless, 1960)* inspired Paul's 'killer-on-the-run' character, playing with love and death in the face of the authorities, and Bacigalupo's filming the 'rhythm of possibilities'.<sup>209</sup> Also evident are the influences of the opening sequence of *West Side Story* (Jerome Robbins, Robert Wise, 1961), and of *8 1/2* (Federico Fellini, 1963), especially in the camera's continuous panning over a variety of new objects, as if gathering fragments of reality, or the 'residues of life'.

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<sup>209</sup> Bacigalupo, 'Massimo Bacigalupo - Intervista Immaginaría', *Il Film Sperimentale, Bianco e Nero*, ed. by Bacigalupo, 1974, pp. 20-36 (p. 21).

Bacigalupo was also evidently influenced by Maya Deren's symbolic and existentialist cinema. Deren encouraged filmmakers to become free of the camera's fixed tripod, to trace a character's fluid movement throughout different environments in unmatched shots.<sup>210</sup> And staying abreast of the contemporary American avant-garde, he drew the idea of the title credits written on a wall from Ron Rice's *The Flower Thief* (1960).<sup>211</sup> Bacigalupo's visionary and innovative filming techniques and narrative conventions expressed an existential attitude to life, while a typical discontent with the intrusion of the mass media in the sixties is underpinned by the recurrent shots from his own archive alluding to an historical cultural continuum.

*Quasi una Tangente* demonstrated Bacigalupo's early versatility in experimental filmmaking. Already at the crossroads between art cinema aesthetics and narrative, with a grammatically free, mercurial camera and a sensibility for avant-garde film aesthetics, the film won the main award of the Montecatini Film Festival in 1966.<sup>212</sup>

### 3. *Ariel Loquitur (Ariel Speaks, 1967)*<sup>213</sup>

Very different from *Quasi una Tangente*, *Ariel Loquitur* was based on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.<sup>214</sup> This showed how Bacigalupo had become a more mature artist, conscious of such avant-garde techniques as the juxtaposition of photographs, archive compilations and non-linear narrative. Apart from its literary source, he drew the other

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<sup>210</sup> Bacigalupo, in Bursi and Causo, 2010, p. 153.

<sup>211</sup> 'An essay by Maya Deren about filming without a tripod and getting from one place to another just with one continuous movement had been a revelation, as had Ron Rice's *The Flower Thief* and Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising*.' Bacigalupo, 2010, p. 153.

<sup>212</sup> 'In 1966 his feature *Quasi un tangente* was awarded first prize in the Montecatini Film Festival. Bacigalupo, who was nineteen- at the time, remembers that he was sitting in the audience with Lillian Gish and Anita Loos, who happened to be visiting Montecatini (Gish was a friend of Massimo's parents).' Bacigalupo, 2010, p. 149.

<sup>213</sup> *Ariel Loquitur (Ariel Speaks, 1967, 8mm, silent, b/w-col., 50')*.

<sup>214</sup> The story of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, has Prospero cast out to sea with his daughter Miranda, after his dukedom of Milan was usurped by his jealous brother Antonio. They settle on an island in the Mediterranean where he deploys magical powers to create a powerful tempest that causes a shipwreck. Antonio, and his party that includes the King of Naples, Alonso, his brother Sebastian, and his son Ferdinand, are swept ashore the magical island. Through skilful illusions and enchantments, and thanks to the artfulness of his two slaves, the earthy savage Caliban and especially the spirit Ariel, Prospero, depicted as a rational magician, succeeds in redeeming political justice, revealing Antonio's low nature, invoking romance between Miranda and Ferdinand (who will marry on the island), and releasing Ariel from slavery.

materials from the earlier films he made since 1961, including footage and outtakes from *Quasi una Tangente*.

For *Ariel Loquitur* the filmmaker repurposed his short film *Lilan* (1965, 8mm, col.) and a 'love letter' he composed according to the American experimental filmmaker Gregory Markopoulos's method of in-camera 'letter writing'.<sup>215</sup> Bacigalupo shot this 'letter' in 1967 on thirty metres of film stock, using a forward and backward tracking camera movement. It would become the fourth act of *Ariel loquitur*, where the wedding of Miranda and Ferdinand takes place as 'an unedited night-film in which one catches glimpses of a match being lit'.<sup>216</sup> The images in the first act stand for the tempest and the castaways; the second act refers to their past and the dimension of memory; while the third is mostly composed of material from *Quasi una tangente*, which brings to life the story of Caliban as the antithesis of Ariel. The last act also 'introduces colour and sound, the latter through the Beatles' *A Day in the Life* (from *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*) leading up to Ariel's liberation from slavery and the duke of Milano, Prospero, sailing back to his homeland.<sup>217</sup>

Within each act, and throughout the whole film, recycled footage is open to new interpretations, as the socio-political crisis of the sixties in Italy is re-visited allegorically, through the lenses of the mythical Shakespearean world and the historical Elizabethan era. Thus, the viewer is implicated in an allegorical reading of the present, in which the value of the archive is revived through the resonance of

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<sup>215</sup> *Lilan* is about the heroine's sentimental education, a musical film 'timed to *Midsömer*, a lyrical track in the Atlantic album *The Modern Jazz Quartet at Music Inn/Volume 2*.' *Lilan* is heartbroken after finding out about her lover's deceit, however she will finally achieve a clearer vision about love.' Bacigalupo, 2010, p. 152.

<sup>216</sup> Bacigalupo, 2010, p. 152.

<sup>217</sup> Bacigalupo, 2010, p. 22.

classical English literature, contrasted with the alienated 'second nature' of discarded film and outtakes re-integrated into a new narrative compilation.<sup>218</sup>

The allegory of the spirit Ariel 'who speaks' (*loquitur*), serving his master Prospero, and invested with supernatural and magical powers, might stand for Bacigalupo's wish to achieve independence from the conventions of mainstream commercial cinema. Ariel proves his loyalty to Prospero by tricking the castaways with a masque of characters from classical mythology, including the goddess of agriculture and fertility Ceres in Act four, and others throughout the play.<sup>219</sup> Ariel's service to Prospero leads to him eventually obtaining freedom.

It is significant that Bacigalupo did not make the magician-monarch Prospero his main protagonist, but Ariel, the mischievous yet benign spirit who speaks against illusions and trickery as a means to exercise power and control. Hence, perhaps, the intended allegory of the cultural hegemony of the film industry over independent filmmakers' initiatives. The role of Ariel can be read through Benjamin's notion of 'the dialectical image', that binary figure which embodies the critical dialectics of past and present, technology and nature, and natural science and history in transition.<sup>220</sup> His magical tricks reveals the jagged places and discontinuities. Through Ariel's world of enchantment, 'material nature' is fragmented and 'other', which may remind us of Benjamin's 'second nature' defined as 'other than the subject'. Like Bacigalupo,

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<sup>218</sup> The concept of 'second nature' is what Lukács defined as 'meaningless world' (that is an alienated world of commodities, the world of convention). He wrote: 'it can only be defined as the embodiment of well-known yet meaningless necessities and therefore it is ungraspable and unknowable in its actual substance'. Lukács, 1978, p. 62. The concept of 'second nature' is also explained in Chapter 1.

<sup>219</sup> 'Ceres therefore is not only associated literally with grain, but is more importantly linked with the physical, psychological, and sociological factors which sustain life. [...] She is placed over and against brutal bestiality, for she stands for a civility attuned to the higher harmonies present in the creation.' Clifford Davidson, 'The Masque within *The Tempest*', *Notre Dame English Journal*, Vol. 10, n. 1/2 (1976), 12-17 (pp. 14-15).

<sup>220</sup> 'Dialectical images as "critical constellations" of past and present are at the center of materialist pedagogy. Short-circuiting the bourgeois historical-literary apparatus, they pass down a tradition of discontinuity. If all historical continuity is "that of the oppressors, "this tradition is composed of those "rough and jagged places" at which the continuity of tradition breaks down, and the objects reveal "cracks" providing "a hold for anyone wishing to get beyond these points."' Benjamin, *Notes to the Theses on History I*, cited by Buck-Morss, p. 290.

the Shakespeare scholar Jonathan Bate noted that ‘magic meant the knowledge of hidden things and the art of working wonders’ and ‘the highest form of natural philosophy: the word came from *magia*, the ancient Persian term for wisdom’.<sup>221</sup> Thus, *Ariel Loquitur* shows how, as in *The Tempest*, Ariel’s humanism was necessary to exhort his master to abandon his cultivation of illusionist practices in favour of human wisdom and forgiveness: ‘The play is indeed an investigation of what it means to be human, or, to put it in another way, the meaning of humanism.’<sup>222</sup> Hence, the creative tension in this film hinges on the evocation of non-human, supernatural powers and earthly humanity, the non-material and the material world. The conclusion of the story as Bacigalupo presented it offers redemption from the ‘sins’ of practising theatrical illusion.<sup>223</sup>

### **3.1 Natural magic: technology and nature**

In *Ariel Loquitur*, Bacigalupo’s personal archive became a site of ambiguities, where wisdom and natural magic on one side, and sorcery on the other, collided; all the magical elements clashed trying to resolve the chaos of civilisation and corruption of humankind brought about by the dark powers of political hegemony. Prospero’s magic is relevant only in relation to Ariel, whose role is to alert his master to the illusions he deploys to trick people, and colonise nature and its inhabitants.

From the start, the filmmaker threads through thematic binaries such as body and machine, animal and human, nature and civilisation, pre-industrial and modern, to generate reflection on the actual integration of the human being into a consumer-made

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<sup>221</sup> Jonathan Bate, ‘Introduction’, in Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (New York: Random House, 2008), p. XI.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>223</sup> Bacigalupo, 2010, p. 22.

world. The opening sequence introduces the film's settings through an intermittent shot of a seagull flying high over the sea, its wings fluttering; the resulting intermittent movement through sequential frames recalls Eadward Muybridge's pre-cinematic study of animal locomotion.<sup>224</sup> Bacigalupo's reflexive photographic experimentation interwove the everyday of home-movie footage with aspects of life's 'otherness', the physical and the metaphysical: a natural landscape becomes an imaginary classical world of balanced forms, an idyllic pastoral environment. Footage from a home-movie shows a family portrait of a man, a woman and a child playing by the sea-shore, and an elderly man sitting in a garden in pensive posture, near a marble statue, which lends the film a lyrical aesthetic and a contemplative mood. Although this picture of an individual positioned in relation to a natural landscape is imbued with memory and loss, it provides a poignant moment of reflection on the human condition.

The film traces Bacigalupo's poetic and melancholy images reflecting human remoteness from nature (Prospero in exile from his homeland), as if cut off from his naturally creative skills, divorced from authenticity. Through the lenses of human grace and disgrace pervading consumer society, a shot shows Edvard Munch's painting *The Scream*. Here, the filmmaker's intervention suggests multiple temporalities, a tension between the archive aesthetic of the home-movie with its timeless past, conveyed by a subjective camera shooting in film-diary impressionistic style, and frustrated human attempts in the contingent present to reintegrate modern life with a more authentic pattern in the past. This is clearer when the film starts

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<sup>224</sup> Muybridge wrote to Leland Stanford, his investor: 'On the 7 August 1877 in a letter (a copy of which I have before me) I suggested to you a plan for making a series of electro-photographs, automatically, by which the consecutive phases of a single stride could be successfully photographed. [...] from a few days after the date of my letter, until the spring of 1881, or for more than three years, my time was devoted almost exclusively to superintending the construction of the apparatus of the execution of the work. Letter from Muybridge to Stanford dated May 2, 1892.' Brian Clegg, *The man who stopped time: the illuminating story of Eadward Muybridge: father of the motion picture, pioneer of photography, murderer* (Washington, DC: Joseph Henry Press, 2007), p. 119.

building a rhythm that speaks of energy and dynamism, with a montage of a classical painting, a seagull flying, and a naked woman, curled up with her back to the camera, her body language expressing emotional and psychological vulnerability, which is a recurrent image in Bacigalupo's films. The camera is handled like a paintbrush, tracing shapes and forms throughout the film, as in *Quasi una tangente*, seemingly trying to recover the tactile quality of film as medium.

However, Bacigalupo's reflexive experimental techniques re-exhume the missing alchemical ingredients of the creative process. Like a magician conjuring man's liberation from a condition of self-entrapment and ultimate inability to communicate, he manipulates the human figure in motion by either accelerating or slowing-down its motion. He creates a denser texture by also interweaving these human forms with words and images from the Shakespeare play. Thus, *Ariel Loquitur* encompasses man's attempts to re-engage fully with life through the arts, from the figurative to the abstract, and from music to literature; in short, through an experimental and subjective use of technologies in order to attain potentially increased freedom of expression.

In contrast with the undertones of nostalgia for a primitive cinema, through the observational camera's attention to movement, and a more scientific interest in the moving image, there is an artistic sensibility displayed through techniques and materials. The text "this is a love letter" is a collage of cut-out letters, a paper strip juxtaposed across images of classical sculpture, natural environments, Mickey Mouse cartoons, tinted images of the seagull flying, and a family portrait.<sup>225</sup>

If the perception of 'magic' engendering a 'naïve spectatorship' (as Moore called it), with the suddenly animated still image provoked wonder, these techniques were

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<sup>225</sup> The montage of his films was influenced by some of the filmmakers of the New American Cinema he met, among them Guy Davenport, Stan Brakhage, Gregory Markopoulos, Jonas Mekas, and Abbott Meader. Bacigalupo, 2010, p. 149.

also deployed to awaken an awareness of illusionist conventions.<sup>226</sup> Experimenting with live action footage, archival imagery, repetition and speed variation was not only an act of redemption, but also of salvation from creative death. It was a call for both the artist's emancipation and the spectator's engagement with the newly created work. Bacigalupo's expression of his desire for authenticity by foregoing the narrative illusions of mainstream cinema through experimental filmmaking is evident in the textual structure of *The Tempest*, supporting a relevant allegorical reading of this film that forewarns against the 'trickeries' deployed by the film industry.

While *The Tempest* provides the film's meta-narrative, its subtext is the re-creation of memory: a series of flashbacks from Prospero's viewpoint, once he has reached his homeland and been re-integrated into society (his dukedom of Milan) is re-created by repurposing footage from Bacigalupo's earlier films. As Stephen Orgel argued in relation to *The Tempest*: 'its realities throughout are largely the products of Prospero's imagination, or of the imaginative recreation of his memory'.<sup>227</sup> The power of imagination is indeed essential to a filmmaker's creativity, and for a more independent cinema.

#### **4. *60 metri per il 31 marzo (200 feet for March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1968)*<sup>228</sup>**

Bacigalupo stated that he shot *60 metri per il 31 marzo* on 8mm almost like a dance, mostly over the course of one day, and that it was edited in camera.<sup>229</sup> In it, life is depicted across a day, as a silent, yet euphorically optimistic Happening:

The 200 feet of unspliced footage were born, flower like, on this most beautiful March 31<sup>st</sup> 1968 – as a vibration hidden in the pause between the possible and the

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<sup>226</sup> The notion of 'reenactments of naïve spectatorship' is drawn from Moore, 2000, p. 4, and is also explained in Chapter 3.

<sup>227</sup> Stephen Orgel, 'Introduction', in Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. by Orgel, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 2-60 (p. 25).

<sup>228</sup> *60 metri per il 31 marzo (200 feet for March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1968*, 15', 8mm, silent, b/w).

<sup>229</sup> 'My 200 Feet for March 31<sup>st</sup> is a happening, a real 8mm product.' Bacigalupo, 2010, p. 146.

actual... this small film is at best an attempt to prove, quite unassumingly, that once a certain degree of tension has been reached, the whole damn thing comes off into light, wavelengths that the spectator's eye will not fail to perceive. I believe that some means of probing, of developing through work in progress, have been given to us. These materials, proceeding from very different realms of sensibility (arts) can be used constructively to deal with so-called experience, and make 'sense' of it.<sup>230</sup>

The film and its making were a public performance-event, a participatory, collective action breaking down boundaries, not only between the various art disciplines, but also between life and art, as with the first musical performances staged by John Cage in the fifties, and Allan Kaprow's first untitled 'happening' of 1958.<sup>231</sup> The film as the title suggests was shot mostly over the course of one day: As Corrigan has observed:

Diaries map the expressions of an individual according to different temporal chronologies and rhythms, perhaps as detailed sequential organisations, sometimes with dramatic ellipses, and invariably according to various rhythms usually associated with daily life and experience.<sup>232</sup>

Here, the authorial subjectivity of Bacigalupo's camera creates a diary film whose 8mm format recorded and imagined society's desire to integrate the arts into daily life. The mobility and lightness of the 8mm film format allowed Bacigalupo to create a spontaneous and unscripted record of the events. His 'painterly' technique recalls not only Stan Brakhage, but also Derek Jarman's use of 8mm film after his training as a painter.<sup>233</sup>

Combining the impromptu potential of the handheld 8mm camera with the film's narrative structure, Bacigalupo also found literature useful to convey his imaginative pre-historic vision of humanity. His film's meta-text is the ancient Indian philosophical work, the *Katha-Upanishad*, which is divided into six 'Vallis', or

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<sup>230</sup> Massimo Bacigalupo, 'Schede: Sessanta Metri per il 31 Marzo', *Ombre Elettriche*, December 1968, p. 36.

<sup>231</sup> Udo Kultermann, *Art-Events and Happenings* (Mathews Miller Dunbar: London, 1971), p. 42.

<sup>232</sup> Corrigan, 2011, p. 131.

<sup>233</sup> A book dedicated to Jarman's film work in Super 8 was published in 2014. James MacKay, *Derek Jarman Super 8* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2014).

branches that narrate a dialogue between the young man Nakiketa and Death. Bacigalupo interwove his archive imagery through live-action film, superimposing classical Western and Eastern fine art imagery over live-action footage of natural landscapes. Thus, through montage and juxtaposition techniques he could express his perception of contemporary daily life, creating an impressionistic canvas populated by archaic imagery, echoes of a timeless temporality and an ephemeral present.

Despite the rich tapestry of myths and allegories underpinning it, the film 'synopsis', detailed by Bacigalupo in his 2010 film catalogue, is quite simple and similar to *Quasi una tangente*:

The story moves from a room to a garden to a quiet water-surface as the afternoon goes on. Then there is an amorous encounter, a bit of fun among youngsters playing cops and robbers, and a boy and a girl quietly awaiting the night.<sup>234</sup>

Each section of *60 metri* tells the story of an event by interlacing two references, one literary and another figurative, as each shot 'quotes' from both a writer and a painter or a filmmaker. Hence, while the film's macrocosm, or allegorical meta-text, consists of extracts from ancient Hindu scriptures, the filming of one day, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1968, is its microcosm. Intertextual references from Bacigalupo's archive echo Stan Brakhage's lyrical study of vision in his book *Metaphors on Vision*, which Bacigalupo translated into Italian in 1970.<sup>235</sup>

The first series of 'art citations' from his personal archive, standing for one of the six 'Vallis', presents shots of, or quotations from Ezra Pound and Kandinsky; the second, from Stan Brakhage's *Metaphors on Vision* and his film *Dog Star Man*; the third, from E. E. Cummings and Botticelli; the fourth, from John Donne, Aubrey

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<sup>234</sup> Bacigalupo, 2010, p. 154.

<sup>235</sup> Stan Brakhage's *Metaphors on Vision* was published in 1963 and translated by Bacigalupo in 1970 (published by Feltrinelli). Bacigalupo, 2010, p. 148.

Beardsley and Hieronymus Bosch; the fifth from *The Katha-Upanishads* and Piero della Francesca; and the sixth from Lawrence Durrell and Caravaggio.<sup>236</sup>

Through intertextual references to the popular culture of the sixties in *Quasi una Tangente*, Bacigalupo commented on the intrusive presence of the mass media, while with *Ariel Loquitur* he created an allegory about cinema, also through citations from classical literature. This aesthetic of cultural echoes and intertextual references from the classical to the modernist arts coexists in the ‘happening-film’ *60 metri*. As an innovative filmmaking method, it exemplifies Bacigalupo’s attempt to break through not only the boundaries of the specificity of film as medium, by letting it interact with a plurality of other arts, but also the barriers dividing ‘low’ and ‘high’ art of contemporary avant-garde practices.<sup>237</sup> Performance artist and dancer Ann Halprin provided another example of how the artwork was the result of the artist's participation and intervention into, rather than isolation and separation from, everyday reality. She wrote:

[...] challenge participation by the whole person, body, mind, and senses. That is the basic difference between contemporary Happenings and Dadaist and Surrealist thinking and action, without which, it must be said, society would not have changed in the way it has. The artist is no longer working cut off from society, he is looking for ways to act within it. His goal is to unify his work with society, to give up his traditional class status.<sup>238</sup>

By repurposing film material, and ancient and modernist texts from his personal archive, Bacigalupo sought to initiate something ‘other’ than outdated discourses based on shock and scandal, which had been intensified by Dada and Surrealism. As a form of social commitment instead, this practice attempted to initiate interaction

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<sup>236</sup> Bacigalupo, 2010, p. 154.

<sup>237</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 1, Umberto Eco’s *Apocalittici e Integrati (The Apocalyptic and the Integrated)*, published in 1964 epitomised the cultural status of an ongoing process hybridising “high” and “low” culture. This cultural discourse was prompted by art critic Clement Greenberg’s 1939 essay ‘Avant-garde and Kitsch’.

<sup>238</sup> Kultermann, p. 107.

between individuals and art materials, where the latter were considered as ‘other than the subject’, and therefore could be re-purposed to disturb and challenge passive spectatorship.

### 5. *Versus* (1968)<sup>239</sup>

Forming a diptych with *60 Metri*, *Versus* is its mirror: both photographically and thematically its negative and expressive opposite. It is the outcome of Bacigalupo’s engagement with metaphysics, his study of the chasm separating the present from its historical ‘real’, whilst denouncing the excessive happiness and euphoria of *60 Metri*. The filmmaker stated that while in the film-happening *60 Metri* there was a certain degree of harmony and optimism, in *Versus* life and death are incompatible: it constituted a ‘dark response to the contrived form of *60 Metri*’.<sup>240</sup>

Bacigalupo’s meditations about filming and the ontology of the photographic image can be gathered from his ‘Imaginary Interview’ published in *Bianco e Nero* in 1974. *Versus* reflexively studied the perception of the image, ‘starting with a street in Jerusalem’, in which the image of the filmmaker and his camera appears in double-exposure, as a filmic self-analysis, or self-portrait.<sup>241</sup> Bacigalupo’s photographic *mise-en-abîme* addresses the visual experience of the image and the value of historical images for the present. Through his camera, he intended to probe what he defined as the ‘abysmal’ ontological fracture between film as historical artefact and his experience of the image in the immediate present, prior to its re-mediation. With *Versus* Bacigalupo performed an incisive analysis of the relationship between the moving image and its different temporalities, which raises awareness of the sourcing

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<sup>239</sup> *Versus* (1968, 16mm, b/w, silent, 14’).

<sup>240</sup> Bacigalupo, 1974, pp. 20-36 (p. 24).

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*

of the image, whether from the recent present or the distant past. This thought about the ontological status of the re-purposed image can be seen in relation to Adorno's philosophy of 'natural-history' and *physis*, and the 'second nature' of reified human value throughout time, with its ontological indeterminacy hinging both on 'natural stasis' and 'historical dynamism'.<sup>242</sup>

Bacigalupo wrote that 'the film consists of four unedited 100-foot 16mm reels, one of which was previously exposed in an 8mm camera'.<sup>243</sup> This formal dichotomy is displayed in a four-screen diegetic space formed of two film-strips running vertically next to each other. The footage shows a sequence set in the countryside, a bicycle on one side and a woman lying in the sun on the other. These images are like notes sketched for this notebook film, personal records of his trip to Jerusalem; a dirty road, some passers-by, children, a woman, and people involved in a conversation. While there is no conventional narrative, it is a poetic, notebook film, whose evocative images convey the aesthetic of personal memory. It could be argued that they are connected to one another through the film's experimental approach to subjectivity, which may support filmmaking with an epistemological approach to reality.

Bacigalupo said that what he found striking about *Versus* was the 'poverty' of the film; for the image was so 'unclear', physically unpleasant, like 'a thing, a petrified experience, a wreckage, a ruin: it was not made for cultured animals. It is my treatise on the darkness of the night.'<sup>244</sup> This seems to suggest that, for him, the study of the materiality of the moving image meant to reflect humanity's total desolation, the lapse

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<sup>242</sup> Adorno, 2006, p. 259. I have discussed the topic of the nature of the archive in Chapter 1, Section 4.

<sup>243</sup> Bacigalupo, 2010, p. 155.

<sup>244</sup> My translation. The original text reads: 'È una cosa, esperienza pietrificata, rottame, desolazione: non è fatta per gli occhi di animali culturali. È il mio trattato della notte oscura.' Bacigalupo, 1974, pp. 22-36, (p. 25).

into personal memories clouding the present, and turning life and death into a perpetual dialectic.

## **6. A film-tetralogy: *Fiore d'eringio* (*The Eryngium cycle*, 1969-1970)**

Bacigalupo's repurposing technique with 'quotations' from the archive continued into his film tetralogy, *Fiore d'eringio*, where Benjamin's notion of the 'eternal transience of history and nature' can fruitfully be applied.<sup>245</sup>

In its potential for growth and change, *physis* lies within the film's mythological material posited, in light of the present, as critically relevant. Projected as a single filmic whole, Bacigalupo's *Eryngium* cycle reveals its meaningful circular poetic narrative, suggesting philosophical reflections on timeless oppositions: life and death; contemplation versus the vital energy of practice; the elements disturbing homogeneity and linearity, and bringing *physis* back to life.<sup>246</sup>

The eryngium is the thistle that the painter Dürer holds in a self-portrait of 1493, belonging to the Louvre: a symbol of marital fidelity, but also an ambiguous sexual metaphor. In the film, the flower is a symbol of cultural memory, and only appears in the last section titled *Coda*, when the filmmaker found an eryngium on the mountains in Northern Italy. It is also a metaphor for the cyclical nature of the four seasons of life. As a poetic essay film, it is a composite of film-diaries and self-portraiture from Bacigalupo's experiences while travelling to India and Nepal in 1969, during which he saw himself as a young man and artist. Despite not having a camera with him for a while, he kept a diary, which he called *Bamyan's News* after a valley in Afghanistan, which also inspired an Eastern soundtrack of the film section titled *Migration*. The

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<sup>245</sup> This theme is firstly examined in Chapter 1, Section 4 'Towards an essay film form', and in Adorno, 2006, 252-304 (p. 264).

<sup>246</sup> Bacigalupo, 1974, pp. 20-36 (p. 26).

tetralogy starts as a specifically personal record of experience, before progressing to more universal themes.

The *Eryngium* displays the painterly sensibility of the self-portrait, a trait of personal cinema of the avant-garde, which, as Raymond Bellour has argued, corresponds most faithfully to the only autobiographical cinematic form which is unencumbered by any specific generic conventions or story-telling devices:

The self-portrait clings to the analogical, the metaphorical, the poetic, far more than to the narrative. Its coherence lies in a system of remembrances, afterthoughts, superimpositions, correspondences. It thus takes on the appearance of discontinuity, of anachronistic juxtaposition, of montage. Where autobiography closes in on the life it recounts, the self-portrait opens itself up to a limitless totality.<sup>247</sup>

Thus, the film hinges on the formal dichotomy of the personal and subjective, the poetic and mythical. It offers an imaginary portrait of Bacigalupo as a twenty-three year old man and artist, carrying forward the cultural legacies of the past, both personal and mythical, as the film is also heavily influenced by Greek mythology and other ancient texts. Its essayistic register denotes the style of travel diary writing and evokes the 'I' of self-portraiture in painting.

The film offers itself as an object and source of a whole progression of possibilities, a form of experience as if held on pause before its completion, as the trace of a possible temporal trajectory, which is at times closer to its moment of utmost stillness. It is the affirmation of both the irrational and the responsible side of possible human actions.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Raymond Bellour, 'Eye for I: Video Self-Portraits', in *Eye for I: Video Self-Portraits*, ed. by Bellour (New York: Independent Curators Incorporated, 1989), pp. 7–20 (p. 7).

<sup>248</sup> Bacigalupo, 1974, pp. 20-36 (pp. 26-27).

## 6.1 *L'ultima Estate (The Last Summer, 1969)*<sup>249</sup>

*L'ultima Estate* was Bacigalupo's last film, despite his having started it before leaving for India, making it the first in the chronology of this film cycle. He called it 'his Nepalese film'. It is a film diary, very close to his personal life as it portrays his family, albeit always kept at a distance from the camera.<sup>250</sup> It is also a portrait of the bourgeois world in decline, showing its unmasked face, which in the filmmaker's words is also the face of death:

This is a moment of stillness in the course of the great migration. As in the family, the older members are saying goodbye to life, whereas the younger members are approaching it with gusto. Contemporary life is made to reveal an archaic substratum. Natural process is always there to sustain vision and acceptance.<sup>251</sup>

Thus, *L'ultima Estate* can be seen as Bacigalupo sketching his own rite-of-passage from his youth, moving away from his family bonds and middle-class rituals, to a more mature and conscious desire to 'escape' the hypocrisy of bourgeois life. The film is also symbolic of his artistic migration as an independent filmmaker starting to develop his own creative vision. It carries on the themes of youthful dissatisfaction and restlessness started in 1966 with *Quasi una tangente*, themes that he further explored over the course of one year during these travels, and throughout this cycle, ending with *Coda* in 1970.

## 6.2 *Né Bosco: una conversazione (Nor Wood: a conversation, 1970)*<sup>252</sup>

This film's title is a quotation from the poetry of Greek poet Sappho, 'And there was no meeting where we were separated, nor wood', to whom Bacigalupo dedicates the

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<sup>249</sup> *L'ultima Estate (The Last Summer, 1969, 8mm, 30')*

<sup>250</sup> 'The people who appear in this film are my family, not seen under a microscope but through a telescope, as Proust said.' My translation. The original text reads: 'Le persone che vi appaiono sono miei parenti, visti non al microscopio ma al telescopio, come diceva Proust.' Bacigalupo, 1974, pp. 20-36 (p. 27).

<sup>251</sup> Bacigalupo, 2010, p. 156.

<sup>252</sup> *Né Bosco: una conversazione (Nor Wood: a conversation, 1970, 16mm, silent, b/w, 15')*.

film.<sup>253</sup> The poem provided the dialogue for the whole film tetralogy, although in this film it appears as a text, alternating with images of both Indian and Western classical painting, sourced from his personal archive.<sup>254</sup>

*Né bosco* is a dense and lyrical tapestry, both textual and visual, drawing on the *Cantico dei Cantici* (*Song of Songs*) in the Bible. It represents a dialogue between two lovers, a man and a woman, while positive and negative images provide the visual underpinning for the lovers' conversation. Here, Bacigalupo was interested in experimenting by intertwining historical text and images, thus invoking new meanings.<sup>255</sup> The film also illustrates the dialectical relationship stemming from the gulf between universal binaries, such as life and death, and myth and the everyday.

### **6.3 *Migrazione* (*Migration*, 1970)<sup>256</sup>**

*Migrazione* was both a celebration of life and the filmmaker's praise of woman. It could be considered a feminist film, focusing on the representation of strong female figures in antique scriptures, mythological texts, and modernist and contemporary art. Woman is portrayed as a dominant character who can lead mass migrations and movements. This composition of different sources and epochs also encompasses images spontaneously recorded from ordinary life in the present. Using his 16mm camera as if it was a paintbrush, Bacigalupo envisioned his film like a fresco. Biblical moments are represented by filming sacred imagery at Christian sites, which are in turn superimposed as photographic layers, metaphorically representing the age of film as a fossil or as organic matter, apart from being mythical and archaic material. After

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<sup>253</sup> Bacigalupo, 2010, p. 157.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Bacigalupo, 1974, pp. 20-36 (p. 29).

<sup>256</sup> *Migrazione* (*Migration*, 1970, 16mm, b/w, 60').

the opening sequence, Bacigalupo films the frescoes of the Church of Santa Maria Antiqua, in the Roman Forum, consisting of at least three superimposed layers.<sup>257</sup> The most recurrent imagery, however, derives from Indian sacred scriptures, narrating the large ancient Indian migrations descending through Greece into Western Europe, worshipping and celebrating the life-principle.

As Bacigalupo has explained, the central myth is that of the Annunciation: the angel and the Madonna who is sometimes a virgin and sometimes a mother. It is also about the mystery and myth of Kore, or Persephone in Greek mythology, daughter of Zeus and queen of the underworld. The film includes superimpositions and montages of close-ups of female faces, which either stand for the Madonna or woman. As a man's voice recites the text of a poem on the soundtrack, a girl interprets this text.

In intertwining Biblical mysteries and myths, casting an 'archaeological gaze' over multiple temporalities, collective and personal memories, this tetralogy can be seen as a rich, multi-cultural terrain where Western and Eastern philosophies intersect.

The soundtrack is also a collection of multiple references: from Kafka's *The Castle* (the story of Amalia, which is the reverse of the Annunciation, since the young woman rejects the obscene advances of the autocrat-angel Sortini), to Book I of Herodotus's *Histories*, about marriage and death, which also suggests a critical analysis of bourgeois social conventions.

Through his copious use of mythological material, in the filmmaker's own words, 'the whole thing could be seen as a Mystery Play (a sacred representation)'.<sup>258</sup> *Migrazione* could be considered as evoking a timeless present, where the students' daily life is transformed into that of the eternal, sacred universe traversed by the

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<sup>257</sup> Bacigalupo, 1974, p. 30.

<sup>258</sup> Bacigalupo, 1974, p. 158.

migrants. Moved by childhood Catholic memories of his Sunday visits to church, and images of the Madonna and other female saints, his visions were also informed by Eastern philosophies which retain a more existential approach to the self. His cultural influences were mainly from T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, drawing on the lyrical-epic elements rather than the critical and grotesque.<sup>259</sup>

#### 6.4 *Coda (Coda, 1970)*<sup>260</sup>

This concluding part of the cycle deals with the theme of self-portraiture, and the various ways in which artists have approached life both courageously and tragically. Bacigalupo refers to Erich von Stroheim's *Foolish Wives*, Caravaggio's *Goliath*, Dante Alighieri's *Sestina* (which is read by the filmmaker), a whole sequence from the film *Medea* by Italian experimental filmmaker Pia Epreman, and Dürer's *Self-portrait with Eryngium*. Despite the dramatic representations of different artists in self-portraiture, the film ends on a hopeful note.<sup>261</sup>

This very personal, lyrical film is the result of considerable experimentation with the moving image, while also drawing on an idiosyncratic archive. In pitting the individual against the vastness of natural landscapes, it evokes an oneiric atmosphere, and perhaps a sense of displacement, since at the bottom of a long panoramic shot from a rooftop over a town (possibly the filmmaker's native Rapallo, where he was living) there is an epigraph: 'A Requiem for Soldiers lost in Ocean Transport.' Based on his reflections on his long journey through India and Nepal coming to a close in Italy, *Coda* depicts Bacigalupo's mindscape, populated by images from time

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<sup>259</sup> Bacigalupo in email conversation with myself in April 2013 about his cultural influences and use of his personal arts collection in his films.

<sup>260</sup> *Coda (Coda, 1970, 16mm, b/w, silent, 15')*.

<sup>261</sup> Bacigalupo, 2010, p. 159.

immemorial, late-modernity and post-revolutionary Italy. It also illustrates his youthful vitalist yearning for a timeless present, despite the involution of a bourgeois society, waging imperialistic wars, to leave ruins and the epitaphs of fallen heroes.

## **7. Citations from the personal archive**

Bacigalupo's philosophy of history and re-purposing of historical material recalls Benjamin's historical materialism and his philosophy of natural history. For Benjamin there could be no simple return to, or continuation of the past. History and tradition, which led to the decline of civilisations, were marked by wars, blood and horror, and were seen as a field of ruins.<sup>262</sup> Following a break in tradition, the authority of the past was lost, and for Benjamin citation had replaced the notion of transmissibility of history, and thus was the methodology that afforded him new ways of dealing with the past:

Walter Benjamin knew that the break in tradition and the loss of authority which occurred in his lifetime were irreparable, and he concluded that he had to discover new ways of dealing with the past. In this he became a master when he discovered that the transmissibility of the past had been replaced by its citability and that in place of its authority there had arisen a strange power to settle down, piecemeal, in the present and to deprive it of 'peace of mind', the mindless peace of complacency.<sup>263</sup>

Similar to Benjamin's 'bibliomania', citations were also for Bacigalupo closely related to a sense of rupture in tradition and the irreparable loss of authority in history. The importance of referencing the past was about doing it justice, rather than in the form of revelation of a secret which would shed light on the present. According to Hannah Arendt, for Benjamin:

It was an implicit admission that the past spoke directly only through things that had not been handed down, whose seeming closeness to the present was thus due precisely to their exotic character, which ruled out all claims to a binding authority.

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<sup>262</sup> Arendt, in Benjamin, 1999, pp. 7-60 (p. 42).

<sup>263</sup> Arendt, pp. 7-60 (p. 43).

Obligative truths were replaced by what was in some sense significant or interesting, and this of course meant – as no one knew better than Benjamin – that the ‘consistence of truth... has been lost.’ Outstanding among the properties that formed this ‘consistence of truth’ was, at least for Benjamin, whose early philosophical interest was theologically inspired, that truth concerned a secret and that the revelation of this secret had authority. Truth, so Benjamin said shortly before he became fully aware of the irreparable break in tradition and the loss of authority, is not ‘an unveiling which destroys the secret, but the revelation which does it justice.’<sup>264</sup>

In this sense, the historical records of archive materials, when deposited in a new context, could unsettle the present and create unexpected new meanings. Looking to the future, citation entailed extracting reified and petrified meaning that retained humanist value from the rubble of history, thus re-invigorating a sense of justice from the past. Historical and cultural quotation had an immanent and ‘transcendent force’ in relation to the universality of human tragedies. As Arendt explained: ‘the destructive power of quotations was “the only one which still contains the hope that something from this period will survive”’.<sup>265</sup> Bacigalupo’s cultural criticism and youthful wish for the union of life and art through film could be seen in light of Benjamin’s argument about the critic as:

an alchemist practising the obscure art of transmuting the futile elements of the real into the shining, enduring gold of truth, or rather watching and interpreting the historical process that brings about such magical transfiguration [...].<sup>266</sup>

Thus, I argue that Bacigalupo’s filmmaking made extensive use of archival quotation as a critical stance towards the culture industry. His films gestured towards the wish for a cultural transformation, laying the basis for a humanist understanding of life.

Because I am arguing throughout this thesis that *physis* in the archive represents its potential for innovation and change, the final part of this Chapter draws on Benjamin’s notion of ‘second nature’ and Buck-Morss’s *The Dialectics of Seeing* to

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<sup>264</sup> Arendt, pp. 7-60 (p. 45).

<sup>265</sup> Arendt, pp. 7-60 (p. 43).

<sup>266</sup> Arendt, pp. 7-60 (p. 11).

argue that two epistemological paradigms are at work in Bacigalupo's citation methodology: the liberating power of 'magic', and of natural history and myth.

### 7.1 The 'magic' of natural history

Regarding Benjamin's incomplete *Arcades Project* (*Passagen-Werk*), Buck-Morss has explained that he wanted to reconstruct philosophical ideas out of historical material:

Benjamin perceived historical nature as an expression of truth's essential transitoriness in its contradictory extremes – as extinction and death on the one hand, and as creative potential and the possibility for change on the other.<sup>267</sup>

As citations marked the transitoriness of history, they were as much for Benjamin as for Bacigalupo the result of an archaeological excavation into the depths of knowledge and literary sources, where allegory performed a magical role.

A passage from *The Tempest* with Ariel singing in Act I, Scene Two, illuminates this archaeological practice and the role of allegory in re-animating the fossilised life of ancient texts lying within the archive:

Ariel (*sings*):  
Full fathom five thy father lies,  
Of his bones are coral made;  
Those are pearls that were his eyes;  
Nothing of him that doth fade,  
But doth suffer a sea-change  
Into something rich and strange.<sup>268</sup>

Ariel is singing about the drowning of Alonso, King of Naples, after a storm has been conjured up by the magical powers of the usurped Duke of Milan, Prospero, which causes the transformation of Alonso's bones and eyes into coral and pearls, as he lies deep in the sea. Such metaphorical composition is based on dialectical ideas. One is about the animal and human body, earth and sea, illustrating the legend of man's

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<sup>267</sup> Buck-Morss, p. 66.

<sup>268</sup> Shakespeare, 1987, p. 123.

regression into a marine fossil – here the result of Prospero’s magical practices to punish Alonso’s malevolent actions. In relation to Bacigalupo’s film, and its reactivation of the past through experimental techniques, the Shakespearian allegory can be deployed to explain how film form may work like magic, creating life changes for the individual. Prospero’s actions are the effect of his ‘violent thinking’, resulting in Alonso’s drowning, and causing death or ‘drowning in a sea of illusions and deceptions’. Thus Alonso’s tricks and falsities become fossilised nature, and Prospero’s ‘violent thinking’, is a metaphor for Bacigalupo’s experimental re-purposing, which may unsettle the complacent pace of narrative linearity, causing ‘a sea-change into something rich and strange’.

The effectiveness of supernatural magic as allegory in *The Tempest* can, metaphorically, dislocate the fossil in the archive, a fragment from its original context thus triggering profound transformations. Those who were shipwrecked all risked dying because of the tempest; in fact, Prospero’s purpose was to cause an assault on their contrived lives, and so lead them to re-evaluate the moral system that had brought about his dispossession and exile. In relation to the force of literary citations and Benjamin, Arendt also analysed the power of allegorical narrative in *The Tempest*, and reflected:

This method is like the modern equivalent of ritual invocations, and the spirits that now arise invariably are those spiritual essences from a past that have suffered the Shakespearean ‘sea-change’ from living eyes to pearls, from living bones to coral.<sup>269</sup>

The ‘magic’ invoked by primitive cinema and classical narratives, together with discourses on primordial life forms, are essential to Bacigalupo’s experimentation with fragmented histories and speculations on the present-day world. The potential re-

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<sup>269</sup> Arendt, pp. 7-60 (p. 52).

activation of *physis*, generating growth and transformations, remains dormant.

However, I argue that Bacigalupo's extensive use of his archive to yield quotations was a way for him to generate meanings in perpetual transformation.

Rachel Moore has posited technology and the archaic as never distant from one another in her study of fetishism for old films and found footage. Moore's argument about Benjamin and technology resonates with the dialectical thinking in Bacigalupo's films: 'Walter Benjamin's suggestion, that when delving into the technological secrets of modernity the archaic is never that far off, grows palpable when watching film from the archives'.<sup>270</sup> With regard to the allegory of supernatural magic that film technology can produce when it comes to reviving the archaic, Moore also mentions

*The Tempest*:

In narratives that pre-date cinema and modern technology, such as Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, amongst Ariel's magical manoeuvres on Prospero's account is the charming of Miranda and Ferdinand so that they are immediately devoted to one another.

Thus, through the 'magical practices' of experimental techniques and the film apparatus, the audience is transported to the '*facies hippocratica* of history, a petrified primordial landscape', and beyond, or back to a new life.<sup>271</sup> Moore writes: 'Moments of cinematic physis, moments in which technology reveals the archaic are moments in which the enciphered and petrified object reawakens before us'.<sup>272</sup>

In *Versus* Bacigalupo also revealed his interest in fossil and early biological life-forms through the shape of a shellfish, which illustrates the idea of life at its most primordial stage, the archaic of the photographic and moving image.<sup>273</sup> Through his

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<sup>270</sup> Rachel Moore, 'Love Machines', *Film Studies*, Issue 4, Summer 2004, 1-11 (p. 1).

<sup>271</sup> Benjamin in his *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1925) also mentions *physis* and signification, as quoted by Adorno, 2006, pp. 252-304 (p. 263).

<sup>272</sup> Moore, 2004, 1-11 (p. 10).

<sup>273</sup> Bacigalupo, 2010, p. 143.

study of the 'poverty' of film, locating the embryonic essence of the moving image in pre-industrial 'wreckage, a ruin', he thus evokes an idea close to Benjamin's 'ur-image', which springs out of a dream of the future.<sup>244</sup> Buck-Morss wrote: 'Nowhere in his writings do the ur-images have a status other than that of dream symbol. They provide the motivation for future emancipation.'<sup>274</sup> In this sense, *Versus* reveals film as being closely connected to both a dream-like and an archaic dimension.

## 7.2 Myth in the archive

Myth also plays a central role in Bacigalupo's anti-illusionist filmmaking, which provides imaginary portals to existential landscapes. The airy spirit 'speaking' in *Ariel Loquitur* is entrenched in myth. Ariel's magical imprisonment in a hollow oak tree by the witch Sycorax is rooted in Celtic mythology, while the performance of masques as part of Jacobean Court Spectacles usually derived from Greek mythology. The fertility masque during the wedding ceremony of Miranda and Ferdinand is attended by the Goddesses Juno, Ceres and Iris, while Ariel also appears as a sea-nymph and as a harpy.<sup>275</sup> In his introduction to *The Tempest*, Stephen Orgel observes: 'As the move from conflict to harmony is central to the action of the masque, so antithesis is basic to its structure'.<sup>276</sup> This is why the role of the figure of Ariel is central to Bacigalupo's film, especially when placed in antithesis to the deformed slave Caliban. Ariel represents a well-meaning person who can 'bewitch' to attain education, but also to

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<sup>274</sup> Buck-Morss, p. 116.

<sup>275</sup> 'The Jacobean masque was largely the creation of one poet, and the form as Jonson developed it was both celebratory and educative. It undertakes to lead the court to its ideal self through a combination of satire, exhortation, and praise. [...] Jonson's masques are always about the resolution of conflict, personified, in this early period of his masque-writing career, in clear symbolic figures: the lustful satyrs and obedient fairies [...]; maleficent witches banished by heroic queens [...]; the sphinx of Ignorance set against Love [...].'. Orgel, 1987, pp. 2-60 (pp. 44-45).

<sup>276</sup> Orgel, pp. 2-60 (p. 45).

illuminate the wisdom within the darkness of magical powers. Thus, his role is a humanist, redemptive one.

Throughout the films analysed in this Chapter, Eastern, Greek and Western mythologies and the sacred scriptures have provided a meta-textual structure, although, while they represent universal parables of humankind, they also provide important textual allegories. The historical continuum splintered by photographic and editing techniques proposes a renewed value for myth in the sixties, playing its part in Bacigalupo's film aesthetic devoted to social commitment. This was a new way of seeing and knowing both the past and the present; in this case, the moving image as the sum of its parts, materials deposited in the archive that emerge to affect the audience's passive consumption of film.<sup>277</sup>

Myth and allegory serve the purpose of assigning new meanings to material culture in contemporary consumer society. They open up the doors to oblivion in order to reform cultural bonds with lost memories of imperialist wars and a fascist dictatorship, hence potentially re-awakening a critical approach to the present. This can also be further underpinned by Eco's critical assessment of commodity culture in his essay 'Form as social commitment', according to which the artist, in order to overcome alienation, needs to inhabit the model he wants to change. The mythological or allegorical formal constructs in Bacigalupo allowed him to re-envision this cultural transfiguration. Such a formal analogy resonates with Buck-Morss's study of myth in Benjamin's *Arcades Project*:

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<sup>277</sup> This critical theory re-connects us to Edoardo Bruno's writings and observations on a 'materialist cinema', as espoused in his 1971 article 'Ragguaglio sul cinema sperimentale di Knokke' ('A Survey on Experimental Film in Knokke'), which I mentioned in the introduction to this thesis (Bruno, in Lodato, 1981, pp. 247-256 (p. 249)). In 1976, Peter Gidal's enriched this view with his theory on 'Materialist Film', also reinforcing the structural and self-reflexive practice by stating: 'Structural/Materialist film attempts to be non-illusionist. The process of the film's making deals with devices that result in demystification or attempted demystification of the film process.' Peter Gidal, *Structural Film Anthology* (London: BFI, 1978), p. 146. The materialist sensibility of Italian experimental cinema lay bare an aesthetic of the individual's consumerism, the experience of the consumer and producer of film as memory.

In the era of industrial culture, consciousness exists in a mythic, dream state, against which historical knowledge is the only antidote. But the particular kind of historical knowledge that is needed to free the present from myth is not easily uncovered. Discarded and forgotten, it lies buried within surviving culture, remaining invisible precisely because it was of so little use to those in power. Benjamin's "Copernical revolution" completely strips history of its legitimating, ideological function. [...] its cultural contents are redeemed as the source of critical knowledge that alone can place the present into question.<sup>278</sup>

This approach to history seems close to Bacigalupo's desire to re-invigorate the interaction between life and art and between 'apocalyptic' and 'integrated' views of modern popular culture. I argue that Buck-Morss' argument on Benjamin's 'rescue operation' further illuminates Bacigalupo's view of popular culture particularly when seen in such marked contrast with the past:

Benjamin makes us aware that the transmission of culture (high and low), which is central to this rescue operation, is a political act of the highest import – not because culture in itself has the power to change the given, but because historical memory affects decisively the collective, political will for change. Indeed, it is its only nourishment.<sup>279</sup>

In this Chapter, I have explored some of Bacigalupo's early work, where his experimental, epistemological approach to filmmaking could be seen as an expression of 'form as social commitment'. This practice aimed to foster independent and subjective art practices. The citation of archival materials has allowed Bacigalupo to create essayistic films such as the diary and self-portrait films. All of his films analysed in this Chapter are steeped in classical and ancient literature and can often be read in an allegorical key, which generated a new sensibility for the union of life and the arts for the avant-garde of the sixties. Similar to Benjamin's *Arcades*, unsettled by montage and photographic juxtaposition, the fossil life of myths and ancient scriptures is endowed with new meaning and force. As Buck-Morss wrote:

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<sup>278</sup> Buck-Morss, p. x.

<sup>279</sup> Buck-Morss, pp. x-xi.

For Benjamin the technique of montage had ‘special, perhaps even total rights’ as a progressive form because it ‘interrupts the context into which it is inserted’ and thus ‘counteracts illusion’ and he intended it to be the principle governing the construction of the *Passagen-Werk*: ‘This work must develop to the highest point the art of citing without citation marks. Its theory connects most closely with that of montage.’<sup>280</sup>

The ‘dialectical image’ of myth and allegory outlines the importance of the cyclical movement of natural history as symbolically exemplified by the *Eryngium cycle*, the film diptych *60 metri per il 31 marzo* and *Versus*, and the recurrent symbol of a circle with a tangential line in *Quasi una tangente*.<sup>281</sup> As Benjamin observed in connection with his *Arcades* project: ‘a scarcely past ur-epoch opens up when we gaze into the Passages that have spread into every city. Here is housed the last dinosaur of Europe, the consumer.’<sup>282</sup> Bacigalupo’s revisiting classical and ancient literature may then be seen as a way to probe the historical nature of popular cultural tropes, and shape his philosophy about the transitoriness of natural history keen to displace the archaic from within the archive. Not only deployed for this reason, but also in essayistic films such as the diary and the self-portrait film, citation had become also a useful source of speculation for critical analysis.

While his early films are reminiscent of the decadence and thoughtfulness of the American Beat generation's literature and cinema, as well as the exuberance and vitality of the French New Wave, some of his later films have a much sterner expressive quality; they cast an oblique look over dystopian, apocalyptic landscapes where ‘the sense of an ending is everywhere.’<sup>283</sup> He wrote:

When I had to re-utilise some sequences from *Quasi una Tangente* to insert into my next film, *Ariel Loquitur*, I found a lot of waste material; despite this, I thought it was very good, and obviously I could not understand why I did not use it then.

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<sup>280</sup> Buck-Morss, p. 67.

<sup>281</sup> As mentioned in my earlier Chapter 3, Benjamin’s ‘dialectical image’ is a montage of images that questions ‘the nature of commodities’: ‘the principle of construction is that of montage, whereby the image’s ideational elements remain unreconciled, rather than fusing into one “harmonising perspective”’. Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Buck-Morss, p. 65.

<sup>283</sup> Bacigalupo, 2010, p. 143.

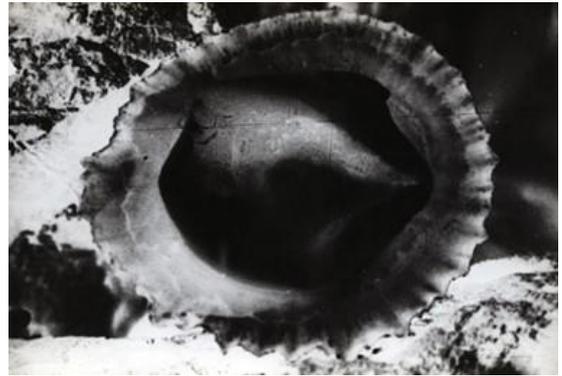
However, this is a common factor to any action. That is we need to carry on even when we know that all our actions have an ending.<sup>284</sup>

Experimental film as a form of personal expression, and potentially innovative approach to the archive, continues in the next Chapter with the *cinigiornale*, a form of avant-garde newsreel, which helped to re-envisage and re-map a new world.

**Figures: 1-4**



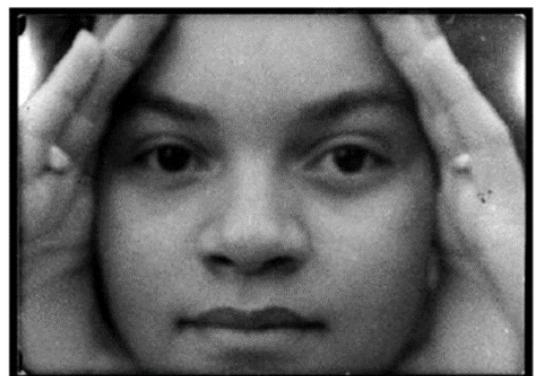
1. *60 metri per il 31 marzo*  
(*200 feet for March 31<sup>st</sup>*, 1968)



2. *Versus* (1968)



3. *Fiore d'eringio*  
(*The Eryngium cycle*, 1969-1970)



4. *Migrazione* (*Migration*, 1970)

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<sup>284</sup> My translation. The original text reads: 'Quando dovetti riutilizzare certe sequenze della *Tangente* per *Ariel Loquitur*, il film successivo, trovai molto materiale scartato, per quanto mi sembrasse ottimo, e ovviamente la ragione mi sfuggiva. Ma questo e' un dato comune d'ogni azione, come si diceva all'inizio. Insomma, bisogna andare avanti anche sapendo che ogni azione è votata alla morte'. Bacigalupo, 1974, pp. 20-36 (p. 22).

## Chapter 5. The Avant-garde *Cinegiornale*

This Chapter explores a range of experimental films whose ways of considering the past and envisioning a transformative reality differed from Bacigalupo's narrative allegories of humankind. It focuses on compilation and montage newsreels, known as *cinegiornali*; films whose innovative approach to the archive consisted not only in adopting the style and format of state-propaganda *cinegiornali* in order to create a new cultural archive for future actualities and personal essayistic films, but also in re-contextualising past archival footage. With their innovative and experimental methods, these newsreels can be deemed avant-garde *cinegiornali*, whereby both filmmakers and audiences could participate in the reworking of historic archive material. While on the one hand Alfredo Leonardi's *Cinegiornale* was a montage film, and hence completely transformed the classical Italian cine-newsreel format, in contrast Cesare Zavattini's *Cinegiornali* hinged, like Bacigalupo's adoption of ancient and modernist meta-textual structures for his films, on the compilation film format. For this reason, it is worth providing a brief historical account of this narrative convention.

The compilation film form, based on the recording of reality in documentary films as well as fictional dramas found in the archive, dates back to the era of early cinema. One of the earliest, almost legendary, cases of a compilation film was allegedly created by the Lumière operator Francis Doublier in 1898. This entailed re-contextualising existing moving image material into a new film composite, probably shown as separate reels in view of the date.<sup>285</sup> This anticipated what was to become an

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<sup>285</sup> Of this case, Jay Leyda wrote: 'In 1898 Francis Doublier was working for the Lumière brothers, travelling and presenting public programs from their collection of film documents. Movies produced by the Lumières were primarily topical records of places and everyday human activities, some of which were staged. The stationary camera was fixed on a tripod, and the individual shots were of relatively long duration, often the length of the camera roll. While travelling in South Russia showing films in the Jewish districts, Doublier was inspired to take advantage of the local interest in the scandalous Dreyfus case. He cut scenes from several of the Lumières' disparate stock rolls – none of which included any scenes of Alfred Dreyfus – and combined

avant-garde paradigm. In his 1964 book *Film Begets Film*, Jay Leyda described how compiling found footage allowed the filmmaker to create new ‘actuality’ films, therefore bringing the original footage within a new documentary aesthetic.<sup>286</sup> In *Recycled images. The Art and Politics of Found Footage Films*, William C. Wees observes:

Compilation films may reinterpret images taken from film and television archives, but generally speaking, they do not challenge the representational nature of the images themselves. That is, they still operate on the assumption that there is a direct correspondence between the images and their profilmic sources in the real world.<sup>287</sup>

Thus the compilation film is the result of film segments refashioned and re-located from a documented ‘real’ into a new assemblage, on which the avant-garde practitioner may exercise new, authorial narrative control. It draws on the legacy of ‘found footage’ practice that ran parallel with the early years of the cinema as a commercial and, in some cases, propagandistic enterprise. With films such as *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* and *The Great Road* (both released in 1927), Esfir Shub, a film editor working alongside Sergei Eisenstein and Lev Kuleshov in post-revolutionary Russia, developed the art of the compilation film, showing how historical narrative could be re-fashioned for the ideological purposes of the present.<sup>288</sup>

In exploring different examples of avant-garde *cinegiornali*, this Chapter focuses first on Zavattini’s *Cinegiornali*, which consisted of independent initiatives aimed at

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them to create a sequence that, when accompanied by live narration, sufficiently fuelled the imagination of his audience to the point that they believed that they were watching a recently shot, linear document of Captain Dreyfus being arrested, court-marshalled, and shipped off to Devil’s Island. This new technique of taking disjointed footage and compiling it into a convincing film that could render evidence and promote the authenticity of an event set the stage for future newsreel and documentary productions.’ Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), p. 37.

<sup>286</sup> Leyda defined the so-formed compilation of ‘actuality’ films as: ‘Any means by which the spectator is compelled to look at familiar shots as if he had not seen them before, or by which the spectator’s mind is made more alert to the broader meanings of old materials – this is the aim of the correct compilation.’ Jay Leyda, *Films Beget Films* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), p. 45.

<sup>287</sup> Wees, p. 36.

<sup>288</sup> Annette Michelson and Kevin O’Brien, *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1984), p. 146.

experimenting with the compilation film, and earlier formats of actuality. Secondly, I examine Alfredo Leonardi's experimental *Cinegiornale*, made of a montage of archive film. Before doing so, it is necessary to examine the lineage of this form of compilation and montage *cinegiornali*, in order to foreground not only a rupture in the convention of making news on film, but also the kind of traditional materials and formats they were seeking to emulate and transform: the *Cinegiornale Luce* and *La Settimana Incom cinegiornali*.

### **1. Historic *cinegiornali*: *Cinegiornale Luce* and *La Settimana Incom*: (1927-1965)**

Originally cast in the style of the news-reportage narrative, the *cinegiornale*, or newsreel, was steeped in a long Italian tradition of circulating information through short documentaries on social and political affairs made for the cinema. Like Pathé or Movietone newsreels in Britain, except state-approved in Fascist Italy, *cinegiornali* were screened before feature films in cinemas. They played a vital role in promoting political attitudes towards colonial ventures and constructing a national populist ideology, although ostensibly devoted to social and political welfare and supporting progressive cultural objectives.<sup>289</sup>

In 1927, the *Istituto Luce (L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa)* started producing *cinegiornali* alongside other short educational-didactic and propaganda documentaries. Over a thousand silent newsreels were made between 1927 and 1931, and over two thousand between 1931 and 1943, with over 53 more made in Venice during the Republic of Saló, from 11 October 1943 until 18 March 1945. Today, 90% of these are archived and preserved in the *Luce* archive.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Forgacs, pp. 68-69.

<sup>290</sup> In 1925 The Union of Educational Cinematography (*Luce*) provided the decisive impetus to documentary film production. Nationalised in 1926, from 1927 it started producing educational, didactic and propagandist short films, alongside a *cinegiornale*.

According to Adriano Aprà, the *cinegiornale* aesthetic had a considerable impact on neorealism, whose style and narrative structure drew on ‘warfare realist’ films, such as *Il cammino degli eroi* (*The Heroes’ Walk*, Corrado D’Errico, 1936), a compilation of archival film deposited at the *Istituto Luce*, which chronicled the Fascist war in Abyssinia (modern Ethiopia). Aprà saw *Il cammino degli eroi* as the summation of a series of aesthetic and stylistic choices, much closer to fiction than to documentary; and he also considered Roberto Rossellini’s ‘war trilogy’, *La Nave Bianca* (*The White Ship*, 1941), *Un Pilota Ritorna* (*A Pilot Returns*, 1942) and *L’uomo dalla Croce* (*The Man from the Cross*, 1943) as ‘formally invested’ in the warfare realism genre.<sup>291</sup>

The *Cinegiornali Luce* were steeped in this narrative form. They contributed to fostering a national cultural identity, based on values such as modernity and innovation, and on the strength and pride of fascist ‘revolutionary’ power, which opposed any political movement threatening its drive for unity and expansionism. Cinema became another medium through which to solicit and perpetuate Italians’ consensus in supporting Mussolini’s nationalist vision. *Cinegiornali* contributed to the Fascist dictator’s ubiquity, enhancing his power through modern mass media. These compilations of documentary footage would typically show large crowds gathered in streets and squares, paying tribute to his victories and self-aggrandizing expansionist plans.

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The 1926 law guaranteed *Luce* the monopoly of the cinematographic information and sanctioned the obligation to program in cinema theatres the *cinegiornale*. My translation of the original text in Adriano Aprà, ‘Primi approcci al documentario italiano’ (‘First approaches to the Italian documentary’), in *Annali dell’Archivio audiovisivo del movimento operaio e democratico*, 1 (Audiovisual Archive Annuals of the Workers and Democratic Movement), Roma, 1998, [http://host.uniroma3.it/docenti/casula/\\_private/Apr%C3%A0%20-%20Primi%20approcci%20al%20documentario%20italiano.pdf](http://host.uniroma3.it/docenti/casula/_private/Apr%C3%A0%20-%20Primi%20approcci%20al%20documentario%20italiano.pdf), p. 40 (40-67) [accessed 24 April 2013].

<sup>291</sup> Aprà, 1998, pp. 40-67 (pp. 44-45).

During the fascist years, the considerable propagandistic power of the *cinogiornali* lay in helping to indoctrinate the armed forces with ‘positive’ national values, such as prowess and fortitude, and promoting the advancement of Italian civilisation through the proud figure of the ‘new Fascist man’. Populist images of smiling young workers in factories or farming would infuse this type of propaganda with human energy and vigour: people typically looked content and at peace with their surroundings. Especially at a time when Mussolini and Hitler’s ideologies were drawing closer, leading up to their military and political partnership during the Second World War, the propaganda values of the *cinogiornali*, based on selective actuality footage and warfare realism, were integral to the longevity of Fascist Imperialism.<sup>292</sup>

Another state-supported newsreel which had populist appeal was the *cinogiornale* series *La Settimana Incom*. The company *Industria Cortometraggi Milano* (from which the acronym was formed – the *Milan Industry of the Short Film*) was founded in 1938, and started a tradition of weekly programming which lasted for nearly thirty years, only ending in 1965.<sup>293</sup> As Forgacs and Gundle argued:

[...] clearly there were important ideological differences between the Fascist newsreels of the *Istituto Luce* and those of the postwar years. However, there were continuities in the mode of production and exhibition – newsreels were still inserted between successive projections of features – and in certain aspects of style: duration, tone of commentary, and use of accompanying music. [...] Despite that *Incom* was a private company, and newsreel production was contracted both to its own crews and to a number of small private documentary-producing firms, the contents of the newsreels were still, as they had been under Fascism, an official voice of the government.<sup>294</sup>

Between the late forties and sixties, *La Settimana Incom* not only proclaimed national pride through stereotypical images of fortitude (as Italians were rebuilding their

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<sup>292</sup> [...] historians generally agree that the nonfiction films, newsreels, and documentaries, produced by the *Istituto Luce* under the Fascists and by the *Settimana Incom* after the war, were vehicles of governmental opinion.’ Forgacs and Gundle, p. 216.

<sup>293</sup> In 1967, the entire collection was purchased by *Istituto Luce*, where it has been preserved ever since.

<sup>294</sup> Forgacs and Gundle, pp. 217-18.

political and economic identity post-war), but also through interviews with migrants from Southern Italy, which showed the integration of a neglected portion of society into a country still living in poverty. However, through the didactic tone of the voiceover, and a variety of less observational stylistic choices that included camera angles and movement, colour, lighting, and editing, the social environment appeared sentimentalised, and the tone was generally ‘euphoric’. The *Cinegiornali Incom* were not impartial when illustrating post-war reality; in fact, they contributed to its fictionalisation.<sup>295</sup> Their representation of post-war Italy was based not only on portraying Christian, humanist values, but also capitalist interests.

Since the late fifties, *Cinegiornali Incom* had consciously become a central arena for the presentation of film stars, ordinary people and politicians alike.<sup>296</sup> Sandro Bernardi identified the propaganda objective that was typical of the *Cinegiornali Luce*: ‘Informing people is still clearly a matter of ‘forming’ people.’<sup>297</sup> Pierre Sorlin emphasised *Incom*’s role in the country’s economic propaganda, as it was financially dependent on the government, which gave it a vested interest in evoking positive representations of national welfare: ‘the *Cinegiornali Incom* were less the Government’s voice than that of capitalism’.<sup>298</sup> However, he also argued that there was an important difference from the *Luce* newsreels in the way the *Cinegiornali Incom* portrayed the progress of civilisation, based less on the nation than on the individual.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Augusto Sainati, ‘Prefazione’ (‘Foreword’) in *La Settimana Incom. Cinegiornali e informazione negli anni '50 (Settimana Incom: Cinegiornali and Information during the 1950s)*, ed. by Augusto Sainati (Torino: Lindau, 2001), pp. 2-20 (p. 13).

<sup>296</sup> Sainati, ‘Stile e formato dell’informazione “Incom”’ (‘Style and format of information Incom’), in Sainati, ed., pp. 21-34 (p. 27).

<sup>297</sup> Sandro Bernardi, ‘Immagini di paesaggio’, in Sainati, pp. 35-50 (p. 37).

<sup>298</sup> Pierre Sorlin, ‘La *Settimana Incom*: messaggera del futuro: verso la società dei consumi’, in Sainati, ed., pp. 62-76 (p. 72).

<sup>299</sup> Original text reads: ‘Si potrebbe dire che i servizi della Settimana relativi all’economia non fossero altro che mera propaganda e che in ciò essi somiglino a quelli del fascismo. Tuttavia una differenza fondamentale li distingueva dai reportage filmati per i cinegiornali Luce: la Settimana insisteva ripetutamente sul fatto che il beneficiario del progresso era l’individuo, non la patria.’ Sorlin, in Sainati, ed., pp. 62-76 (p. 75).

On the other hand, Franco Monteleone argued that the role of the *Cinegiornali Incom* was instrumental in making propaganda, since they appealed to the spectator's emotional reactions through an invasive configuration of a reality based on beliefs, collective representations, and symbolic behaviour; that is, on ideology.<sup>300</sup> He also outlined the 'deformations' implicit in the *Cinegiornali*'s narratives, which helped construct an aesthetic of spectacle and sensationalism typical of mass media information: '[...] the capacity to manipulate and invent reality, to hollow, falsify, ritualise it, that is to make it compatible with and intimately accepted as 'true' by the spectator's imaginary'.<sup>301</sup>

In proposing a vastly different perspective from the *Cinegiornali* on social reality, emphasising people's abilities and opportunities to intervene in newsreel storytelling, the avant-garde *cinegiornali* had the objective of communicating a newly invigorated optimism for the future, aiming to improve awareness of Italy's historical and cultural legacies. The innovative film language of Cesare Zavattini's *Cinegiornale della pace* (1963) and *Cinegiornali liberi* (1968-70), and of the experimental filmmaker Alfredo Leonardi's *Cinegiornale* (1967) expressed a new-found freedom in a variety of aesthetic expressions.

## 2. Avant-garde *cinegiornali*

I maintain that the avant-garde *cinegiornale* aesthetic of the 1960s stood at the intersection of compilation and montage experimental filmmaking. Its intention was to

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<sup>300</sup> Franco Monteleone, 'Dalla Pellicola alla Telecamera: l'informazione per immagini tra stereotipo sociale e controllo politico' ('From Film to Video-Camera: information with images between social stereotype and political control'), in Sainati, ed., pp. 115-128 (pp. 121-2).

<sup>301</sup> My translation. The original text reads: '[...] la capacita' di manipolare e inventare la realta', di svuotarla, di falsarla, ritualizzarla, ovvero renderla compatibile e intimamente accettata come "vera" nell'immaginario dello spettatore.' Monteleone, in Sainati, ed., pp. 115-128 (p. 122).

preserve cultural memory, challenge the legacies of Fascism and give representation to marginalised voices expressing anti-war sentiments.

Re-shaping existing *cinegiornali* became a hermeneutic activity that ran parallel to mainstream information as broadcast by the state television channel RAI, taking place in the cinema. This alternative discourse communicated a more subjective and inspiring account of everyday reality as told and experienced by ordinary people.<sup>302</sup> It had a distinctly humanist and pacifist message, and a completely different tone and purpose from the more overtly political ‘militant cinema’ associated with the extra-parliamentary left (such as, amongst others, Movimento Studentesco, Potere Operaio, and Lotta Continua), with which this study is not concerned.

*Cinegiornali della pace* (1963) and *Cinegiornali liberi* (1968-1970), created by one of the forefathers of neorealism, Cesare Zavattini, were rooted in a profoundly humanist sentiment for historical ‘reality’; they testified to the cultural legacy bequeathed by neorealism, imbued with a naturalist aesthetic and social realist concerns. Zavattini’s dedication to making news about ordinary lives could be seen as similar to Alfredo Leonardi’s video recordings of social inequalities, which he made in the early seventies.<sup>303</sup> But in his 1967 *Cinegiornale*, Leonardi expressed his criticism of Italy’s fascist past, and the colonial and imperialist wars in the East and

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<sup>302</sup> On 11 September 1952, the inaugural national RAI Television broadcast showed the first news program whose structure was inspired by the “cinegiornale-actualité” style, containing five or six news reports narrated by an off-screen voice and ending with a sequence of curious actualities. The original text read: ‘Il primo notiziario televisivo è irradiato da Milano. Dura 15 minuti ed è trasmesso ogni martedì, giovedì e sabato. È ispirato al cinegiornale, con una serie di cinque o sei servizi commentati da una voce fuori campo e conclusi da una sequenza di curiosità.’ Aldo Grasso, *Il Corriere della Sera* (originally published in Aldo Grasso, *La nascita della televisione italiana*, Milano: Garzanti, 1992).

<http://cinquantamila.corriere.it/storyTellerThread.php?threadId=nascelatv> [accessed 10 May 2013]

<sup>303</sup> In 1971, Leonardi formed a small collective of documentary makers with Anna Lajolo and Guido Lombardi, Videobase, which aimed to record on video the life of the working class and its discontents, thus exposing the capitalist exploitation and segregation of this class, its plight and place within class struggle. Guido Lombardi and Anna Lojolo, ‘Guido Lombardi e Anna Lojolo’ in Bacigalupo, 1974, pp. 130-144 (p. 141). *Il Fitto Dei Padroni Non Lo Paghiamo Più* (*We are paying the masters’ rent no more*) is one of their documentaries and can be seen in its entirety on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJkCaWCbys>. [accessed 12 May 2013].

the West. He also focused on the ontological and formal properties of found footage by treating it as an expressive artistic medium.

### 3. Cesare Zavattini: *Cinegiornale della Pace* (1963) and *Cinegiornali Liberi* (1968-70)<sup>304</sup>

Zavattini's series of *Cinegiornale della pace* were symptomatic of a need felt by many to assert and strengthen humanist values, thus avoiding the nationalistic sentiments propounded by fascist newsreels.<sup>305</sup> In his manifesto 'Appello per un *cinegiornale della pace*' ('A plea for a newsreel about peace'), Zavattini appealed to the ordinary person and filmmaker to shoot, even if only on 16mm film, in order to express their views on issues such as peace and war, especially amid widespread anxieties and a generalised sense of uncertainty. He suggested that the narrative tone of these films should be moderate and devoid of sentimentality.<sup>306</sup> In his introduction to Zavattini's *Cinegiornale*, the neorealist director Mario Soldati exhorted the wider public to participate in whatever register they wished, be it poetry, fiction, confession, testimony, a straightforward protest, or a chronicle, even a fable. These subjective forms of personal essayistic films should not aspire to participate in film competitions; rather they should follow people's wish to freely explore their historical reality. In such a multiform style, *Cinegiornale della pace* allowed interviewees to reflect on the widespread fear of a nuclear war, and discuss ways in which they could collectively work towards peace.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> *Il Cinegiornale della Pace (Newsreel for Peace, 1963, 16mm, b/w)* and *Cinegiornali liberi (Free Newsreels, 1968-70, 8mm, b/w)*

<sup>305</sup> A documentary on Zavattini's *cinegiornale della pace Il Cinegiornale della pace* (1963) can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qUICqgExfRs>

<sup>306</sup> Cesare Zavattini, 'Appello per un film sulla pace' ('A plea for a film about peace'), in <http://www.pipernofaccini.it/cinegiornale.htm> [accessed 6 May 2013]. Originally published in 1962, 'Lettera di Zavattini all'Anac sui cinegiornali liberi', on <https://www.anac-autori.it/online/lettera-di-zavattini-allanac-sui-cinegiornali-liberi/>. [accessed 13 May 2013].

<sup>307</sup> An off-screen voice, over a black screen, introduces the film with the words: 'General, your tank is a powerful machine. It levels a ditch and smashes hundreds of men. However, it has a fault, it needs a tank driver. General, your bomber is powerful, it

Whilst re-deploying narrative devices similar to the original *cinegiornali*'s journalistic style, and at times even didactic in tone, the *Cinegiornale della pace* were in fact clearly based on anti-warfare realism. They provided a typical example of an optimistic and democratic narrative strategy, encouraging meditations on socio-political issues, especially on the cultural legacies of Fascism and World War II.

Zavattini's *Cinegiornali liberi* continued this innovative format and humanist sensibility. On 27 June 1968, he wrote to ANAC (*Associazione Nazionale Autori Cinematografici*) asking for their support for his *Cinegiornali liberi*, in order to turn mass media information into more independent and immediate expressive forms.<sup>308</sup>

Founded in Reggio Emilia, the aim of the *Cinegiornali liberi* cooperative was to promote collaborative work among intellectuals, factory workers, students and farmers, developing a creative yet critical approach to mainstream documentary on everyday current affairs. The *Cinegiornali* were free ("liberi"), since their making was open to all, even those who only wanted to contribute with simple outline ideas. In Zavattini's view, this organisation could have a positive impact on social and political changes and facilitate cultural debates: '*Cinegiornali liberi* were made with the awareness of being a political instrument and the start of a movement which makes this concreteness its emblem'.<sup>309</sup>

Zavattini explained that his cooperative was looking for distribution channels that understood the need to document any expression of social discontent, in order to

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flies faster than a storm and can carry more than an elephant. However, it has a fault, it needs a mechanic. General, man can do anything, he can fly, he can kill, but he has a fault, he can think...' My translation. The original text reads: 'Generale, il tuo carro armato è una macchina potente. Spiana un fosso e sfraccella cento uomini. Ma ha un difetto, ha bisogno di un carrista. Generale, il tuo bombardiere è potente, vola più rapido di una tempesta e porta più di un elefante. Ma ha un difetto, ha bisogno di un meccanico. Generale, l'uomo è capace di tutto, può volare, può uccidere, ma ha un difetto, può pensare...'. Zavattini, 1962.

<sup>308</sup> ANAC stands for "The National Association of Cinema Authors" and was founded in 1952. <https://www.anac-autori.it/online/> [accessed 18 July 2019].

<sup>309</sup> My translation. The original text reads: 'Per questo i Cinegiornali liberi hanno coscienza di essere uno strumento politico e l'inizio di un movimento che di questa concretezza fa il suo emblema.' Cesare Zavattini, 'Lettera di Zavattini all'ANAC sui Cinegiornali liberi' ('Zavattini's letter to ANAC about free newsreels) in *Archivio Storico (ANAC Historical Archive)*, 27 June 1968: <http://www.anac-autori.it/online/?p=179> [PDF downloaded on 14 May 2012], p. 2.

engage the attention of a wider audience. He suggested that the *Cinegiornali liberi* centre in Rome could become part of the ANAC, thus promoting a process of osmosis between the individual and collective cultural and sociological concerns.<sup>310</sup> Free *cinegiornale*, he argued, would also support the ANAC's own development and promote its independence from state control.

In relation to both mainstream art cinema and the traditional *Istituto Luce* newsreel, it could be argued that the innovative scope of Zavattini's *cinegiornali* mapped the 'warfare realist' genre onto a vastly different avant-garde landscape, both formally and thematically. They told stories of ordinary lives using new filmmaking technologies, such as hand-held cameras, and emulated television-style news reporting and interviews. This type of filmmaking took place among ordinary people, in the everyday settings, ethically removed from the demands of cinema as a state-financed enterprise, or an institutional body.

Similar in spirit to the pioneering journalistic style of 'cinéma vérité' (as in Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin's *Chronicle of a Summer*, 1961), or its American equivalent, 'direct cinema' (as in Robert Drew's *Primary*, 1960), *Cinegiornali liberi* also eschewed burdensome filmmaking equipment. Without the tyranny of any elaborate technical set-up, lightweight equipment made possible a new cinematic language, shared by *Cinegiornali liberi*. These movements and collaborative efforts represented cinema's desire to become a democratic medium, accessible to many and for the benefit of the wider audience, as distinct from commercial filmmaking, made by an elite for a commercial audience. According to Zavattini, truly taking part in ordinary life also entailed chronicling this with a new cinematic language.<sup>311</sup> In his 1953 essay

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<sup>310</sup> Zavattini, 1968, p. 4.

<sup>311</sup> As Forgacs noted: 'initially made on the cheaper and more accessible 8mm film format, however these 'free newsreels' later switched to 16mm as it was difficult to get 8mm prints distributed.' Forgacs cited Romano Frassa, as reported in Faldini, Franca

‘Some Ideas on Cinema’, Zavattini claimed that the new Italian cinema’s desire was to reveal ‘the largest possible number of human, moral, social, economic, poetic values from the bare documentary fact’.<sup>312</sup> For him, this moral impulse was rooted in the neorealist canon. Hence, I suggest that his *cinegiornali* constitute an overlooked part of the history of Italian post-war film; namely, the creation of newsreel archive films which form a significant part of the country’s cultural heritage.

### 3.1 A Neorealist *cinegiornale*?

While it may only be natural to wonder whether Zavattini’s *cinegiornali* aesthetic should be considered as ‘neorealist’ or not, this Section is a response to critical writings interested in a rather different use and understanding of the *cinegiornale*. It engages with debates initiated by film historian Adriano Aprà’s article ‘Un *cinegiornale* ‘neorealistico’, which espouses a negative connotation of ‘neorealism’, and condemns the neorealist ethos of Zavattini’s *cinegiornali*. For this reason, I find Aprà’s article very useful for providing me with the opportunity to prove that Zavattini’s initiative and proposition of a new cinematic experimental language, made by the people, was indeed neorealist.

As one of the foremost and most influential figures in neorealist cinema, Zavattini relied on its humanist ethos and ‘realist’ aesthetics for his *cinegiornali*, by following similar precepts to neorealist filmmakers (for whom he penned so many stories and scripts) such as: on-location shooting, the participation of ordinary people and non-professional actors, and the use of natural lighting. However, bearing in mind Aprà’s

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and Fofi, Goffredo, *Il cinema italiano d’oggi 1970-1974, raccontato dai suoi protagonisti (Contemporary Italian Cinema 1970-1974, as told by its protagonists)*, Milan: Mondadori, 1984), pp. 24-27, in Forgacs, p. 147.

<sup>312</sup> Cesare Zavattini, ‘Some Ideas on Cinema’, *Sight & Sound*, 23:2 (October-December 1953), 64-69 (p. 64). Originally published in 1952.

history of the Italian documentary, namely his view on warfare realism aesthetics shared by both fascist and neorealist cinema, Zavattini's series of *cinegiornali*, despite its avant-garde approach, also reflected some of these formal properties. Wide variations in structure and tone were also typical of the traditional *cinegiornale* aesthetic: a frequently picaresque and travelogue-like narrative, invariably accompanied by the voiceover of a sympathetic omniscient narrator, who occasionally shrouded in sentimental tone peoples' testimonies. Ever since the fascist era, society had been gripped by the fear of war, felt the sorrow of the past, and nurtured the desire to construct a different future. Thus, a viable line of argument would be to question whether Zavattini's *cinegiornali* could be deemed avant-garde.

In order to provide an affirmative answer to the latter proposition, that they were positively engaged in promoting artistic and cultural innovation, I argue that Zavattini's *cinegiornali* were unambiguously different from the newsreels made by the student movement, for example, which also voiced their discontent with contemporary life. While trying to convey a historically conscious perspective, *cinegiornali* were fully aware of society's own incongruities.

They were also very different from the more politically radical and activist films made by the American underground collective The Newsreel, although like the film cooperative they expressed a concern with the present, forewarning the repetition of past events. In their 1969 article 'Theory (and practice) of (counter) information', Stefano Beccastrini and Marco Melani argued:

This consciousness about the past in the present is very clear in The Newsreel. Their films always know that the filmed demonstration, or the political gathering, will arrive late for their audience; it will already be their past. Thus they film it as such, not as present but as history (or, rather, as a historical present).<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> My translation. The original text reads: 'Questa coscienza del passato per la coscienza del presente è chiarissima in The Newsreel. I suoi film sanno sempre che la manifestazione, il comizio filmati giungeranno in ritardo allo spettatore, come Passato.'

These film critics analysed the influence “The Newsreel” (an American underground film movement founded in New York, at the Filmmakers Cinémathèque, on 22 December, 1967) had on eminent critics and their evaluation of Italian experimental filmmaking of the sixties. Consisting of about forty filmmakers, The Newsreel’s ethos was steeped in political consciousness, and the mission of recording the everyday in its manifold expressions, with no sentimentality. While avoiding any realist portrayal that did not involve political action, such as the documentary, this type of filmmaking proposed itself as a ‘revolutionary information service’. Its approach to social realism emphasised society’s contradictions, as exploited by mainstream media. The Newsreel collective placed emphasis on the stark difference between the film footage the public saw, within a variety of contexts, and what people experienced in actuality; showing how things really were meant to show how to change them, and how to participate concretely in such changes.<sup>314</sup>

A close analysis of the *Cinema & Film* article reveals how different the American underground collective was from the neorealist *cinegiornali*’s socio-political involvement through its democratic newsreel practice.<sup>315</sup> While the American film collective was more focused on a radical, guerrilla approach to news-making, Zavattini’s humanist sensibility and realist aesthetic sought to convey messages of peace and reciprocal support, infused by the widespread concern with potentially dangerous conflicts for the whole humanity. His newsreels did not encourage agit-prop intent.

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E dunque come tale lo filmano non come Presente ma come Storia (o semmai Presente come Storia).’ Stefano Beccastrini, Marco Melani, *Cinema & Film*, Summer 1969, 371-374 (p. 372).

<sup>314</sup> Beccastrini and Melani, 371-374 (p. 373).

<sup>315</sup> Benjamin’s quote from his *Thesis on the Philosophy of History* was inserted as epigraph to the article: ‘As flowers turn toward the sun, by dint of a secret heliotropism the past strives to turn toward that sun which is rising in the sky of history. A historical materialist must be aware of this most inconspicuous of all transformations.’ Benjamin, in *Illuminations*, p. 246. Italian version in Beccastrini and Melani, pp. 371-374 (p. 371) As the article concludes, these political films, characterised by a revolutionary praxis, drew on the didactic value of film, ‘acted in the present for the future’. Beccastrini and Melani, 371-374 (p. 374).

In his article ‘Un *cinegiornale* “neorealistico”’, Aprà addressed the public demand in Italy for a cinema of documentation, a cinema that besides being a ‘cinema del presente’ (cinema of the present) was also a cinema of documentation.<sup>316</sup> However, while corroborating the view that Zavattini’s newsreels were neorealist, Aprà maintained that *cinegiornali* lacked an authentic and truly innovative voice of protest and criticism, especially of mainstream media. For him, the term ‘neorealist’ had, in fact, negative connotations, being still steeped in fiction. At the same time, he also took a negative view of the Student Movement *cinegiornale*, which he considered ‘neorealist’ because the students were not bold enough to radically ‘de-form’ information didactically (as the American Newsreel group did); for him, they merely recorded events, apparently with no desire to actually change what was happening.<sup>317</sup> Aprà labelled Zavattini’s *Cinegiornali* and Ugo Gregoretti’s *Apollon, una fabbrica occupata* (1969) (a newsreel on the story of a factory’s occupation by the Workers’ Movement) as even more ‘neorealist’. He denounced both, the former for providing incomplete and reactionary historical accounts of Italian society, and the latter for being enslaved to narrative and commercial film language, despite defining itself as a ‘free’ *cinegiornale*, and being independently produced.

Aprà accused Gregoretti’s *cinegiornale* of providing a farcical portrait of the factory’s workers, who were instructed to portray their own lives for the camera by collaborating on the film script. Thus, he suggested, it turned to caricature, lacking any substantial political purpose due to its fictionalising actual facts, with the workers turned into stock-type comedians, emulating popular figures in Italian commercial

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<sup>316</sup> Adriano Aprà, ‘Un *cinegiornale* “neorealistico”’ (‘A “neorealist” newsreel’), in *Cinema & Film*, n. 9, Estate 1969, 374-375.

<sup>317</sup> The original reads: ‘[...] il cinema statunitense, indipendente, animato da Robert Kramer [...] passa subito dalla “pura” registrazione al cinema didattico, alla informazione che è deformazione (forma-azione), proprio per i fini politici che si propone.’. Aprà, 1969, pp. 374-375 (p. 374).

cinema. For Aprà, this meant neglecting ‘the real struggle of the working class’ amid a plethora of other forms of exploitation.<sup>318</sup> Despite their anthropological value, he concluded, Zavattini’s neorealist *Cinegiornali liberi* lacked in an authentic criticism of society, and for this were ideologically ineffective. Their neorealist language ultimately failed to reach out to wider audiences, and so inspire any profound social change.<sup>319</sup>

Despite such criticism, it could be argued that Zavattini’s *cinegiornali* were made in the spirit of the filmmakers’ and artist’s subjectivity, the interest and passion of the archivist who gleans facts from the reality of the present, and finds in the democratic freedom of expression a discursive engagement with reality. *Cinegiornali liberi* aimed to create a new archive for the future based in the present. They formed and circulated opinions on social inequalities, the state of cinema and the arts in general, and in relation to the wider current cultural context. Laura Rascaroli supports this view of Zavattini’s neorealist *cinegiornali*, which for her are characterised by the auto-biographical and ‘first-person filmmaking’ style, and thus are firmly placed within the essay film discourse.<sup>320</sup>

#### **4. Alfredo Leonardi: an experimental *Cinegiornale* (1967)<sup>321</sup>**

Like Zavattini’s newsreels, Leonardi’s *Cinegiornale* was also pervaded by the humanist spirit of the chronicler who sees life as a series of events to be recorded in order to generate a subjective discursive engagement with reality. However, Leonardi’s aesthetic choices were completely different. The experimental quality of

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<sup>318</sup> Aprà, 1969, 374-375 (p. 375).

<sup>319</sup> Aprà denounced neorealism of contriving a realistic, naturalistic cinema as in fact it created fiction; thus there was a clear lack of social and political consciousness in its film language. He argued that neorealism was the mirror of a misunderstanding ending in naturalism, and the result of a false consciousness about the real: ‘Italian political cinema can only be anti-neorealist’. Ibid.

<sup>320</sup> Rascaroli, 2009, p. 111.

<sup>321</sup> *Cinegiornale* (1967, 16mm, b/w, 3’).

*Cinegiornale* mainly consisted in keeping a consistently intense internal rhythm through a fast montage of archive footage.

Although only three minutes long, it took Leonardi months of hard work. The rapid montage unfolds impressionistically, seemingly without any narrative structure. Priding itself on the spirit of both the collector and archivist, *Cinegiornale* exhibits a varied catalogue of themes, film styles and artistic genres. Its focus on past catastrophes lends the film the significance of a grand, universal story. Every scene reflects Leonardi's acute sense of photographic composition: the film could be seen as a canvas densely populated with images of imperialist war newsreels, British monarchs and Chinese dynasties, drawn from travelogue-style documentaries of varied epochs. This rich composition of historical shards of violence and death is accompanied by Eric Satie's elegiac *Trois Morceaux en forme de poire*.<sup>322</sup>

Despite resulting from a painstaking process of selection, the film may at first be regarded merely as an intensely poetic compilation of found footage repurposed from a variety of documentary films, whose myriads of thematic connections are barely evoked. This is substantiated by Leonardi having written in *Bianco e Nero* that he wanted to use an historical repertoire partly for its photographic values of dynamism.<sup>323</sup> In this case, the artist filmmaker, like the social documentarian, initiated a dialogue with the social possibilities of distant epochs, but also worked with the plastic properties of film as an art medium, to create new meanings from archive film. Experimenting with the malleability of film and its visual qualities, accentuated by the fast montage technique, thus created a speculative mode of engagement.

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<sup>322</sup> Alfredo Leonardi, 'Cinema Indipendente in Italia. *Se L'inconscio si rivela si ribella*' ('Italian Independent Cinema'. If the Unconscious reveals itself it will rebel'), in *Ombre Elettriche*, Number One, December 1967, p. 12.

<sup>323</sup> Leonardi, 'Alfredo Leonardi', in Bacigalupo, 1974, 111-129 (p. 112).

The stylistic coherence of *Cinegiornali* provided an all-binding meaningful resonance and perceptual basis to the film as a whole. Its language did not cancel out the discrete semantic value of the image in each footage and its direct correspondence to the real world, yet it envisioned a completely new idea of the *cinegiornale*: a way of accelerating the connection between the distant past and the present, thus transforming what could be deemed as ‘a dead object’, because it was virtually being reactivated and reconnected to the vibrant immediacy and currency of making newsreels for the cinema based in the present. This practice anticipated the idea of the CCI’s collaborative film *Tutto, tutto nello stesso istante* as discussed in Chapter 2.

After a closer analysis, I argue that the figurative nature of the sourced archive film footage contributed to corroborate *Cinegiornale*’s humanist interest prevailing over any essentially apparent aesthetic abstraction: the indexical signifier could not be detached from its historical real and generic referent. An all-encompassing gaze transported its viewers through each found footage film and, even if over the course of only three minutes, across epochs worn down by human beings’ greed and thirst for war and power. Thus, Leonardi’s film transcends the original meanings of the found materials to create a more trans-historical humanist criticism and message of peace, which replenished any purely formalist discourse.<sup>324</sup>

Film historian and critic Bruno di Marino stated that for Leonardi vision was the basis of his ‘modus vivendi’; seeing was a way of life, as he stated: ‘seeing is a way of thinking’.<sup>325</sup> For the filmmaker, seeing was first his experience of life and people before becoming a source of inspiration for his expressive photographic film materials.<sup>326</sup> His philosophy of perception based on vision and thought complements

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<sup>324</sup> Leonardi, in Bacigalupo, 1974, pp. 111-129 (p. 118).

<sup>325</sup> Di Marino, 1999, pp. 57-58.

<sup>326</sup> Di Marino, 1999, p. 59.

the visual phenomenology that transfixes and animates film and the moving image more characteristic of Alberto Grifi's philosophy in *L'occhio è per così dire l'evoluzione biologica di una lacrima* (*The eye is, so to speak, the biological evolution of a tear*) (1965-68), which this study examines through the critical theory of biopolitics in the concluding Chapter.

Although, Bacigalupo defined Leonardi as the 'Italian Mekas'; he thought Leonardi's films illustrated 'the phenomenology of counterculture'.<sup>327</sup> In his book *Occhio, mio dio / My Eye, My God* (1971), Leonardi quoted Jonas Mekas writing for *The Village Voice* in 1961 about his experience of filming *The Brig* (1964).<sup>328</sup> Mekas discussed his experience of filming this theatrical production from a phenomenological perspective, about how he captured the performance of The Living Theatre with the eyes of a 'chronicler'. For Mekas, this did not simply entail showing the actors performing on stage; it also meant allowing his subjective camera to capture their experience of the event.<sup>329</sup>

Leonardi had also worked closely and for a short period co-habited with The Living Theatre in New York. In 1965, he made *Living and Glorious*, an experimental documentary based on their rehearsals for the *Mysteries* show and preparations for *The Brig*. Thus, for both Leonardi and Mekas, experimental filmmaking was animated by a distinctive vision and pervaded by the 'phenomenology of counterculture'. These help explain Leonardi's extensive use of techniques such as rapid montage, superimpositions and fades, together with his selection of photographically expressive

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<sup>327</sup> Leonardi, in Bacigalupo, 1974, pp. 111-129 (p. 111).

<sup>328</sup> Jonas Mekas filmed the theatrical performance *The Brig* interpreted by The Living Theatre live on stage. *The Brig* won the Venice Festival Grand Prize for best documentary. [http://anthologyfilmarchives.org/film\\_screenings/calendar?view=list&month=12&year=2012#showing-40245](http://anthologyfilmarchives.org/film_screenings/calendar?view=list&month=12&year=2012#showing-40245) [accessed 9 November 2017]. Avant-garde American filmmaker Storm De Hirsh made a newsreel on Mekas filming the theatre production *Newsreel: Jonas in "the Brig"* (1964). <https://luxscotland.org.uk/work/newsreel-jonas-in-the-brig/> [accessed 9 November 2017].

<sup>329</sup> Alfredo Leonardi, *Occhio, mio dio* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1971), p. 175.

documentary materials for *Cinegiornale*. His film can be situated within the Italian avant-garde not only because of his bold deployment of archive material and montage, but also for his vision uniting humanist content to technical innovation, musically underpinned by Satie's melancholy score.

In 1967, he also made other two short highly experimental films, *Organum Multiplum* and *J. & J. & Co.* which, like the *Cinegiornale*, represented a continuation of the aesthetic launched with his first feature film, *Amore, Amore* (1967).<sup>330</sup> *Organum Multiplum* unfolded according to a free, indirect and suggestive poetic rhythm, without narrative, demonstrating an autonomous film practice that grappled with an existential approach to life and art that was completely authentic and personal.<sup>331</sup> Bacigalupo maintained that *J. & J. & Co.* was a brilliant essay film on the unusual properties of Leonardi's camera, which he considered an extension of his own body. Leonardi's aesthetics were inspired by the tactile, sensuous relationship between a technological medium and human agency.<sup>332</sup>

He shared this experimental ethos with Mekas' belief in a transformative and radically creative approach to the arts. Like many experimental independent Italian filmmakers of the 1960s, Leonardi was also greatly influenced by another master of the historic avant-garde, the Soviet Constructivist filmmaker Dziga Vertov, and his radically experimental documentaries.

Through what he called a process of 'photographic transcription', notions such as 'the real', 'the ideal', 'art' and 'life' were all carefully examined during his artistic career.<sup>333</sup> His repurposing of fragments of cultural memory in *Cinegiornale* were

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<sup>330</sup> *Amore, Amore* (1967, 35mm, b/w and col., 75').

<sup>331</sup> Leonardi, in Bacigalupo, 1974, p. 118.

<sup>332</sup> Leonardi, in Bacigalupo, 1974, p. 119.

<sup>333</sup> Di Marino, 1999, p. 58.

evidence of Leonardi's philosophical meditation on human existence.<sup>334</sup> While searching for what deeper meanings lay behind a person's appearance, he maintained a child's unadulterated outlook on life, with the expressivity of his archive montage creating natural empathy. Leonardi's concern for the human condition would develop in a more social realist direction in the 1970s, as is apparent in the video documentaries he made with the collective Videobase.<sup>335</sup>

Di Marino described Leonardi as one of the most committed and involved filmmakers for his intense collaborations with the other founders of the Italian Cooperative of Independent Cinema, including Giorgio Turi, Gianfranco Baruchello and Massimo Bacigalupo. Praising his pro-active personality and artistic ambition, Di Marino noted that Leonardi was the only Italian independent filmmaker to acquire first-hand knowledge of the New American Cinema. His trip to the US during 1969 and 1970 provided him with a rich vein of inspiration that led towards profound artistic transformation. He became disenchanted with New York and its film underground, as he realised that its initial countercultural passion, which had produced an innovative film aesthetic, had become a much more disingenuous vision of life and art. Having met many of the American underground filmmakers, he was inspired to write *Occhio, mio dio*, which was dedicated to Jonas Mekas and avant-garde film historian P. Adams Sitney, 'whose work and help were very important to the realisation of this book'.<sup>336</sup>

In the 1967 issue of *Ombre Elettriche*, Leonardi discussed the free formal association between shots that his found-footage montage created. Especially in the

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<sup>334</sup> *Schegge di Utopia - Il Cinema Underground Italiano - Alfredo Leonardi*. Documentary on Alfredo Leonardi and interviews: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMhO8H-b510> [accessed 10 April 2013].

<sup>335</sup> See footnote 298.

<sup>336</sup> My translation. The original text reads: 'A Jonas Mekas e P. Adams Sitney la cui opera e il cui aiuto sono stati così importanti per la realizzazione di questo libro'.

*Cinegiornale*, montage was necessary to address the concept of history, not as a mere ‘convention’, but bound up with contingency affecting the present. The film’s reflexive mode revealed its materiality and a process which disclosed the filmmaker’s commitment to producing social meaning, with archive footage as a critical tool to expose the amorality of contemporary capitalism.<sup>337</sup>

*Amore, Amore* had provided the aesthetic rationale for the *Cinegiornale*, with Leonardi’s first free montage of interwoven semantic and formal associations. However, that film’s tight post-production schedule did not allow him to engage at a deeper level with the content of the re-purposed found footage.

In the December 1967 issue of *Ombre Elettriche*, he argued that the continued creation of formal analogies and visual associations by the contemporary film avant-garde had increasingly strengthened a non-psychological and non-narrative tendency in the arts, which inspired his visionary cinema of the 1960s.<sup>338</sup> Freed from the constraints of narrative identification and point-of-views, the characteristics of classical linear narratives, Leonardi argued that since the end of naturalism in the theatre, *verismo* in literature and James Joyce’s modernism, followed by the avant-garde films of László Moholy-Nagy and Hans Richter, and the cinematic surrealism of René Clair (*Entr’acte*, 1924) and Buñuel and Dalí (*Un Chien Andalou*, 1928), the avant-garde cinema of the 1960s had inherited a rich cultural legacy.

Zavattini’s *Cinegiornali della pace* and *Cinegiornali liberi*, together with Leonardi’s *Cinegiornale* offer two distinct examples of avant-garde, experimental practices with the subjective camera and the *cinegiornale* style. I suggest that they constitute

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<sup>337</sup> Leonardi, *Ombre Elettriche*, 1967, p. 12.

<sup>338</sup> Leonardi, *Ombre Elettriche*, 1967, pp. 13-14.

profoundly innovative approaches to creating archives of cultural memory for the future, having transformed the traditional newsreel format of the historic *cinigiornali*. Both filmmakers envisioned more subjective and independent forms of *cinigiornale*. Zavattini's recalled the early French and Soviet compilation films, re-enacting a post-war realism profoundly imbued with neorealist aesthetics. By contrast, Leonardi's *Cinigiornale* created a dense montage of re-purposed archive material. However, the aim of both was to shape a more democratic and creative means of communication, spurred on by an experimental ethos, and inspired by the new film technologies that made possible a different film language, within the framework of the essay film.

These avant-garde *cinigiornali* reflexively invited meditation on the fragility of human life and, with it, the moving image itself. Proposing speculative approaches to how the past could be seen as unravelling throughout the present, I suggest they fed into the history of the experimental essay film, remind us of the 'essay as form'. As Adorno explained in relation to neo-positivists who identified philosophy with scientific method, the essay

Takes the anti-systematic impulse into its own procedure, and introduces concepts directly 'immediately', as it receives them. They gain their precision only through their relation to one another. In this, however, the essay gets some support from the concepts themselves.<sup>339</sup>

In this sense, both Zavattini and Leonardi conceived the avant-garde *cinigiornale* as not disavowing the past, but incorporating it whilst shaping new ideas, thus imitating the speculative mode of the essay, where each idea – or shot -- is immediately linked to another. Avant-garde *cinigiornali* thus aimed at a new understanding of the present and the past, in the experimental mode of 'trying'. This recalls, as discussed in Chapter 2, the epigraph from Eliot's *East Coker* which opened Bacigalupo's *Bianco e*

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<sup>339</sup> Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', 1984, 151-171 (p. 160).

*Nero* volume dedicated to Italian experimental cinema: ‘For us there is only the trying, the rest is not our business’.<sup>340</sup>

The next Chapter will explore a different mode of filmmaking and involvement with the archive, one which, whilst still retaining a strong interest in public involvement and spectatorship, was also invested in the questioning of modernist art through its conceptual engagement with Arte Povera.

**Figures: 5-6**



5-6 *Bombardamento Alleato su Roma (Allied Bombardment of Rome, 1943) – Cinegiornale Luce*

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<sup>340</sup> Bacigalupo, 1974, p. 2.

## Chapter 6. *Buongiorno, Michelangelo* (Ugo Nespolo, 1968-69). *Azioni Povere* and ‘*Film Povero*’

While the previous Chapter dealt with two types of ‘archive projects’ based on unearthing and making ‘avant-garde *cinegiornali*’, this Chapter explores a different ontology of the archive based on participatory modalities. I focus on one film in particular, Ugo Nespolo’s experimental documentary *Buongiorno, Michelangelo*, made between 1968 and 1969, which I suggest took a different imaginative approach to a specifically Italian avant-garde practice, related to Arte Povera and known as *Azioni Povere* (‘Poor Actions’). Nespolo filmed the day-long performance of the sculptor Michelangelo Pistoletto rolling a large spherical sculpture made of mashed-up newspapers through the streets of Turin in 1967. This type of performance art represented an extension of the Italian conceptual and experimental art form of the 1960s, taking a transformative and performative approach to industrial and primary materials: ‘Arte Povera appeared, in its origins, related most overtly to Conceptualism and Minimalism, but while there were superficial parallels with those tendencies, it was also inherently Italian’.<sup>341</sup> On the occasion of a 1967 Genoa summer exhibition, the critic and curator Germano Celant had defined Arte Povera in relation to artists ‘working around the notion of energy fields using “poor” materials, both natural and artificial’, in this case the paper and ink of archived newspapers.<sup>342</sup> More specifically, the label ‘Azioni Povere’ derives from the 1968 three-day long exhibition that took place in Amalfi (a coastal town near Naples) titled *Arte Povera + Azioni Povere*. Here, Pistoletto exhibited the one-metre ball as part of his installation series ‘Minus

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<sup>341</sup> Richard Flood, Frances Morris, ‘Introduction: Zero to Infinity’, *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962-1972*, ed. by Flood and Morris (Minneapolis: Walker Art Centre, 2001), pp. 10-20 (p. 15).

<sup>342</sup> Germano Celant propelled *Arte Povera* onto the international arena also with his “manifesto” ‘Arte Povera: Notes for a Guerilla War’ and the book *Art Povera: Conceptual, Actual or Impossible Art?* (London: Studio Vista, 1969). Celant argued that these works ‘could serve as models, or even catalysts, of real social change’. Robert Lumley, ‘Spaces of Arte Povera’, *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962-1972*, ed. by Flood and Morris, 2001, pp. 41-66 (p. 56).

Objects' ('Oggetti in Meno'). *Azioni Povere* were also culturally and artistically influenced by the American avant-garde practices of Fluxus and Happenings.<sup>343</sup>

This Chapter draws on these interconnections, and explores the possibility of defining Nespolo's experimentation with the documentary form as a projection of the act of filming as a performance; thus the documentary becomes, alongside the art object, one of the essential elements in performative art. For this reason, I would term it '*film povero*', when such an art practice exploits the synergy of the conceptual and aesthetic porosity between film, the plastic arts and performance art. Thus, I would argue that *Buongiorno, Michelangelo* could be considered an experimental essay film, concerned with exploring the everyday in unexpected ways. In this case, I argue that the act of filming and documenting, together with the intervention of passers-by, became part of the participatory aspect of Pistoletto's *azioni povere*, mobilizing and inciting curiosity among people on the streets of Turin. Thus Nespolo's performative film created new ways of approaching and experiencing old newspapers as archive materials by thinking about the ephemerality of the art medium and its reused fabric.

### **1. Ugo Nespolo: *Buongiorno, Michelangelo* (1968-69)<sup>344</sup>**

Pistoletto first rolled his spherical sculpture made of newspaper pulp, called *Il Mappamondo (The Atlas)*, together with his wife Maria Pioppi, along the streets of Turin in 1966. This performance event was meant as a gesture against the city's alienating urban architecture. The film follows the artist performing this action again in 1967. Between 1968 and 1969, Nespolo edited *Buongiorno, Michelangelo* according to the syncopated style typical of his earlier work.

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

<sup>344</sup> *Buongiorno, Michelangelo* (1968-69, 16mm, b/w, 11').

By placing the large ball in his open-roof car and driving from his studio on the outskirts of Turin to the city centre, then ‘rolling’ it through the streets, Pistoletto ‘appropriated’ a new dimension of urban space, breaking down the frontier separating the art gallery from the city. The route he followed linked the three avant-garde galleries ‘Gian Enzo Sperone’, ‘Christian Stein’ and ‘Il Punto’ where the exhibition *Con temp l’azione* was held. This important exhibition, which ran from December 1967 to January 1968, launched *Arte Povera* into the International avant-garde arena.

The film falls into two parts: a sequence shot in daytime followed by another filmed at night. By day, people catch the ball and engage with it spontaneously. At night, outside the Stein Gallery, the paper ball becomes a moon, with which the critics Daniela Palazzoli and Tommaso Trini, and *Arte Povera* artists Gilberto Zorio and Gian Enzo Sperone, create ‘magical games’.

It begins with Pistoletto shaving in his studio with the help of one of his mirror paintings, part of the ‘Minus Objects’ series; then he and his wife take the ball to their car. The daytime sequence creates a prosaic, casual mood. After driving from the outskirts to Turin city centre, the couple walk the ball through the streets, attracting the puzzlement of passers-by, while *The Atlas* becomes the central protagonist of an urban comedy. Some people stop and look, others follow the action out of curiosity, or join the artists in playing with the ball. Here, the actions appear controlled, almost cautious, and the overall tone of the film reflects an odd mixture of estrangement and confused reactions. Nespolo helps to create this atmosphere by not altering the natural light; so that the Turin sky’s usual greyness gives the daytime segment a rather conspicuous darkness which, half-way through the film, starts edging towards an overall sense of foreboding and general nervousness. In the early sequences, jump-

cuts and elliptical editing enhance the camera's agility and spatial voracity. Then, the montage becomes increasingly fast and more erratic as the day ends, and night falls.

Passing from the daytime's relaxed and observational camera, to its increasingly jagged and frenetic nocturnal gaze, both *The Atlas* and the artists arrive outside the Stein gallery, where some paparazzi taking photographs lend an authentic look of glamour to this avant-garde art scene. As people gather to celebrate the event, they spontaneously join in a collective performance that involves playing with *The Atlas* and climbing on top of it, improvising acrobatics. This spontaneous child-like interaction with the artwork seems to release an animistic energy, a nocturnal desire to tamper with the past and the unknown, as if driven by a ritual fervour.

The photographic quality of this sequence, shot at night, was produced by solarisation, making what would usually be grey areas of the image glaringly bright, in contrast with the blackness of the night. It seems to suggest that life is finally set alight, while a playful energy takes control of *The Atlas*. This sequence also suggests a deep-seated desire to begin again, to create new conditions for the future, which the film depicts as if living in irrational anticipation. The actions of the night are nothing less than a ritual envisaging a different archive. The ball can be considered a silver moon, a catalyst of repressed primeval energies.

## **2. *Azioni Povere* and the de-materialisation of the archive**

In this Section I examine how *Azioni Povere* involved the encounter of various art forms and elicited the 'de-materialisation' of the archive. Thus, I draw on Celant's 1968 statement entitled 'Azioni Povere':

Celant greeted what he perceived as the convergence of "art" and "life" – the twin poles between which the avant-garde had historically oscillated. [...] Celant returned to themes first addressed in 'Notes for a Guerrilla War': 'the only way to

sabotage the art system was to dematerialise art, thereby preventing its commodification.<sup>345</sup>

Starting with this theory, and through studying Nespolo's film and Pistoletto's performance, this Chapter explores the 'de-materialisation' of archived newspapers as a conceptual art project. I argue that this process exemplified the anti-commodification of art, the repurposing of archival information and its treatment merely as raw material for the purpose of creating an Arte Povera sculpture in synergy with *Azioni Povere*. As this turned into an art performance, Nespolo's filming became part of a process specific to the notion of *film povero*, which involved encouraging viewers and city dwellers to regard this event as an act of de-materialisation of the original, commodified object: the newspaper. The process initiated a breakdown of the boundaries between film, performance and the fine arts, while consigning historical material (archived newspapers) to contingent experience. I argue that this participatory activity with archive materials represented a critical approach to the one-dimensional notion of the archive understood as an institutionalised, fixed entity.

Hence, I also draw on Derrida's etymological account of the term 'archive', meaning both 'commencement' and 'commandment'.<sup>346</sup> Creating an experience of de-familiarisation of the everyday, the encounter with this unusual object invading the streets of Turin unsettled the sense of a quotidian social order, and transformed the conventional understanding of 'archive' as part of an institution into an avant-garde concept, closer to Eco's open text and open process. 'The archive', in its transitive state, was being re-purposed. The rolling of the huge newspaper ball, this *azione*

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<sup>345</sup> Lumley, 2001, p. 56.

<sup>346</sup> As also discussed in Chapter 1, it might be useful to recall Derrida's definition of the archive and its genealogy: 'Arkhe' apparently coordinates two principles in one: the principle according to nature or history, there where things commence – physical, historical, or ontological principle – but also the principle according to the law, there where men and gods command, there where authority, social order are exercised, in this place from which order is given – nomological principle.' Derrida, p. 20.

*povera*, metaphorically initiated the ‘de-materialisation’ of ‘the archive’, conventionally connoted with stability and ordered materiality. In foregrounding the raw materials and the performative process, this *azione povera* symbolically called into question consumerism and obsolescence. By encouraging people to engage with the object in a participatory fashion, they would become aware that newspapers had turned into recycled material, hence evoking the phenomenon of obsolescence. The film proclaimed the new concept of ephemeral art and the potentially transient nature of the archive, when turned into a play object that could temporarily re-energise mundane city life. To support my thesis that Nespolo’s film proposed an innovative approach to the ‘archive’, testifying to it becoming ephemeral, I invoke Derrida’s concept of ‘consignation’:

Consignation aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration. In an archive, there should not be any absolute dissociation, any heterogeneity [...] consignation [is also] a gathering together.<sup>347</sup>

Unlike this ideal unity of ‘the archive’, Nespolo’s film constitutes not only a record (in itself archival) of an avant-garde event, but also an example of an ‘autonomous archive’, in the form of a heterogeneous and porous, sculptural medium. *The Atlas* was created to have no fixed domicile, and was prone to cross-fertilisation with other arts; an in-between object creating interconnections between film, sculpture, art objects in spaces of exhibition, dance and performance.

*Buongiorno, Michelangelo* traced an ideal trajectory within the international history of Happenings. *Azioni Povere* were influenced by two internationally renowned performance-oriented art practices. Fluxus, the art movement founded by George Maciunas in the late fifties, and Allan Kaprow’s Happenings were the main

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<sup>347</sup> Derrida, p. 3.

inspirations for *Azioni Povere*'s anti-commodity art. Fluxus shared with experimental film and performance art a celebration of the ephemeral, in this case symbolised by Pistoletto's spontaneously playing with the spherical residue of a news media archive.

So it could be argued that, in the first place, *Buongiorno, Michelangelo* evoked the innovative and regenerative potential of 'the archive'. Old newspapers provided the primary materials of the spherical sculpture, drawing this work closer to the general public and away from the 'uniqueness' of the original work of art – or the originally-made object.<sup>348</sup> Secondly, the regenerative potential of combining film with performance drew attention to 'gesture' and 'play'; people's spontaneous engagement with *The Atlas* transformed their everyday experience of urban space and mass media information.

The reflexive character of this documentary consisted in adapting its language to a more experimental mode as its photographic settings were adjusted according to natural light conditions and the events spontaneously taking place in the streets around this alien object. The 16mm film was treated as one of the plastic arts. The malleable semantic property of the medium constituted a record of people's reactions, a consequence of both the performance and the encounter with the outsized sculpture. Thus, *Buongiorno, Michelangelo* was also a record of the democratising potential of the archive when it became an art object; participating in the ephemeral *azione povera* dispelled any passive reception of the work of art. The film is record of the

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<sup>348</sup> This intention to regenerate and innovate everyday experience by celebrating it as a unique phenomenon through mainstream media recalls Walter Benjamin's concept of the aura of the work of art: 'The concept of aura which was proposed above with reference to historical objects may usefully be illustrated with reference to the aura of natural ones. We define the aura of the latter as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be. [...] Namely, the desire of contemporary masses to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction.' Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in Arendt, pp. 211-235 (pp. 216-17).

transformation of, and transition from, an industrial object and commodity to an interactive art object.

In order to explore more comprehensively the notion of the ‘de-materialisation of the archive’, we might adopt an epistemological approach to the definition of ‘*povero*’. This was rooted in Celant’s definition of *Arte Povera*, which associated the authentic meaning of ‘*povero*’ with base materials. Through this case, I seek to demonstrate how the use of ‘poor’, or primary materials (paper and ink), in conjunction with *Azioni Povere* (performance), implied the pulping of printed matter, and its organised content, a symbolic dispersal of the medium’s constitutive materiality (‘old news’) with the final implementation of the anti-commodification of the work of art:

The concept of ‘poor’, far from being associated with the sociological connotation of destitution, according to the Genoese critic who coined the term, meant ‘primary’ or ‘primeval’, as being at the origins of creation, in perfect synchrony with the idea of ‘poor theatre’ as defined by Jerzy Grotowski, for whom it was necessary to ‘eliminate the superfluous so that the theatre could exist without any trickery’.<sup>349</sup>

Rolled across the ‘poor theatre’ of Turin, its unmade and unprepared urban grid of streets turned into a stage, the old newspapers were ‘de-materialised’ of their past content and left with their basic and essential elements: paper and ink. Having become primary sculptural material, paper pulp, *The Atlas* could create new narratives, sharing the experience contingently set in motion by artists and participants. By encompassing the interplay between life and art, *Azioni Povere* foregrounded action as process, questioning the topology and boundaries of the archive. The creative potential

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<sup>349</sup> My translation. The original text reads: ‘Il concetto di ‘povero’, lontano da ogni assunto pauperistico di stampo sociologico, nelle intenzioni del critico genovese che lo conio, sta più per ‘primario’ o ‘primigenio’, posto alle origini della creazione, in perfetta sintonia con l’idea di ‘teatro povero’ di Jerzy Grotowsk’, per il quale era necessario ‘eliminare il superfluo così che il teatro possa esistere senza trucco’. Marco Napolitano, ‘Arte Povera + Azioni Povere. Da Amalfi al Madre, l’Arte Povera Torna a Rivivere’ (‘Arte Povera + Azioni Povere. From Amalfi to Madre, Arte Povera comes back to life again’, 21<sup>st</sup> December 2011, in <http://www.ilmediano.it/asp/visArticolo.aspx?id=15739> [accessed 21 May 2013].

afforded by performative art could open up audiences' multiple interventions, which in turn would change the object's meaning in relation to subjective experience of the new ephemeral object. As Celant stated, 'process displaced product, the ephemeral supplanted the permanent, and everyday experience took the place of the appreciation of "beauty"'.<sup>350</sup>

Although apparently very different from Zavattini's *cinegiornali* project, we might argue that Nespolo's film attested to the ways in which technological changes influenced the documentary style, which shifted to accommodate modes of representation capable of reflecting the cultural and artistic impulses of the sixties, and shaping its legacies for the future. As noted in the previous Chapter, alternative practices with actuality-based film from the same period were *cinéma vérité* (in France) and *direct cinema* (in the United States), which aimed at provoking reactions by their public/non-professional actors.<sup>351</sup> Lightweight portable 16mm camera created new freedoms that allowed filmmakers to embrace spatial exploration in playful and interactive modes. Between the 1950s and 1970s, the 16mm camera became a tool of resistance to the influence of traditional television on its spectators, making possible a *réportage* style of filmmaking to approach the public, as if 'looking for a need'.<sup>352</sup>

The spatial dimension of this new concept, the 'de-materialised archive', can also be connected to the Situationist practice of *détournement*, that is, to a project of subversion of normative urban structure and cartography. The city of Turin became

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<sup>350</sup> Lumley, 2001, p. 56.

<sup>351</sup> Bill Nichols divides the documentary into four modes of representation: Expository Documentary (John Grierson and Robert Flaherty, amongst others); Observational Documentary (Leacock-Pennebaker, Fredrick Wiseman); Interactive Documentary (Rouch, de Antonio, and Connie Field); and Reflexive Documentary (Dziga Vertov, Jill Godmilow, and Raul Ruiz): 'In documentary film, four modes of representation stand out as the dominant organisational patterns around which most texts are structured: expository, observational, interactive, and reflexive.' Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality. Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 32.

<sup>352</sup> 'The long suppression of 16mm between the 20s and the 50s and the final diffusion of the gauge between the 50s and the 70s highlights the power of 'necessity' in the process gauge of technological development and change. The 16mm was marketed in 1923, yet the 16mm era does not really begin for another three decades. [...] It was only the necessities first of military education and entertainment in World War II and then television news in the 50s which turned the situation around.' Brian Winston, *Technologies of Seeing* (London: British Film Institute, 1996), p. 58.

like a theatre stage for exhibitions and installations of simple objects and materials, which disclosed a conceptual narrative formed of anti-commodity statements, and underpinned by the desire to unite the physical to the metaphysical. The founder of Situationism, Guy Debord, in his 1957 ‘Report on the Construction of Situations and on the Terms of Organization and Action of the International Situationist Tendency’, invoked Dada’s desacralization of bourgeois culture, and the *détournement* technique which was applied to the idea of a ‘unitary urbanism’. This becomes relevant for a reading of Nespolo’s and Pistoletto’s imaginative re-mapping of Turin’s urban space. Debord argued:

Unitary urbanism must take up the creation of new forms and the *détournement* of known forms of architecture and urbanism—as well as the *détournement* of the old poetry and cinema. Integral art, about which so much has been said, can only materialize at the level of urbanism.<sup>353</sup>

Applying this to *Buongiorno, Michelangelo*, it could be argued that Nespolo’s and Pistoletto’s *détournement* technique involved de-contextualising elements of affirmative bourgeois art and culture, especially the institutionalised archive. Their involvement in re-purposing transformed social engagement with the familiar daily media object into a new kind of ephemeral art experience, displacing ordinariness and the reassuring sense of familiarity within a prevailing sense of social order; this meant to fuse art with culture.<sup>354</sup>

The transformative conceptual devices of ‘play’ and ‘gesture’, which promoted the displacement and de-contextualisation of fixed meanings within *The Atlas*, intersected

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<sup>353</sup> Winston, p. 67

<sup>354</sup> Guy Debord provides a definition of *détournement*: ‘*détournement*—the diversion of an element of culture or everyday life (in this case, simply clothes) to a new and displacing purpose.’ Guy Debord, ‘Report on the Construction of Situations and on the Terms of Organization and Action of the International Situationist Tendency (1957)’, in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International. Texts and Documents*, ed. by Tom McDonough (Cambridge, Massachusetts: the MIT Press, 2002), pp. 29-50 (p. 29).

with city dwellers' daily life at a metaphysical level, so that they could create different visions of the present for the future.

### 3. *'Film Povero': 'play' and 'gesture' with the archive*

To provide a theoretical framework for this important film, I consider how relevant the conceptual devices of 'play' and 'gesture' were in activating the symbolic 'de-materialisation' of the archive. For this, it is necessary to use an epistemological approach to examining Nespolo's film within its art exhibition context. As I have argued above, the ephemeral potential of the news media archive was invoked through a practice of *détournement*. Thus, the study of *Buongiorno, Michelangelo* benefits from the conceptual perspective of Arte Povera's approach to art installations, which provoked new ideas about art. As Lumley argued:

Ideas, not an approach to materials, had been the driving force of Arte Povera. But the ideas did not assume programmatic forms, as they did with Futurism. Arte Povera did not have its Marinetti. It was not a movement. Arte Povera's development within city-based art scenes was empirical but not ideological, experimental but not politically directed, localized yet outward-looking, Italian and international.<sup>355</sup>

This perspective also allows for a more precise analysis of the spatio-temporal dis-location of the archive because, as an art object it moved across Turin's urban landscape. The making of the film also joined up three different sites within the urban setting: the art galleries Sperone, Stein and Il Punto, through which the art exhibition had been dis-located and mapped. Together with Arte Povera artists Mario Merz's *Neonmerzare* (1967), and Alighiero Boetti's *Boettinbiancoenero* (1968), Nespolo's *Buongiorno, Michelangelo* belongs to an experimental trilogy, inspired by the montage films of the American filmmaker Stan Brakhage. Most importantly, the

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<sup>355</sup> Lumley, 2011, p. 62.

trilogy documented the Arte Povera exhibition *Con Temp l'azione* where Pistoletto, Merz and Boetti exhibited their installations, while Happenings were taking place, and being filmed, inside and outside the galleries. Therefore, the film trilogy is both document of the interconnection between performance and installation art, and a part of the overall conceptual project involving film. *Con temp l'azione* was also a significant event in avant-garde initiatives, since it started long-term collaborations with New York art dealer Ileana Sonnabend and Pop Art.<sup>356</sup>

As the title of the exhibition *Con temp l'azione* already strongly suggested, its manifest semantic structure illustrated and staged contrasting yet complementary ideas of cohesion and separateness. The dis-jointed parts of this 'word' invoke simultaneously both fragmentation and unity. These ideas of oneness and openness were also enacted by the filmmaking grammar itself – the restless portable camera and jump-cut editing.

The three semantic segments *Con temp l'azione* form one Italian word *contemplazione*, 'contemplation'. However, when the word is split into segments, the three epistemes generate the opposite meaning: 'with time action'. On the one hand, the latter is not only relevant to the meaning of *azioni povere*, action and movement involving 'poor' materials, and performance alongside the object in motion, but also the temporality of the object itself. This idea, bound up with 'con temp l'azione', also implicates the whole project of animating a set of things: a multiplicity of images and one of Pistoletto's 'minus object' sculptures (*The Atlas*), which would conventionally be relegated to a state of immobility. On the other hand, the entire word 'contemplazione' evokes the opposite of the dynamism implicit in the fragmented

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<sup>356</sup> These experimental documentaries were also influenced by Futurist Fortunato Depero's films performances, such as *Il Futurismo italianissimo* (1926). Bruno Di Marino, 'Lo Sguardo Pop. Il cinema di Ugo Nespolo' ('The Pop Gaze. The cinema of Ugo Nespolo'), in Bruno Di Marino, *Nespolo. Films & Visions (1967-2010)*, (DVD Raro Video Italia Publications, 2011), p. 4.

word. The notion of ‘contemplation’, from a modernist perspective, invokes an idealised aesthetic unity between the viewer standing in front of the art object and the art object itself; the word also implies the stability of (pre-determined) meanings and linguistic signs.

Furthermore, the art object as a whole is a sum of its parts, and can be likened to the experimental nature of the documentary’s open structures, its spontaneous recording of a daily event. Both the concept and the art event are about dislocation, as the event as a whole took place across three different locations which shared this conceptual and aesthetic tension involving the arts.

*The Atlas*’s aesthetically specific properties – size, shape and materials – suggested that the viewers’ perceptual experience of it may in this case have involved both misrecognition and spatio-temporal dislocation *before* the object. Thus, the outsized spherical sculpture, and its sudden appearance, may have prompted in onlookers an interstitial aesthetic experience sited between the experience of the de-sacralization of beauty and contemplation *before* the art object; also the unexpected encounter *with* the art object, and potential interaction.

A perception of this new aesthetic experience was reflected stylistically in the film’s syncopated editing, the natural lighting in daytime, solarisation effect at night, and the jagged camera movements. Thus, both technically and aesthetically, *Buongiorno*, Michelangelo echoed the viewers’ new perceptual experience of wonder with the familiar-yet-strange spherical sculpture.

The interplay between film and performance art may also recall a comparison by the American modernist art historian Michael Fried, in his controversial 1967 essay ‘Art and Objecthood’, between minimalist (or literalist) art with ‘theatricality’:

The literalist [minimalist] espousal of objecthood amounts to nothing other than a plea for a new genre of theater, and theater is now the negation of art. Literalist sensibility is theatrical because, to begin with, it is concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters literalist work.[...] Whereas in previous art ‘what is to be had from the work is located strictly within [it]’, the experience of literalist art is of an object in a situation – one that, virtually by definition, includes the beholder.<sup>357</sup>

Against such a modernist interpretation of the art object, through the synergy between film technology, the individual and creativity, *Azioni Povere* could be seen as initiating ‘becoming and theatricality’. The implied temporality of ‘*con temp l’azione*’ (‘with time action’) in the experience of art overcomes the object’s natural stasis and medium specificity, as its conventional fixity becomes instead associated with viewers’ interaction, thus encouraging playful intervention and the creation of manifold meanings. Such ‘playful art’ invokes a different reception. The interaction with the object becomes part of a theatrical gesture opening up a process of re-contextualisation and conscious engagement with art.

The anti-illusionary strategy of turning the streets of Turin into a theatrical space recalls Brecht’s practice, the ‘interruption of the action’, which inspired him to call his theatre ‘Epic’, according to Benjamin, ‘constantly goes against the public’s theatrical illusion’.<sup>358</sup> Furthermore, the notion of theatrical ‘gesture’, in connection with the anthropomorphic nature of Nespolo’s filmmaking, exemplifies the inter-relatedness between technology, the individual and the everyday. This foregrounds Brecht’s argument about ‘gesture’. As Benjamin observed:

Brecht’s discovery and development of the notion of the ‘gesture’ signifies nothing other than a return to the decisive methods of montage in radio and film, but at the same time transforms montage from a process too often dictated by fashion into a human act.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 153.

<sup>358</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘The Author as Producer’, *New Left Review*, trans. by John Heckman, 1/62, July-August 1970, 1-9 (p. 7).

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*

The film's aesthetic aimed at breathing new life into the mundane, while its increased closeness to the ordinary people of Turin allowed it to become anthropomorphised (or humanised).

The anthropomorphisation of Nespolo's new handheld camera, combining the onlookers' participation and Pistoletto's itinerant performance, effects the symbolic 'de-materialisation' of the archived newspapers, and co-stages their ontological transition from material to ephemeral. Nespolo's experimental film registers a 'performance-image' of the spherical archive – in its latent, liminal state. As mentioned earlier, the interstitial aesthetic experience of the performance image is the result of the aesthetic experience sited in the transition between being before to being with the art object. Thus, I would add that the 'performance image' is that perceptual image generated in the viewer's contingent consciousness at the crossroads of oneness and proliferation, stillness and temporality, estrangement and appropriation. The Atlas and *Buongiorno, Michelangelo* incorporate play and gesture in order to regenerate the art material, to allow it to become other than tangible; the performative experience with the image traverses and moves beyond the film's and the sculpture's material specificity.

Following this 'conceptual happening', revealing the ephemeral potential of the archive, 'gesture' becomes another step in the process of 'de-materialisation' of the archive, generating ideas about dissolving the apparently autocratic fixity of the institutionalised archive. As with Brecht's Epic Theatre, Azioni Povere marked performance art as aimed at prompting social interaction; and Nespolo's film demonstrated the importance of creative freedom, a freedom that Celant called 'libero

progettarsi’, or the ‘free projection of oneself’.<sup>360</sup> Arte Povera invited the audience to discover what was otherwise considered unimportant in their daily lives, in order to invoke a more objective and personal understanding of mass media information.

In relation to the dislocation of the archive, the notion of ‘play’ is another integral part of this anti-illusory strategy, through which Benjamin discussed his notion of ‘second technology’. Influenced by Moholy-Nagy’s theory that man shapes his own time with means appropriate to that time, in *One-Way Street* Benjamin argued that ‘human beings’ ability to perceive and comprehend their own material conditions was impaired, had atrophied, and was therefore not equal to dealing with their drastically changed environment’.<sup>361</sup>

Brechtian distanciation and estrangement tactics, through the interruption of action by means of technology, reinforced Benjamin’s idea that the roots of ‘second technology’ lay in ‘play’.<sup>362</sup> According to Miriam Hansen:

The concept of play is central to how Benjamin understands the intersection of nature, technology, and humans. [...] Benjamin asserts, the second technology ‘rather aims at the *interplay* between nature and humanity’. [...] Film, as I have been arguing, assumes this task not simply by way of a behaviourist adaptation of human perceptions and reactions to the regime of the apparatus but because film has the potential to reverse, in the form of play, the catastrophic consequences of an already failed reception of technology.<sup>363</sup>

Bearing this in mind, I would want to cast *Buongiorno, Michelangelo* as a significant case of the interplay between human beings and the indeterminacy of ‘the archive’ (which in this case is *The Atlas*), based on its ‘poor’, primary matter of ink and paper, which is prone to change and growth. It registers the return of technology in its

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<sup>360</sup> My translation. Lumley, 2011, p. 56.

<sup>361</sup> Miriam Bratu Hansen, *Cinema and Experience. Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (University of California Press: London, 2012), p. 135.

<sup>362</sup> Hansen explains Benjamin: ‘the greatest technical feat of the first technology is, as it were, the human sacrifice; that of the second excels along the lines of the remote-controlled aircraft which needs no human crew. [...] he continues the speculation on the second technology’s constitution through distance “[its origin] lies in play.’ Hansen, pp. 138-9.

<sup>363</sup> Hansen, p. 139.

cultural agency, which in this historical time is anthropomorphised (or humanised). The *physis* of second technology is revitalized. In this sense, I would point out that the archive, anthropomorphised by second technology, is more explicitly present in the second half of the film, when primal human energies come to the fore, rather than in the first half where the fetishised nature of the archive, as an object of estrangement, was seen as still having an overpowering effect on passers-by.

In marking the potential encounter of human interactivity and participation, the nascent ‘performance image’ is perceived in relation to plurality and ephemerality. This conjures up Benjamin’s idea of ‘second technology’, in this case experimental documentary and the archived newspapers, enlivened by novel human perceptions and interactions. Thus conceived, the role of the performance image is to enable the re-integration of the potentially archaic nature of archive materials, or *physis*, now re-humanised, into a newly historical and anthropomorphised dimension.<sup>364</sup> Hence, the resulting aesthetic experience can now be related to the ephemeral properties of the ‘de-materialised archive’. According to Hansen, Benjamin envisaged that:

Within this anthropological-materialist framework, then, technology has endowed the collective with a new *physis* that demands to be understood and re/appropriated, literally incorporated, in the interest of the collective; at the same time, technology (qua second technology) has provided the medium – film – in which such reappropriation can and should take place.<sup>365</sup>

The technologically-mediated *physis* of newspapers (commodities) as archive cultural objects, as *Buongiorno, Michelangelo* revealed, was closer to the human being who learnt to overcome, through performance and re-purposing strategies, the uniqueness

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<sup>364</sup> ‘Imagined as a two-way process, [...] what seems important regarding Benjamin’s concept of innervation and its implications for film theory is the notion of a physiologically “contagious” or “infectious” movement that would trigger emotional effects in the viewer, a form of mimetic identification based on the phenomenon then known as Carpenter’s Effect. The recourse to neurophysiological and reflex psychology [...] may have been more in tune with new, technologically mediated forms of aesthetic experience, predicated on mass production, unprecedented circulation and mobility, and collective, public reception.’ Hansen, p. 137.

<sup>365</sup> Hansen, p. 142.

of the art object and its aura, while celebrating its reproduction by the masses. This idea invokes the aesthetics of ruin and decay of the original art object. As Hansen argued:

[...] the mimetic is not a category of representation, pertaining to a particular relationship with a referent, but a relational practice – a process, comportment, or activity of ‘producing similarities’ (such as astrology, dance, and play); a mode of access to the world involving sensuous, somatic, and tactile, that is, embodied, forms of perception and cognition; a noncoercive engagement with the other that resists dualistic conceptions of subject and object; but also, in a darker vein, ‘a rudiment of the once powerful compulsion to become similar and to behave accordingly’. [...] Like the concept of aura, and equally central to Benjamin’s theory of experience, the mimetic faculty is a category that comes into view only at the moment of its decay; one might say that its conceptualisation depends on the withering away of that which it purports to capture.<sup>366</sup>

Drawing on Hansen’s interpretation of Benjamin, I am proposing *Buongiorno, Michelangelo* as a record of the symbolic de-materialisation of the archive (and the concept of aura with which it might be associated), the ‘mimetic faculty’ of Nespolo’s camera gestures towards the multiplicity of meanings that participatory acts can generate. If the ‘archive’ is considered for what it was and what it may become, here it forms part of a conceptual project in relational, participatory practices.

In this Chapter, I have demonstrated how *Buongiorno, Michelangelo* and Nespolo’s filming may affect the individual’s perceptual experience when responding to and interacting with the spherical sculpture. Hence, the film underscored the synergy between technology and the re-purposing of archive objects, enabling freer and more democratic forms of information and communication.

I have also explored ways in which such an avant-garde film practice was innovative for its inclusiveness of other art forms, which in turn may have engendered

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<sup>366</sup> Hansen, p. 147.

essayistic modes in film language. In this case, filmmaking was linked to interaction and de-construction through processes of renewal and displacement. In his *The Absent Structure (La Struttura Assente, 1968)*, Eco discussed the value of conventional narrative structures opening up to other possibilities:

To study language only means to question language, to let it live. Language is never what is thought, but that in which one thinks. To discuss language [...] does not mean to develop explicative structures or relate linguistic rules to specific cultural situations. It means to give all connotative power to language, to turn language into an artistic operation, as long as through such communication what comes to light, if never too clearly, is the appeal of being. The word is not a sign. It is the opening up of being. With an ontology of language any semiotic structure dies. [...] Therefore, what any investigation of communication structures reveals is not an underlying structure, but the absence of any structure. It is the field of a continuous 'game'.<sup>367</sup>

Nespolo's formal experimentation with documentary in *Buongiorno, Michelangelo*, and the resultant performative properties of '*film povero*' not only enhanced Pistoletto's *Azioni Povere*, but also foregrounded the transformative experience of temporality with an unfamiliar art object. Through a new avant-garde practice, the filmic image exceeded the specificity of its medium and, in joining other art forms, recast obsolescence and ephemerality. This is also, to my mind, a good example of Eco's 'form as social commitment'. As an art event spontaneously arranged around the mobile exhibition of mass culture, and as an experimental documentary, *Buongiorno, Michelangelo* proposes archive materials as historical and re-purposed objects in transition. In this respect, 'gesture and play' are meaningful conceptual

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<sup>367</sup> My translation. The original reads: 'Studiare il linguaggio, significa solo interrogare il linguaggio, lasciarlo vivere. Il linguaggio non e' mai quello che viene pensato, ma quello in cui si pensa. Parlare sul linguaggio [...] non significa dunque elaborare strutture esplicative o riportare le regole del parlare a situazioni culturali precise. Significa dare al linguaggio tutto il suo potere connotativo, fare del linguaggio una operazione artistica, affinche' in questo parlare venga alla luce, ma mai completamente l'appello dell'essere. La parola non e' segno. E' l'aprirsi dell'essere stesso. Se c'e' un'ontologia del linguaggio muore ogni semiotica. [...] Cio' che ogni indagine sulle strutture della comunicazione mette in luce, dunque non e' una struttura soggiacente, ma l'assenza di struttura. E' il campo di un "gioco" continuo.' Umberto Eco, *La Struttura Assente* (Milano: Bompiani, 2012), pp. 21-22.

devices that trigger a perceptual experience of the archive; the encounter with fragmentation and unity.

Nespolo's film made this specifically Italian avant-garde event an international success.<sup>368</sup> Its aesthetic legacy is also relevant to a contemporary engagement with the art object in the everyday. In 2009, Tate Modern in London staged a re-creation of the seminal event, with Pistoletto rolling a new *Atlas* (made of newspaper pulp again), across the Millenium Bridge to St. Paul's. Spontaneous interaction with this one-metre-wide ball once again implied new spatial structures surrounding the museum and both sides of the river Thames.<sup>369</sup> Thus, film and performance again mobilized a generative practice connecting the art museum with the city streets, enabling a new urban audience to engage with a transient and ephemeral archive.

**Figures: 7-11**



7-8: *Buongiorno, Michelangelo* (Ugo Nespolo, 1968-69)

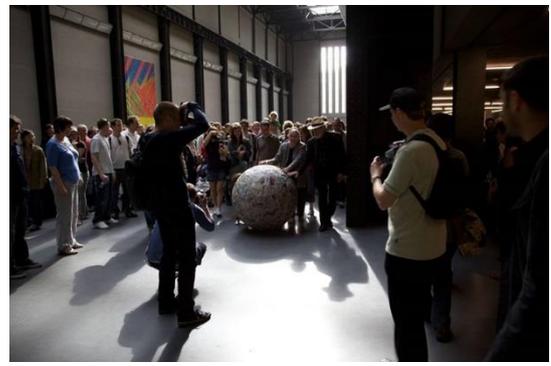
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<sup>368</sup> In November 2017, Pistoletto also re-enacted his 'Walking Sculpture' performance across the streets of Cold Spring and along the river Hudson in New York. <https://www.magazzino.art/events/walking-sculpture-performance> [accessed 16 December 2019]

<sup>369</sup> James Price, *Tate Long Weekend*, 23 May 2009, <https://vimeo.com/22031566> [accessed 14 December 2017]. (<http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/long-weekend-09-michelangelo-pistoletto>)



9: *Buongiorno, Michelangelo* (Ugo Nespolo, 1968-69)



10-11: Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Tate Long Weekend*, London, May 2009

## Chapter 7. Perceptual Strategies and Cognitive Approaches

After the previous Chapter explored the perceptual aesthetic experience of the archive as a *Film Povero*, I now examine a number of films repurposing archive film and television newsreel and implementing experimental perceptual strategies and cognitive approaches to filmmaking. Claudio Cintoli's *Piú*, Giorgio Turi's and Roberto Capanna's *Voy-age*, Adamo Vergine's *Ciao ciao*, and Giorgio Turi's *Scusate il disturbo* foreground the ways in which the technically altered audio-visual structure of experimental film developed an innovative contrapuntal aesthetic, encouraging audiences to engage differently with cinematic and televisual narratives. In the context I have outlined here, I suggest that the Italian filmmakers' aim was to prompt consideration of cultural obsolescence, and to prove that the language of experimental film could be a scientifically valid tool of research. For this reason, I propose that these films are also concerned with revitalising *physis* of 'second technology'.

In *Piú*, Cintoli used collage and animation in order to generate a critical analysis of consumerist lifestyles; and in *Voy-age* and *Scusate il disturbo*, Turi and Capanna aimed to demonstrate their analytic approach to techniques deployed in experimental films, which they considered effective tools for the analysis of media communication. I also invoke Miriam Hansen's critical theoretical framework and Agamben's study of 'repetition' technique, and I explain how both theorists draw on Benjamin. Finally, this Chapter emphasises the importance for the history of the film avant-garde to elicit the encounter of three main areas: 'cultural obsolescence', 'anthropomorphised technology' and 'interruption aesthetics'.

Thus, this Chapter suggests alternative ways in which avant-garde film that repurposed archival footage and deployed cognitive-based aesthetic strategies, thus

motivating thought processes, encouraging society to adopt different modes of engagement with the moving image.

### 1. Claudio Cintoli: *Più* (1964)<sup>370</sup>

The painter and installation artist Claudio Cintoli worked in figurative and informal art, Pop Art collage and frescos prior to moving to New York in 1965, where he lived until 1968 with his own studio in Manhattan. After returning to Italy, his creative output was influenced by Arte Povera's techniques. He combined installations, using assembled found objects and 'poor' materials, along with performance, also drawing inspiration from the Arte Povera artist Pino Pascali's Happenings.<sup>371</sup>

*Più* contains Cintoli's exploration of the origins of moving pictures, as the animated cut-outs and figurines in the film recall pre-cinematic intermedial practices with drawings and photographs, and the indeterminacy of the image hovering between stillness and movement. Consisting of photographs, cut-outs, graphics and comic strips, juxtaposed with very simple animations, this collage aesthetic shares a formal similarity with the television advertising aesthetics of the period. In this film, Cintoli came close to Andy Warhol's eclectic artistic sensibility as an illustrator, animator and filmmaker.

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<sup>370</sup> *Più* (*No More*, 1964, 10').

<sup>371</sup> 'Between 1969 and 1971 Cintoli's artistic activity was particularly fruitful and intense. Also thanks to his work as a critic, he immediately fitted into the new art scene, mainly the Galleria L'Attico di Fabio Sargentini, where Pino Pascali's Happenings had taken place. Well aware of the new horizons opening up before him, Cintoli started a new research strand centred on the conceptual and narrative value of the quotidian and domestic object, thus recuperating its meaning rooted both in popular and agricultural life. He re-introduced the notion of the importance of simple and straightforward gestures capable of involving the audience.' My translation. The original text reads: 'Tra il 1969 e il 1971 l'attività artistica di Cintoli è particolarmente felice e intensa. Anche grazie alla sua attività di critico, si inserisce subito nel cuore della nuova situazione, la Galleria L'Attico di Fabio Sargentini, dove ancora risuonavano gli echi degli happening di Pino Pascali. Perfettamente consapevole dell'orizzonte che si andava rapidamente delineando, Cintoli avvia un nuovo filone di ricerca incentrato sul valore concettuale e narrativo dell'oggetto quotidiano e domestico, recuperandone anche la valenza popolare e contadina, attraverso la proposizione di azioni basate su gesti semplici e comprensibili, in grado di coinvolgere il pubblico presente.' Ludovico Pratesi, 'L'immagine è un bisogno di confine' ('An image stands for the necessity of boundaries'), *Flash Art*, n. 289 Dicembre 2010 – Gennaio 2011, [http://www.flashartonline.it/interno.php?pagina=articolo\\_det&id\\_art=665&det=ok&articolo=CLAUDIO-CINTOLI](http://www.flashartonline.it/interno.php?pagina=articolo_det&id_art=665&det=ok&articolo=CLAUDIO-CINTOLI) [accessed 30 June 2013].

However, while he emulated Pop Art iconography, Cintoli's film language, using collage and repetition, was less concerned with making anti-art statements than providing a cynical portrait of commodity culture. Modern urban life is depicted by vignettes of men's shirts neatly lined up, a plant, the cartoon of a man walking through a labyrinth and automobiles. The man looks puzzled while clearly thinking about money and love, as captions appear above his head referring to the commodification of feelings. Suddenly, on closer examination, sections of the labyrinth recall the Nazi swastika. The urban everyday thus looks like a maze for a disoriented man, whose sense of direction is subliminally dictated by the new demands of late capitalism, shaped around consumerist drives.

Cintoli's criticism of modern life, underlying the apparent irony of his collage, was created through cut-outs from lifestyle magazines such as *L'Europeo* and *Time*, and from commercial news reports; it offered a parodic representation of hedonism. The new post-industrial male prototype paid attention to the latest fashionable clothing, flaunted his elegance, and narcissistically displayed a propensity for a materialistic lifestyle. Images of food and drink consumed at social gatherings completed this portrait of the consumer prototype.

*Più*'s deceptive stylistic simplicity, with its apparently simple ironic illustrations, in fact suggested a subtle analogy between capitalism and fascism, revealing Cintoli's wish to awaken the individual's desire for a more independent agency in his or her daily life. He sought a film language which could appeal to peoples' innermost desire for change, and address the false needs propagated by commodity culture.

Through its concern with consumerist lifestyle, *Più* foreshadowed a growing preoccupation with what came to be known as 'the society of the spectacle', formally

announced in 1967 by Guy Debord's book of that title.<sup>372</sup> The heterogeneity of illustrations, de-contextualised from their mass media sources, crowded the audience's field of vision, emphasising their aggressive intrusion into personal autonomy. Invoking Adorno's philosophy, it could be argued that Cintoli indicted the 'eternally identical' of mass culture, thus elicited the de-personalised condition of the individual formally illustrated in this film. His Pop Art cut-up techniques served to create a metaphor for the criticism of linear narratives through the idea of tailoring, both figuratively, through the illustration of scissors and clothing, and formally by denigrating conformism and a 'bespoke' lifestyle. The reflexivity of the film is indicative of a wry cynicism towards the mass media, promulgating false needs and disavowing any desire for real change.

The second half of the film turned this social critique into a more overtly anti-consumerist discourse, abruptly focusing on themes of human suffering and death. As Cintoli incorporated found footage from historical war films, and newspaper references to Malcolm X, the materialist culture of the Italian economic miracle suddenly bled into more universal and historical human tragedies. Adorno's pronouncement 'there is no true life within a false life', in his 1951 *Minima Moralia*, together with the notion of bourgeois false consciousness, particularly resonate with Cintoli's condemnation of the growing cultural phenomenon of obsolescence, and the typical consumer's lack of self-awareness. The critical attitude proposed by his film was towards the culture industry and the rapid economic growth Italy was experiencing at the time, which de-sensitised society towards its gradual moral degradation.<sup>373</sup> This latter theme was of course also present in many better known

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<sup>372</sup> Guy Debord, *La société du spectacle*. Originally published in 1967.

<sup>373</sup> Hauke Brunkhorst, *Adorno and Critical Theory (Political Philosophy Now)* (University of Wales Press, 1999), p. 64.

Italian films of the 1960s, made by such film auteurs as Michelangelo Antonioni and Federico Fellini, as well as by the rising generation of Marco Bellocchio and Bernardo Bertolucci.

An additional contrapuntal aesthetic can also be found in *Più*'s soundtrack, with its upbeat jazzy rhythm adding irony to an already sombre outlook on life. Overall, Cintoli's techniques, involving contrapuntal strategies with repurposed archival film and jarring aural repetitions formally invoking a critique of consumerism as a degenerate cultural phenomenon.

*Più*'s final sequence goes back to a collage of comic strips, animation and cut-outs from popular media. However, this part of the film seems considerably less subtle in its condemnation of capitalism, despite condemning the commodification and aestheticisation of violence by the mass media, and the constant broadcasting of the Vietnam War. The last sequence shows in rapid succession sensational headlines and photographs from a range of national and international magazines reporting everyday violence. Its ending resonates even more unambiguously with the cry implicit in the title *Più*, 'no more'/'enough!', urging the audience to stop turning a blind eye to the demands of consumer society.

### **1.1 Cultural obsolescence**

Many experimental filmmakers were exposed to sociological and critical debates raised by the Frankfurt School philosophers. Hence Cintoli's portrayal of the individual lost in a maze-like pattern in *Più* can be read not only through Marcuse's contemporary *One-Dimensional Man*, his critique of the homogenisation of any contradiction in late capitalism, but also through Adorno and Horkheimer's influential earlier *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. This had proposed that the separation between

subject and object during the Enlightenment was achieved by a totalitarian system of thought that could only tolerate the repetition of the ‘eternally identical’.<sup>374</sup> Marcuse made his case against false consciousness more resounding:

The distinction between true and false consciousness, real and immediate interest is still meaningful. But this distinction itself must be validated. Men must come to see it and find their way from false to true consciousness, from their immediate to their real interest. They can do so only if they live in need of changing their way of life, of denying the positive, of refusing.<sup>375</sup>

In this light, Cintoli’s film sets out its demand ‘no more!’, encouraging viewers to stop uncritically accepting the values and ideas promoted by the culture industry. Its contrast between animated collage and archive war footage, for example, appeals for this recognition in the viewers’ experience of the film’s content. The formal tension aims to elicit a critique of positivism and the ‘false needs’ created for a bourgeois society. About ‘false needs’, Marcuse had argued:

Most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to this category of false needs.<sup>376</sup>

As *Più* illustrated, the bourgeois ‘false consciousness’ of Italy’s culture industry of the economic miracle could readily be exposed in the avant-garde language of a collage/montage dialectic, interpreting the consumer’s disorienting, fragmented experience of commodity culture. Its aesthetic aimed at jolting spectators to attention, inviting them to acknowledge and engage with, at a cognitive level, their false needs.

It might also be suggested that the filmmaker endowed his non-linear narrative strategy with a Brechtian ‘quotable gesture’, the ‘theatrical device’ of interruption of action and distantiating from context that Brecht deployed in his Epic theatre.<sup>377</sup> The

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<sup>374</sup> D’Alessandro, p. 105.

<sup>375</sup> Marcuse, p. xlv.

<sup>376</sup> Marcuse, p. 7.

<sup>377</sup> About ‘quotable gesture’ in Brecht’s epic theatre, Benjamin wrote: ‘The effect of each sentence’, reads one of Brecht’s dramaturgical didactic poems, ‘was anticipated and revealed. And the moment was anticipated when the crowd would lay the sentences upon the scales.’ In short, the action was interrupted. We may go further here and recall that interruption is one of the

multiplicity of expressive strands in *Piú* amount to a series of moments of disaffection with reality; when action must be interrupted.<sup>378</sup> The repetition motif, combined with the serigraph technique typical of Pop Art, serve to illustrate how the commodification of art had made the mass-produced object a mere cultural referent. Cintoli's serialisation of tropes from popular culture defined him as a Pop artist, turning shards of popular media into objects of iconoclasm. Indeed, in his essay 'That old thing art...' Roland Barthes argued that 'Pop Art reverses values', citing Liechtenstein: 'What characterises Pop is mainly its use of what is despised.'<sup>379</sup> In a similar vein, I propose that Cintoli presented the modern individual as de-personalised and hollow, a mere 'style man' or stereotype.

This leads to the suggestion that the mass media image, as deployed by Cintoli, can be seen as having no meaning other than to display its meaningless surface. My analysis is underpinned by Agamben's concept of 'imagelessness', itself drawn from Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*: 'the image exhibited as such is no longer an image of anything; it is itself imageless'.<sup>380</sup> Agamben compares the image to 'a zone of undecidability between the true and the false'.<sup>381</sup> The spectacle generated by 'style man' and consumerism, as ironically illustrated in Cintoli's *Piú*, challenge the

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fundamental methods of all form-giving. It reaches far beyond the domain of art. It is, to mention just one of its aspects, the origin of the quotation. Quoting a text implies interrupting its context. It will readily be understood, therefore, that epic theatre, which depends on interruption, is quotable in a very specific sense. That its texts are quotable would be nothing very special. But the gestures used in the process of acting are another matter. "Making gestures quotable" is one of the essential achievements of epic theatre.' Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, trans. by Anna Bostock (London: Verso, 1998), p. 19.

<sup>378</sup> This technique may invoke the notion of positivism. Marcuse wrote: 'The term "positivism" has encompassed (1) the validation of cognitive thought by experience of facts; (2) the orientation of cognitive thought to the physical sciences as a model of certainty and exactness; (3) the belief that progress in knowledge depends on this orientation. Consequently, positivism is a struggle against all metaphysics, transcendentalisms, and idealisms as obscurantist and regressive modes of thought.' Marcuse, p. 176.

<sup>379</sup> Roland Barthes, 'That Old Thing Art...', in *Pop Art: A Critical History (Documents of Twentieth-Century Art)*, ed. by Steven Henry Madoff (London: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 370-375 (p. 372)

<sup>380</sup> Giorgio Agamben, 'Difference and Repetition: On Guy Debord's Films', trans. by Brian Holmes, in McDonough, 2002, pp. 313-319 (p. 319). Agamben originally delivered this article as a lecture on the occasion of the "Sixth International Video Week" at the Centre Saint-Gervais in Geneva in November 1995.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*

ostensibly neutral advertisements, in order to propose a different cultural identity for society.

Furthermore, I suggest that Agamben's insights on 'repetition' may illuminate further the aesthetic importance of Cintoli's technique in *Piú*, reinforcing the significance of its title, 'no more':

The force and the grace of repetition, the novelty it brings us, is the return as the possibility of what was. Repetition restores the possibility of what was, renders it possible anew; it's almost a paradox. To repeat something is to make it possible anew. Here lies the proximity of repetition and memory. Memory cannot give us back what was, as such: that would be hell. Instead, memory restores possibility to the past.<sup>382</sup>

Agamben's thesis on the dichotomy between the past and the possibility of its repetition, whereby the latter term has a forewarning capacity, complements Benjamin's idea of a 'messianic history', according to which the historical image's 'inherent' responsibility for the future is based on its foretelling power; especially, I would argue when integrated within the context of the audio-visual media of the post-economic miracle of the sixties.<sup>383</sup>

Based on Agamben's thought that Benjamin's notion of memory restoring possibility to the past amounted to a theological experience, I would argue that Benjamin's idea of 'possibility' constitutes one of Agamben's 'transcendentals of montage'. For Agamben, another defining aesthetic feature of cinema is related to 'the conditions of possibility for montage' which he argued may be called 'transcendentals'. 'In philosophy, since Kant, the conditions of possibility for something are called transcendentals. What are the transcendentals of montage?' For

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<sup>382</sup> Agamben, 2002, pp. 313-319 (p. 315).

<sup>383</sup> 'But what is the history involved? Here it must be stressed that it is not a matter of a chronological history in the strict sense, but of a messianic history. Messianic history is defined by two major characteristics. First, it is a history of salvation: something must be saved. But it is also a final history, an eschatological history, in which something must be completed, judged. It must happen here, but in another time; it must leave chronology behind, but without entering some other world.' Although I discuss Agamben's theory of difference and repetition, based on Benjamin's concept of 'Messianic history' in more detail in the next Chapter, it is necessary to quote from Agamben also in this context. Agamben, 2002, pp. 313-319 (p. 314).

Agamben, these are ‘repetition and stoppage’.<sup>384</sup> Hence, the repetition and stoppage techniques in Cintoli’s film, combined with extracts from archive newsreels, generate the idea that memory restores possibility to the past.

The Brechtian ‘quotable gesture’ of Cintoli’s montage could also be seen as a ‘transcendental’ prerequisite of his montage/collage technique. The audience’s experience of an unfamiliar narrative rhythm and structure is enlivened by a compulsion (triggered by ‘repetition’) to experience the possibility of ‘what once was’. This sets into motion a continuous tension with the present, which may create a fissure in the experience of passive spectatorship and turn it into a constructive activity. The ‘transcendental’ is thus transported into the mundanity of the present for the sake of salvation, for a final history ‘in which something must be judged’.<sup>385</sup>

Marcuse also wrote: ‘but as all freedom depends on the conquest of alien necessity, the realisation of freedom depends on the techniques of this conquest’.<sup>386</sup> By foregrounding the tension between the past and the present, and between mass media and society, *Più* can be considered an exemplary epistemological model of how avant-garde film techniques could activate a cognitive understanding of false needs and false consciousness.

## **2. Giorgio Turi and Roberto Capanna: *Voy-age* (1964)<sup>387</sup>**

Together with *Non Permetterò* (1967, which will be analysed later in Chapter 9) and *Scusate il disturbo* (1968), *Voy-age* forms part of what Bruno Di Marino defined as ‘the trilogy of attractions’, referring to the well-known concept of a ‘cinema of

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> Agamben, 2002, pp. 313-319 (p. 314).

<sup>386</sup> Marcuse, p. 18.

<sup>387</sup> *Voy-age* (1964, 16mm, b/w, 12’).

attractions', first introduced by Tom Gunning in 1986.<sup>388</sup> In relation to new experiences of time and space, the Italian 'trilogy of attractions' also had many elements connected to the aesthetics of surprise, interruption and spectacle, albeit revisited within the social context of the Italian economic miracle.

Giorgio Turi had started his career as a photographer, before becoming involved with the New American Cinema movement in New York in 1962, and working as director of photography and assistant director on the feature film *Goodbye in the Mirror* (1965), co-directed by Storm De Hirsch and Louis Brigante.<sup>389</sup> In 1963, with experimental filmmaker Giorgio Capanna, Turi made a documentary *Il fachiro* (*The fakir*) according to the tenets of *cinéma vérité*, and between 1966 and 1969 he studied filmmaking as a research methodology in the humanities, alongside analysis and theory of communication for the Italian Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche (National Research Council). He also worked in television, in RAI's Experimental Services between 1968 and 1969, and contributed to imaging techniques for the opening credits of experimental television programmes.<sup>390</sup> Thus, Turi's formal research was critically responsive to the effects of developments within the mass media, exploring ways in which science and technology could work together to address a crisis in social values, and promote commitment to cultural change.

Roberto Capanna's career developed out of a more social-realist approach to communication technologies, having worked with Cesare Zavattini and Vito Pandolfi in 1962, on both documentary and experimental projects. His works achieved a certain national and international recognition. At the fifth and sixth International Biennale in

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<sup>388</sup> *Non Permetterò / I will not allow it*, also made by Turi and Capanna, in 1967 is analysed in Chapter 9; *Scusate il disturbo / Apologies for the Interruption*, made by Turi in 1968, is discussed in the following Section. Di Marino, 1999, p. 81. Tom Gunning 'The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde', *Wide Angle*, Vol. 8, nos. 3 & 4 Fall, 1986

<sup>389</sup> *Goodbye in the Mirror* (1965, 35mm, 80').

<sup>390</sup> Giorgio Turi, 'Giorgio Turi (e Roberto Capanna)', in Bacigalupo, 1974, pp. 175-178 (p. 178).

Paris (in 1968 and 1970), his films *Voy-age* and *V/M* (1969, 16mm, 13') represented new Italian cinema.<sup>391</sup> He also served as assistant director and screenwriter on some of Roberto Rossellini's films,<sup>392</sup> and spent the better part of three decades making television documentaries on avant-garde music and expressive gesture.<sup>393</sup>

Both filmmakers were committed to experimenting with film as medium and audio-visual text. In *Voy-age*, they reflected on industrial life and traditional character-driven narrative conventions, responding to a widespread sense of social alienation. The film's experimental poetics amount to a critique of the corporate domination of modern society.

*Voy-age* is a compilation of heterogeneous film materials, from new live action to found footage, including rushes taken from historical documentaries.<sup>394</sup> Although the arrangement may initially appear random, the film in fact resulted from a careful analytical study of temporality and duration, influenced by its makers' research on aural and visual semantic elements in the making of a language. As in the case of Cintoli's *Piú*, this creative process involving the creation of a new film language was also aimed at encouraging audiences to recognise film spectatorship as an epistemological experience.

As its title implied, Turi and Capanna's film proposed a metaphorical 'voy-age' through film as both language and art medium. This unfolds along three thematic axes: aging, film aesthetics, and the ontology of the moving image. These can be considered complementary parts of a process that foregrounds technical interventions, and their effect on viewers' experience of temporality.

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<sup>391</sup> Turi, in Bacigalupo, 1974, pp. 175-178 (p. 175).

<sup>392</sup> Roberto Capanna, *Vie* (Roads), in <http://www.librinelcassetto.it/blog/2011/08/02/vie-di-r-capanna/> [accessed 8 December 2013].

<sup>393</sup> Di Marino, 1999, p. 80.

<sup>394</sup> Turi, in Bacigalupo, 1974, pp. 175-178 (p. 176).

## 2.1 Anthropomorphising technology

In this Section, I discuss the idea that with *Voy-age* Turi and Capanna mapped out what could be considered a humanising technology. The film's live action sequences explore themes such as spontaneity and chance encounters, as typified by the Sixties interest in Happenings. These would seem to demonstrate a dichotomy between the individual's mundane life, riddled with automated tasks, and the possibility of fortuitous encounter with art and the moving image. Intercut with found footage, these endow the film with a sophisticated dialectical narrative structure. Turi and Capanna explore leisure through polarising aspects of life suspended between action and meditation. Their use of extreme close-ups and long shots of an elderly couple accentuate the mundane aspect of the everyday, while also revealing sombre views of the surrounding industrial wasteland. This aesthetic suggests a metaphorical interpretation of film as a material medium, prone to decay and ephemerality, evoking the association between film and human skin, film and time. For Turi and Capanna, there is an association between epidermis and celluloid, where human skin is like a 'lived landscape'. A home movie segment depicted communal activities, exploring the carefree passage of time through the innocence of children's unruly and joyful activities, recalls memories of an untroubled time, and the promise of eternal freedom that only imaginary open spaces seem to offer.

The film communicates the possibility of combining different artistic choices across its jagged transitions between one style and another, from documentary to home movie sections, as it interweaves the idea of an observational and objective perspective with a subjective experience of time and landscape as continuum. By foregrounding its experimentation with audio-visual forms, narrative registers, and film's materialities, the 'anthropomorphising technology' of *Voy-age* gestures towards

recuperating the missing link between film as object and film as subjective experience.

*Voy-age* is also organised in registers that recall the history of non-narrative film poetics. While the montage is clearly influenced by the social-realist vein of Eisenstein's montage, it also recalls Dziga Vertov's Constructivist Kino-eye experimental documentary. Other historic experimental forms evoked include Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's experimentation with the interplay of light and motion-based media in his 1930 *Light Space Modulator*, and the abstract figurations of geometrical shapes in space in Viking Eggeling's or Walter Ruttmann's films of the 1920s. *Voy-age* could also be said to show a Cubist sensibility in its analytical image composition, reminiscent of Fernand Léger and Dudley Murphy's 1924 *Ballet Mécanique*. Alongside this paean to historic avant-garde modes of expression, *Voy-age* is equally a stark criticism of industrial society, with its depiction of inhospitable urban sites, spoilt rural landscapes and ruins. The urban industrial landscape, while fascinating for its ghostly scenarios, can be seen as a dystopia of the metropolitan modernity shown more optimistically in Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: symphony of the great city* (1927) or Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929).

Together with the depiction in flat monochrome of wastelands and abandoned fairgrounds, *Voy-age* includes more abstract representation of remote industrial landscapes standing on the outskirts of civilisation. Low-angle close-ups of dilapidated buildings, and of industrial materials such as metal and iron, cogs, pipes and factory smoke seem to be closing down on, or towering above the individual. This focus on perspective conveys an imbalance between the imperial presence of objects and the isolation of human beings. Turi argued that the heterogeneous montage of 'primary materials' - extreme low-angle shots of factories and plants to scale up their

actual size, together with landscapes of industrial locations and close-ups of human skin - constituted 'the formal gestalt of *Voy-age* at a semantic level'.<sup>395</sup> The filmmakers' techniques served not only as research tools, but also as a research project in innovative cinematic language.

After this documentary footage of a dystopian post-apocalyptic landscape, with conglomerations of furnaces, chimneys and metal works referring to factory workers' life struggles, the ensuing home movie footage of people living at leisure encapsulates the work-vs-leisure predicament dictated by capitalist society.

The care-free happiness exuded by family life as portrayed in the home-movie footage shows human beings living at liberty, content and in harmony with their natural environment. As these images are also seen in slow motion, they seem to communicate the potential of memory retrieving the exact moment, the discarded fragment of a distant time; pointing towards a potential engagement with *physis*. In this section with archive footage, the representation of personal memories, which evoke the oneiric quality of intimate private moments, an uplifting experience of family life as contrasted with the documentary images of desolate and forgotten lands.

Many quickly-edited shots of feet dancing, or simply walking and jumping, recall the Futurists' celebration of a cinema that does not merely reproduce reality, but tries to capture the rapid rhythms of modernity in painting, sculpture, architecture and literature – as demonstrated in Arnaldo Ginna's film *Vita Futurista*, 1916.<sup>396</sup> However, while Futurism celebrated the speed of modernity, Turi and Capanna prefer slowing down the moving image, not only invoking nostalgia for the past, but

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<sup>395</sup> Turi, in Bacigalupo, 1974, pp. 175-178 (p. 176).

<sup>396</sup> Madesani, p. 15.

criticising the worship of progress, which drives moral degradation and the compulsion to consume, and feeds the phenomenon of obsolescence.

For Turi and Capanna ‘anthropomorphising technology’ involved establishing a relationship between filming techniques, temporality, and human gesture, leading them to slow down some of their images in relation to the movement of the human body. Hence, *Voy-age* can be seen in part as a philosophical meditation about human life and media technologies, offering their analysis of humans’ desire to control media technologies, with the consequent ‘innervation’ (to borrow Benjamin’s term) of the human body. Miriam Hansen explained this distinctive concept:

In Benjamin’s dictionary, *innervation* broadly refers to a neurophysiological process that mediates between internal and external, psychic and motoric, human and machinic registers. These concerns – in particular the fate of the human sensorium in an environment altered by technology and capitalist commodity production – place the concept squarely in the framework of what Benjamin names the tradition of ‘anthropological materialism’.<sup>397</sup>

The camera’s voyeuristic eye, we might say, is epistemologically referenced by the first syllable of the title *Voy-age*, establishing a connection between human biology and technology, while ‘voy-age’ links the predatory form of human sight (voyeurism) with ‘seeing in time’. The film’s aesthetic proposition around technological innervation may therefore be that both human body and moving image are connected in space and time

I suggest that *Voy-age* can usefully be considered today in light of Hansen’s development of the Benjaminian concept of ‘technologically enabled interpenetration of “body and image space”, or the notion of an imbrication of physiological with machinic structures’, in order to revalidate the integration of the human body into

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<sup>397</sup> Hansen, 2012, p. 133.

technology.<sup>398</sup> Retrospectively, we may judge that the filmmakers' scientific research and experimentation with the moving image succeeded in recuperating the idea of human agency through the appropriation of 'second technology'.

Movement and temporality are also clearly connected to memory and history: human perception is dulled by an excess of meaningless residues of ghostly signifiers, and so compelled to travel back in time, to re-engage with the meaning of the image and recapture its vanished referent in reality. Turi's and Capanna's technical interventions displayed a sensibility for aural and visual imagery, and mixed dichotomous narrative registers, while their repurposing of archival footage, I suggest, was primarily aimed at triggering a process of technological 'innervation' of spectators' perception.

Turi claimed that it was necessary to go back to the origins of filmic language to rediscover the discourse of aesthetic and scientific experimentation started by the artists of the historic avant-garde. For independent filmmakers of the 1960s wanting to criticise traditional narrative cinema, one critical resource was evidence that could be verified by theoretical and scientific postulates.<sup>399</sup>

Turi and Capanna's juxtaposition of dystopian documentary and joyful home movie footage provided an epistemological framework for their analysis of the cultural impact of technology on modern society. This raised the question as to whether their research indirectly created ways of 'anthropomorphising' technology as a critical practice. The danger of this experimentation lay in giving priority to objects rather than human beings, or the human body. The film's semantic approach, starting

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<sup>398</sup> Benjamin, quoted in Hansen, 2012, p.133.

<sup>399</sup> Turi, in Bacigalupo, 1974, pp. 175-178 (p. 176). Turi and Capanna were not alone among independent filmmakers of the 1960s in appealing to the history of science and cinema. In Britain, Don Levy made a collage film about theories of time, *Time Is* (1964), and in the United States, Hollis Frampton frequently deconstructed filmic language and invoked its early history.

with the title *Voy-age*, suggests journeying through time from both a metaphysical and personal perspective. It is also concerned with ontological becoming and transformation, as technology and human biology become closely inter-connected, as humans are to mass media. The extreme close-ups of elderly faces associated the physicality of aged human skin with the materiality of archival film, both having been exposed to the ravages of time; both skin and film are shown as ephemeral materials and matter. The photographic association between close-ups of aged skin and the dissected body created by the camera's angles can be taken further, suggesting a textural continuum between human epidermis and environment. The nearly invisible presence of human life emphasised a hollow spectacle of the surrounding landscape.

I would argue that the filmmakers' 'human-skin' and 'film-as-medium' analogy relate to 'a poetics of a cultural obsolescence'. The heterogeneous yet tightly woven fabric of the film, outlined above, suggests that the filmmakers were not merely concerned with aesthetic difference, but with showing how formal differences constitute the semantics of a new filmic language. Overall, their criticism is of film understood primarily as a cultural commodity, which is also an inherently ephemeral material due to celluloid's vulnerability to deterioration. Their analysis of film was based not only on enhancing a cognitive awareness of 'film as medium', but also on an often discordant audio-visual perception. As Turi stated: 'The same principle was applied to the film's soundtrack (with both diegetic and non-diegetic elements practically reconstructed in a laboratory, from everyday live sound to classical music) which at times simply underpins the images, but more often contrasts them'.<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>400</sup> My translation. The original text reads: 'Lo stesso principio è stato esteso alla colonna sonora (praticamente costruita in laboratorio, sia con elementi originali che con brani recuperati dalla musica classica o dai rumori della vita quotidiana), colonna che talvolta sottolinea semplicemente le immagini, ma più spesso si oppone a queste.' Turi, in Bacigalupo, 1974, pp. 175-178 (p. 176).

*Voy-age* demonstrated how a film aesthetics based on the study of post-industrial society could focus on the intersection of human biology and technology. Through its ‘anthropomorphised technology’, this film can be regarded as an innovative avant-garde proposal for the recuperation of ‘second technology’, challenging what Hansen described as ‘an already bungled reception of technology [...] structurally accountable for the success of fascism’.<sup>401</sup>

### 3. Adamo Vergine: *Ciao ciao* (1967)<sup>402</sup>

Apparently very different from Turi’s and Capanna’s critical position, Adamo Vergine’s *Ciao ciao*, inspired by the familiar greeting, was based on Vergine’s personal archive, and could be called a ‘memory-film’, re-enacting the fruitful tension between bodily movement and the technology of repetition. In some ways it recalls the repetition passages of Fernand Léger’s and Dudley Murphy’s cubist-inspired *Ballet Mécanique* (1924), and foreshadow Paolo Gioli’s collage film with found footage *Commutazioni con mutazione* (1969).<sup>403</sup> Like the latter, which also utilized a variety of techniques - from film re-colouring, black and white imagery, and scratches on the film strip - *Ciao ciao* focuses on the technological embodiment of human gesture.

The film recycles four sequences taken from Vergine’s first 8mm ‘memory-film’, made during a trip with his family in 1955. Sequences were joined in a loop, and projected onto frosted glass, which projection was then filmed with an 8mm camera, utilizing all the variations that this afforded both in speed and focus. The uncut film

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<sup>401</sup> Hansen, p. 132.

<sup>402</sup> *Ciao ciao* (1967, 16mm, b/w, silent, 6’). Adamo Vergine was born in Naples, and earned a degree in Medicine, with the specialisation in Psychiatry.

<sup>403</sup> *Commutazioni con mutazione* (*Commutations with mutation*, 1969, 16mm, b/w, col., silent, 6’).

strip was then screened as if it was a 16mm film, so that four images could be seen simultaneously: two on the left and two on the right. The aim was to foreground the presence of the camera and the film strip.<sup>404</sup>

While evoking Pop Art in its serialised compositions, *Ciao ciao* illustrates body language rhetoric, the human being 'de-naturalised', like a mechanical object, and out of joint in its simple gestures. The repeated image of a woman waving 'ciao' to the camera, counterpointed by a jazz piano score, emphasised the intersection of human gesture and technology. Vergine wanted to reclaim the human dimension that he believed was in crisis due to the presence of the camera between filmmaker and actor.<sup>405</sup> Like in Turi and Capanna, the self-reflexive quality of Vergine's film evokes the 'cinema of gesture' of Grifi's and Baruchello's *Verifica Incerta*, where human body and technology intersect. Vergine was one of the co-founders of the Cooperative of Italian Independent Cinema, and with *Ciao ciao*, he continued the group's reassessment of cinema's means of reproduction.

On the one hand, his film foregrounds the vulnerability of the human body as a simple bodily movement becomes enmeshed with technology, with the gesture being recorded by the camera. On the other hand, the film reinforces the power of the human element, as the 'actor' responds to the director's vision behind the camera by waving 'ciao' at him. This, we might conclude, happily resolves a potential impasse in human relationships involving the recording of personal memories, feelings and the environment.

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<sup>404</sup> Adamo Vergine, 'Adamo Vergine', in Bacigalupo, 1974, pp. 179-80 (p. 179)

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*

#### 4. Giorgio Turi: *Scusate il disturbo* (1968)<sup>406</sup>

Turi continued his study of communication technologies with the densely woven audio-visual fabric of *Scusate il disturbo* (*Apologies for the interruption*), offering a deconstruction of television documentary and newsreel formats. Like many other artists in this period, Turi's indictment of television encroaching on the everyday used the appropriation and re-contextualisation of broadcast material and documentary footage. His purpose was to demonstrate the deconstructive potential of experimental film through new audio-visual structures.

The film opens with a rapid montage of advertisements, newsreels, radio broadcasts and the recorded message of flight attendants advising on emergency procedures. Clearly Turi wanted to criticise consumerism and the oppressive presence of the mass media. The speed of this sequence reflects both the pace of consumerism and the modern individual's distorted perception of time. As in *Voy-age*, human biology is being subjected to technological encroachment. In *Scusate il disturbo*, the hypothesis is that the constant incursion of the media into people's lives will damage their senses and distort their spatio-temporal perception. The film's perceptual aesthetics illustrate a warped, de-familiarised experience of reality, with audiences unable to form a lucid opinion of, or a critical engagement with, the texts produced by mass culture. In order to form his 'second technology', Turi subjected archive footage taken from televised war films and newsreels, along with excerpts from trivial entertainment programs, to aggressive processes of hyper-mediation. Visual images and sounds are distorted and collaged, with 'disturbances' at both the perceptual and semantic level.<sup>407</sup>

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<sup>406</sup> *Scusate il disturbo* (*Apologies for the Interruption*) (1968, 16mm, b/w, 16').

<sup>407</sup> Turi, in Bacigalupo, 1974, pp. 175-178 (p. 177).

Turi's innovative approach to film language of consisted in this renewal of a constructive engagement with media technologies, which resulted in a 'disruption, or noise aesthetic', turning audio-visual narrative signifiers into ruptures of normally hypnotic televisual narratives, thus subverting their manipulative presence. The contemporary work of Pop Art painters such as Roy Lichtenstein and Alain Jacquet was also influential on his techniques of superimposing new audio-visual imagery on pre-existent broadcast footage to expose the artificiality of conventional televisual narratives about contemporary events.<sup>408</sup> Popular television programmes, interspersed with reports on the Vietnam War had become media commodities which de-sensitised viewers to violence and war atrocities, turning authentic concerns about peace in the world into communication strategies.

The precision of his film's structure underpinned an attempt to reveal, through a scientific approach, film as a structured language based on materials and techniques deployed by mass media communication in consumer society. As the art critic Alberto Boatto wrote:

The conflict, or rather the controversy lies not so much in the content of such images but in the film's precise linguistic structure, where the real contrast is between lightness, artificiality and visual fascination on the one hand (towards which Turi is clearly sensitive) and poverty, crudity, rawness on the other; the lack of visual seduction by those images brutally fixed by the camera.<sup>409</sup>

Turi's re-constructed semantics involved integrating, amid crackling sounds and noise (sonic signifiers of electronic disturbances), a brief audio extract from a flight attendant giving instructions on the use of the oxygen mask. This recorded message becomes a voiceover for to a rapid montage of commercials, mainstream films and

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<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> My translation. The original text reads: 'Il conflitto o meglio l'attrito polemico appare quindi affidato più che ai contenuti, ad una precisa strutturazione linguistica, dove il vero contrasto sta fra la leggerezza, artificiosità, fascinazione visiva da una parte (a cui Turi è chiaramente sensibile) e povertà, ruvidezza, mancanza di seduzione da parte d'immagini fissate brutalmente dall'obbiettivo fotografico.' Alberto Boatto, as quoted by Turi, in Bacigalupo, 1974, pp. 175-178 (p. 177).

sport events, creating a productive tension. On the one hand, there are visual references to the pleasures of leisure time, anticipating family holidays away from home; and on the other, there are audio references to work (as the flight attendant's words conjure up automated gestures). This audio-visual montage is then abruptly followed by the harrowing spectacle of death and human suffering in war newsreel footage. A different voiceover for this imagery explains the effects of the burning by napalm, to which many victims of the Vietnam War were subjected.<sup>410</sup> Juxtaposing such very different subject matter was intended to promote an active and thoughtful viewing of otherwise familiar narratives and their underpinning structures.

*Scusate il disturbo* made a bold critical statement on television's routine narratives which underplayed the authentic gravity of the consequences of war, providing no substantial social engagement with world news. Its aggressive formal manipulation of audio-visual imagery and raw representation of facts aimed to foreground the triviality of many television programmes. The critical analysis performed by Turi's 'détournement' of war newsreel footage is another clear reference to Guy Debord's 'society of the spectacle', as his film cast a critical eye on consumer society's lack of interest in any social commitment to cultural change. *Scusate il disturbo* offered not only a stark assessment of the poverty of the audio-visual image (its reference to the real), but also its one-dimensional narratives.

The film ends abruptly with a statement perfunctorily voiced by a female presenter (as if it were a pre-recorded message, resonating with the initial flight attendant's mechanical voice): 'Scusate il disturbo, grazie', 'Apologies for the interruption. Thank you [for watching]'. Its overall aesthetic of disturbance culminates with the sudden

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<sup>410</sup> Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 244.

appearance of a television presenter routinely reassuring viewers that the scheduled programs will resume once technical problems have been resolved. The decontextualised signifier, the apologetic announcement, is repurposed to emphasise with irony an apology not only for showing images of wounded and dead bodies, the aftermath of a distant war, but also for interrupting leisure time. The darker implication is that these images did not offer any viewing pleasures, and hence constituted a real interruption and disturbance of the viewers' experience of an untroubled linearity, which generated the illusion of existential wellbeing.

It is also possible to argue that Turi's interruption aesthetics denoted a feminist sensibility, as the sudden ending points to a criticism of the objectification of women by the mass media. A close-up of the female presenter foregrounds a highly polished performance, whose mechanised demeanour and automatic-sounding voice punctuate the narrative flow of television programming schedules that complied with patriarchal structures and expectations: presenters had to be female and feminine, alluring to the eye. Further evidence of Turi's critical stance against women's lack of subjectivity and autonomy in the Italian society of 1968 is provided by the film's formal circularity, from the female flight attendant's voice in the opening sequence to the female presenter's mechanised apology in the film's abrupt ending.

#### **4.1 Interruption aesthetics**

Turi's *Scusate il disturbo* can be considered a counterpoint to Grifi's and Baruchello's Dada-influenced montage film *Verifica Incerta* (to be examined in the following Chapter). The aim of Turi's film was to test the possibilities of a film language that would cognitively reach out to a potentially more attentive audience. His aggressive and unapologetic criticism of broadcast television was founded on the contrast

between its 'immediacy' aesthetic (liveness and newsreels reportage) and an anti-illusionist aesthetic based on 'unmediated reality'. As William C. Wees argued in his *Recycled Images*, 'found footage films based on a montage of disparate and incongruous images are... more likely to challenge the media's power to make ideologically loaded images seem like unmediated representations of reality'.<sup>411</sup>

Turi's undercutting of the illusion of unmediated truthfulness of news broadcasts through a brash audio-visual montage opened up a discourse on televisual representation hinging on the fiction-reality binary. He suggested a new 'meaningfulness' based on a deliberately compounded rupturing of media. In May 1967, in the journal *Filmcritica*, he published an article on the theory of information and communication aesthetics. By subverting the sensory effect of 'noise-disturbance', he re-cast the binary 'order-disorder' of conventional, linear televisual narratives and programmes, as he had demonstrated in the fast-paced montage of *Scusate il disturbo*, in order to mark out the persuasiveness of these realistic narratives as fictional:

This paradoxical consideration [...] allows us to subvert the effect 'noise-disturbance' (which under normal circumstances would influence negatively communication), thus to utilize this characteristic more conveniently in order to sharpen or foreground the message. To this end, when structuring the (film) message the filmmaker should consider noise as a background against which to pit the true message, thus creating a dialectical relationship between order and disorder.<sup>412</sup>

Turi's 'interruption aesthetics' were intended to engage at a perceptual level to foreground the impact technology had in mediating viewers' perception of linear narratives, and show how this depended upon uninterrupted audio-visual flows. The

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<sup>411</sup> Wees, p. 48.

<sup>412</sup> My translation. The original text reads: 'Questa considerazione paradossale [...], permette di capovolgere l'effetto del "rumore-disturbo" (che nella normale accezione dovrebbe influenzare negativamente la comunicazione), utilizzando tale element in maniera opportuna, al fine di aumentare l'informazione contenuta nel messaggio. A questo scopo, nella strutturazione del messaggio (filmico) il trasmettitore (il cineasta) dovrebbe considerare il rumore come uno sfondo sul quale far risaltare il messaggio vero e proprio, creando un rapporto dialettico ordine/disordine.'. Turi as cited in Di Marino, 1999, p. 81.

productive tension between audio-visual signifiers from disparate sources would burst into aesthetic noise, thus creating an interruption aesthetic, or ostensibly incoherent narratives. Turi had created a formal proximity between medium and human epidermis in *Voy-age*, with consecutive images of human skin burnt by napalm and the material of film catching fire taking on a metaphorical significance. Aggression against the human body is matched with semantic manipulation of the photographic image, which underpins the indexical representation of 'the real'. In 1954, Adorno had presciently written on the typical television series:

It seems timely to investigate systematically socio-psychological stimuli typical of televised material both on a descriptive and psychodynamic level, to analyse their presuppositions as well as their total pattern, and to evaluate the effect they are likely to produce. This procedure may ultimately bring forth a number of recommendations on how to deal with these stimuli to produce most desirable effect of television. By exposing the socio-psychological implications and mechanisms of television, which often operate under the guise of false realism, not only may the shows be improved, but, more important possibly, the public at large may be sensitized to the nefarious effect of some of these mechanisms.<sup>413</sup>

Adorno's proposals for experimental approaches to televisual narrative may illuminate Turi's film new narrative aesthetics, pivoting around the deconstruction of the language of television programming to reveal its mediation and creation of illusory liveness. His separation of the image's visual referent from its sonic signifier produced an audio-visual assault on audience perception, which might reveal the underpinning semantic structures and their bearing on psycho-social dynamics.

In relation to the main research area of this thesis, nascent essayistic modes of engagement and aesthetics of experimental films, the 'interruption aesthetic' of *Scusate il disturbo* represents an important stage, based as it was on the deconstruction

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<sup>413</sup> Adorno, 'How to look at television', in Adorno, 2001, p. 136. Originally published in *The Quarterly of Film, Radio and Television*, Spring, 3, 1954.

of the televisual apparatus. In relation to ‘the essay as form’ in his eponymous text, Adorno referred to Lukács’s ‘Soul and Form’, where he stated:

The essay is always concerned with something already formed, or at best, with something that has been; it is part of its essence that it does not draw something new out of an empty vacuum, but only gives a new order to such things as once lived. And because it only newly orders them, not forming something new out of the formless, he is bound to them; he must always speak “the truth” about them, find, that is, the expression for their essence.<sup>414</sup>

In this vein, it could be said that the compositional techniques deployed in *Scusate il disturbo* followed the formal strategies already theorised by both Adorno’s and Lukács’s writing on the essay as form.

I would argue that ‘interruption aesthetics’ were avant-garde in terms of generating not only perceptual and cognitive, but also moral, disturbance.

Thus, I posit that the experimental films of Cintoli, Turi, Capanna, and Vergine are essayistic for implementing perceptual strategies and cognitive approaches to archival materials and formats. This also provides a context for a third-avant garde: Eco’s writing on the purposes of an experimental language, through which, he argued, the artist could re-cast the same language from which they became alienated, in order to further understand and reflect on it.<sup>415</sup>

This may recall Peter Gidal’s ‘On Structural/Materialist Film’, and its strategy of reflexivity.<sup>416</sup> Gidal wrote: ‘Structural/Materialist film attempts to be non-illusionist. The filmmaking process deals with devices that result in demystification or attempted demystification of the film process.’<sup>417</sup> As noted in my introduction, in his 1971

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<sup>414</sup> György Lukács, *Soul and Form* (Cambridge: MIT, 1974), p. 13. Cited in Adorno, 1984, pp. 151-171 (p 151).

<sup>415</sup> About Eco’s ‘Form as social commitment’, please see Chapter 1, Section 3.

<sup>416</sup> Peter Gidal, ‘Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film’, in Michael O’Pray, *Avant-Garde Film. An Anthology of writing* (London: The Arts Council of England/John Libbey Media/University of Luton Press, 1996), p. 145. Originally published in 1976.

<sup>417</sup> Peter Gidal, ‘Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film’, in O’Pray, Michael (Ed.), *Avant-Garde Film. An Anthology of writing* (London: The Arts Council of England/John Libbey Media/University of Luton Press, 1996), p. 145. (Originally published in Peter Gidal, (Ed.), *Structural Film Anthology*, London: BFI, 1976).

survey of Italian experimental film, Edoardo Bruno already found that there was an interest in the materialist, linguistic transformation of the moving image, marking the official coming of age of a ‘materialist cinema’, which was self-reflexive in its use of archival and other image materials. However, the anti-illusionist techniques, and aggressive intervention on the film’s photographic and historical materials undertaken by the Italian ‘third avant-garde’ films were aimed at viewers’ perceptual sensibilities, compelling cognitive awareness about the films’ content and themes.<sup>418</sup>

*Scusate il disturbo* addressed the language of television through experimental film, adopting a deconstructive process aimed at re-configuring the boundaries of the medium and techniques of communication. In the mid-sixties, early video art was also based on deconstructive experimentations with television as medium; such pioneer video and media artists as Nam June Paik and Wolf Vostell also popularised the critical notion of ‘medium specificity’.<sup>419</sup>

The leading Italian pioneer of experimentation with media technologies and video art, working especially with television, was Lucio Fontana, who had already founded the art movement ‘Spazialismo’ (Spatialist Movement) in the forties.<sup>420</sup> Turi’s research into the new aesthetic potential of media communication involved filming off the television screen (in the era preceding video recorders), hence performing a

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<sup>418</sup> Bruno, Edoardo, ‘Ragguaglio sul cinema sperimentale di Knokke’ (‘A Survey of Experimental Film in Knokke’), in *Ind Under Off – Materiali sul cinema sperimentale 1959-1979*, ed. by Lodato, Nuccio (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 1981), p. 145. Originally published in *Filmcritica*, n. 251, 1971.

<sup>419</sup> ‘In 1962, the German artist Wolf Vostell called on audiences to hijack the evening’s TV entertainment by repeatedly changing channels, wrapping the TV in barbed wire, buying it or eating it as an indigestible “TV Dinner”. Through his instruction to channel-hop continuously, Vostell was shattering the pervasive narratives of television and his absurd injunction to destroy what were then very expensive sets highlighted the consumerism that dominated cultural production and reception.’ Elwes, 2006, p. 24.

<sup>420</sup> With the Spatialist Movement, Fontana envisioned perceptual interconnections among new technologies such as radio, television and radar, thus expanding on the prevailing visual representations of the spatial dimension. His artwork installations, as a combination of media intertextuality, were reminiscent of Dada and the contemporary French movement Lettrisme, but also prefigured Anglo-American Expanded Cinema, because of his exploration of space blending art with science. In the “Manifesto del Movimento Spaziale” (“Manifesto of the Spatialist Movement”), accompanying a projection shown on television in 1952, Fontana stated that while the Spatialist artist did not propose any figurative theme, the viewer was encouraged to create his own subjective otherworldly dimensions based on his own sensations and perceptions that the moving images projected into space evoked. As technology influenced new creative means of expression through the collapse of medium specificities, the Spatialist aesthetic sought to set free the painting from its frame, the sculpture from its materiality and the written page from its typographical constraints. Madesani, pp. 54-55.

pragmatic deconstruction of the televisual language. Other early Italian video artists, contemporary with Turi, were working towards social awareness and against the grain of television specificity, at a crossroads with video art. These included Luciano Giaccari (*Televisione come memoria*, an installation of television monitors, 1969), and Aldo Tambellini (*TV as a creative art*, 1969, New York).

The British video artist David Hall's *Television Interruption series* (1971) seems in retrospect, very similar to Turi's aesthetic ambition.<sup>421</sup> Hall's work on medium specificity consisted in drawing the attention to the television set as object. His 'Interruption' series disrupted audience attention by interfering unannounced in scheduled television programming, hence causing a fissure in audience attention and potentially provoking it to question the illusion of televisual 'reality'. This amounted to a 'guerilla' aesthetic operation by means of image and sound disruption.

This Chapter has examined in detail the different ways in which Claudio Cintoli, Adamo Vergine, Roberto Capanna and Giorgio Turi engaged with the possibilities afforded by the creative use of techniques applied, not only to film as an art medium, but also to the archive moving image. By doing so, they interrogated the limits of cinema's communication strategies, aiming to reclaim the human element by re-humanising technology, and hence advanced the scientific potential of deploying perceptual strategies and cognitive approaches to film's language and materials. The Chapter has sought to demonstrate how these filmmakers worked with new reflexive techniques, often utilising footage from home-movies, television newsreels and archive film as components of contrapuntal strategies intended to recuperate a 'second

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<sup>421</sup> On Hall's *TV Interruptions*, see <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/display/bp-spotlight-david-hall-tv-interruptions>.

(re-humanised) technology’, with a view on cognitively re-awakening human subjectivity.

In the following Chapter, I examine an alternative version of ‘interruption aesthetics’ in *Verifica Incerta*, also based on a montage of repurposed found film footage, where any scientific intent was clearly disavowed, as its title declares. And, through this, I discover a ‘cinema of gesture’.

### **Chapter 8. *Verifica Incerta (Disperse Exclamatory Phase)* (Gianfranco Baruchello, Alberto Grifi, 1964-65): A ‘Cinema of Gesture’**

While the previous Chapter examined perceptual strategies in the experimentation with the moving image and archive footage, here I deploy a neuro-cognitive theoretical framework, and probe the argument that such techniques as montage and ‘repetition and stoppage’ foreground the idea of a ‘cinema of gesture’.<sup>422</sup> I argue that, by applying these techniques to their found footage in *Verifica Incerta (Disperse Exclamatory Phase)*, Alberto Grifi and Gianfranco Baruchello created a gestural cinema to provoke audience engagement and critique cinema as a commercial enterprise.<sup>423</sup> In contrast to Turi and Capanna’s cognitive approaches to perceptual strategies in cinema, attempting to validate scientifically film language as a new experimental form of communication, with *Verifica Incerta* - as its title *Uncertain Verification* indicates - Grifi and Baruchello maintained that film’s identity as a time-based medium cannot be scientifically verified. I argue that the resultant fragmented

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<sup>422</sup> I explored Giorgio Agamben’s use of the notions ‘repetition and stoppage’, and his idea of the ‘transcendentals of montage’, which he drew on Kant’s idea of ‘transcendentals’, in the previous Chapter 7, Section 1.1. Agamben’s use of ‘repetition and stoppage’ is further considered in Section 5.3 of the present Chapter.

<sup>423</sup> Regarding the length of this film: there are some discrepancies. In Baruchello’s book, *Gianfranco Baruchello. Archive of Moving Images. 1960-2016* the original notes describe the length of the film to be 45’ (no page number), while on page 196 it is described as 30’ long. Perhaps segments of the film have been lost. Associazione Grifi has published an online version which is just over 30’ long: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmhvr3RbGnA> [accessed 26 Sep 2019].

language of a ‘cinema of gesture’ is a reflexive strategy, aimed at jolting the audience to activate their improved critical engagement. Thus, I apply a neuro-cognitive framework to further evidence that the cinema of *Verifica Incerta*, as a found footage film, is essentially based on an aesthetics of fragmentation and aporia, symptomatic of human lapses of dis-functionality, both in communication and locomotor skills.<sup>424</sup>

Strongly influenced by Dada’s acts of defiance against art, the nonsensical, and the idea that film as an artform in essence relies upon cutting up and juxtaposing reproductions of reality, *Verifica Incerta* made use of discarded and respliced found footage from 1950s and 1960s American commercial films, which were originally shot in CinemaScope.<sup>425</sup> The initial plan of its inventive architecture entailed the film’s being cut up again and dispersed after its screening, although this did not happen.

Thus the film’s montage of found footage evokes the experience of film as both an ephemeral medium and, to paraphrase Eco’s theory, an ‘open work’. Grifi and Baruchello’s aesthetic strategies could also be seen as attuned to the textuality of the 1950s Nouveau Roman movement, where meaning was often perceived as elusive and uncertain; an experimental film language would also problematize the concept of ‘reality’ when viewing or ‘reading’ its text.<sup>426</sup>

Recycling found film footage had become a more common exploratory and self-reflexive strategy in the 1960s, creating new sub-genres. One of these can be traced

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<sup>424</sup> According to the Oxford Dictionary of English (2005), the meaning of ‘aporia’ is: ‘an irresolvable internal contradiction or logical disjunction in a text, argument, or theory’. Also available online: <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/aporia>

<sup>425</sup> Gianfranco Baruchello, ‘Gianfranco Baruchello – Immagini di Formazione’, in *Il Film Sperimentale, Bianco e Nero*, ed. by Massimo Bacigalupo, maggio-agosto 1974, pp. 50-57 (p. 55). Bruno Di Marino, *Sguardo Inconscio Azione* (Roma: Lithos, 1999), p. 80.

<sup>426</sup> About Alain Robbe-Grillet’s novel Stephen Heath argues: ‘The activity of the text hovers or hesitates forms of discourse. It is a question for Robbe-Grillet of *reading* the production of the novel form (of grasping its intelligibility, of *forming* it as a *vraisemblable*), all the effort of which traditionally has lain in the effacement of its own production and the dispersion of its form(s) in the illusion of its direct representation of ‘Reality’. Stephen Heath, *The Nouveau Roman: A Study in the Practice of Writing* (London: Elek Books, 1972), p. 69.

back to Joseph Cornell's visually compelling collage film *Rose Hobart* (1936), a non-linear cut-up of the Hollywood feature *East of Borneo* (George Melford, 1931), which starred the actress Rose Hobart. In addition to being a subjective, fetishistic recreation of the female star persona, this collage exploited the metonymic and synchronic associations between images. In view of Cornell's experience as a collage artist, used to handling objects of the most disparate provenance, the interpretation of film compilation/collage as an artist's enactment of an independent film practice seems to become even more relevant.<sup>427</sup> Silvio and Vittorio Loffredo's fetishisation of historical objects and anthropological records in their archive collage *Le Court Bouillon Part IV* (1960) (discussed in Chapter 3) bore a strong resemblance to Cornell's practice, assembling heterogeneous archive objects such as memorabilia and ephemera.<sup>428</sup> The American artist Bruce Conner's *A Movie* (1958) also dis-located fragments from a wide variety of Hollywood genre films,<sup>429</sup> and these archival compilations constitute *Verifica Incerta*'s lineage in found footage aesthetics. While Baruchello was unaware of Joseph Cornell's film, which he only saw after making *Verifica Incerta*, the latter remains uniquely steeped in Dada.<sup>430</sup>

*Verifica Incerta*'s conceptual *détournement*, the dis-location of meanings and generic conventions from already-made films, resulted in an unconventional non-narrative dimension that defied normal commercial conventions. It opened up a non-diegetic spatio-temporal dimension for artistic contestation, recovering the idea of

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<sup>427</sup> 'Cornell is best known as a collagist who created handmade wooden boxes with glass fronts, containing a carefully arranged variety of small objects, photos, news clippings, illustrations, and other paper ephemera.' Stefano Basilico, *Cut: film as found object in contemporary video* (Milwaukee, WI: Milwaukee Art Museum, 2004), p.16.

<sup>428</sup> For an account of the filmmakers' original fascination with pre-cinematic media and fetishisation of the historical moving image, see Chapter 3.

<sup>429</sup> 'Inspired by the Marx Brothers' *Duck Soup* and developed conceptually over many years, *A Movie* is made up of shots condensed from longer action films, available to Conner at his local film supply store. These were assembled along with scavenged newsreel, scientific, soft-core porn, leader, and other types of film.' Basilico, p. 17.

<sup>430</sup> Subrizi and Rabottini, 'A conversation between Massimiliano Gioni and Gianfranco Baruchello', in *Gianfranco Baruchello. Archive of Moving Images. 1960-2016*, ed. by Subrizi and Rabottini (Milano: Mousse Publishing, 2017), pp. 91-118 (p. 100).

filmmaking as craftsmanship, free from industrial standardisation and censorship practices. Here, I attempt to demonstrate how the dispersal of the film's materiality – as its subtitle, *Disperse Exclamatory Phase*, also suggests – was more than a way to critique commercial Hollywood cinema. By foregrounding the de-materialisation of logical meaning and the activation of mere signifiers, it also aimed to show that commercial cinema was itself subject to cultural obsolescence and ephemerality. As a performance event, it was inspired by Happenings, like Bacigalupo's *60 metri per il 31 marzo* (1968) and Ugo Nespolo's *Buongiorno, Michelangelo* (1968-69). The latter film (discussed in Chapter 6) involved the Arte Povera artist Michelangelo Pistoletto's participatory performance with a spherical sculptural object, promoting the idea of 'play and gesture', which resonates strongly with the ethos of *Verifica Incerta*, with its delight in lapses of human dis-functionality and aporia, thus revitalising the conceptual character of the found footage image, and the human body's neuro-cognitive processes.

### **1. *Verifica Incerta (Disperse Exclamatory Phase)***

Made between 1964 and 1965, *Verifica Incerta* was dedicated to Marcel Duchamp, who for both Baruchello and Grifi was the film's 'moral protagonist', its spiritual father. Duchamp introduced the film's preview in 1965 in Paris, at the post-production centre Poste Parisien.<sup>431</sup> Duchamp's appearance was shot in Baruchello's house in Italy in 1963, and suggests that he could be the inspiration behind the name 'Eddie Spanier', a character sourced from various films, therefore repeatedly seen in different

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<sup>431</sup> 'Verifica Incerta (first film screening), Center for post-production Poste Parisien, Paris, April 30, 1965', 'Filmography 1960-2016', ed. by Carla Subrizi (Exhibition history by Daniela Zanoletti), in Subrizi and Rabottini, p. 208.

guises and identities.<sup>432</sup> (Ill. 12-14) After Paris, the film was shown in Palermo on the occasion of the historic encounter with the Italian experimental literary narrative Group 63; then in Milan at Teatro San Marco, and in Naples at the Centre of Experimental Film.<sup>433</sup> In 1966, it was screened in New York at the Museum of Modern Art and at the Guggenheim Museum at John Cage's invitation;<sup>434</sup> and then in Rome at the renowned Feltrinelli bookshop, thanks to an invitation by the avant-garde writer Nanni Balestrini.<sup>435</sup> The 'Exhibition History' section in Baruchello's latest book shows that the film was screened in London at the Hayward Gallery in March 13-15, 1977.<sup>436</sup> According to the historian and curator David Curtis, it was also shown earlier, in 1969 in the Edinburgh International Film Festival, and in London at the Arts Lab in 1970, as part of a 'collage artists' programme.<sup>437</sup> The British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection based at the University of the Arts in London has a record of this event, which included, together with Grifi and Baruchello's film, works by other Italian experimental filmmakers explored in this thesis, such as Vergine, Patella, Lombardi, Turi, and Leonardi, and many other renowned international film artists from the New American Cinema and New York Film Cooperative, including Jonas Mekas, Stan Brakhage and Michael Snow.<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>432</sup> Gianfranco Baruchello, Alberto Grifi, 'Verifica incerta 1 – premesse', in *Baruchello e Grifi. Verifica Incerta. L'Arte Oltre i Confini del Cinema*, ed. by Carla Subrizi (Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2004), pp. 52-53 (p. 52).

<sup>433</sup> Italian avant-garde writer Edoardo Sanguineti, founder with Umberto Eco of the avant-garde literary group *Gruppo '63*, defined *Verifica Incerta* an 'anti-film' because for him the film sets out an incisive critical discourse on narrative norms, with a beginning, middle and end. Subrizi, 'L'arte oltre i confini (del cinema) dell'arte', in Subrizi, pp. 13-44 (p. 34).

<sup>434</sup> 'John Cage was well-known by then as a performance conceptual artist. He had staged his first musical performances in the fifties, a precursor of Happenings, participatory events aimed at the encounter between space and time, art and life. The first untitled Happening was Allan Kaprow's which took place in 1958.' Kultermann, p. 42.

<sup>435</sup> 'Umberto Eco also wrote about John Cage's work to introduce the notion of reading and interpretation as an ongoing, "open" process. One of the most interesting stimuli to intellectual discourse in Italy in the 1960s had in fact been Cage's presence in Milan in the late 1950s.' Christov-Bakargiev, 'Thrust into the Whirlwind: Italian Art Before Arte Povera', in Flood and Morris, 2001, pp. 29-40 (p. 35).

<sup>436</sup> These are only some of the early dates of *Verifica Incerta's* exhibition which are sourced from Gianfranco Baruchello's latest book, *Gianfranco Baruchello. Archive of Moving Images. 1960-2016*, based on his archive of images, and on his long profession as a conceptual artist and filmmaker. 'Exhibition History' ed. by Daniela Zanoletti, in Subrizi and Rabottini, p. 208.

<sup>437</sup> David Curtis, in an email to Prof. Ian Christie, 26 September 2019.

<sup>438</sup> Edinburgh International Film Festival NEWS, 25 August 1969, [http://www.studycollection.co.uk/programme\\_results.php?page=1&title=festival](http://www.studycollection.co.uk/programme_results.php?page=1&title=festival) [accessed 26 September 2019].

Over a period of eight months, Baruchello (who had been working also with other media, especially painting, since the forties) and Grifi (photographer and artist filmmaker) created a montage of images extracted from forty seven films, representing 150,000 metres of material, which consisted mostly of American CinemaScope films of the fifties destined for waste disposal, which they bought for 15,000 liras.<sup>439</sup>

The film takes the form of a long scroll, a fast-moving series of tableaux with a variety of settings and scenarios, from the garden where Duchamp is seen smoking a cigar and the Baths of Caracalla, to America, Japan, and the First World War. Like a parody of an action movie, we see men performing aggressive actions, ‘more attacks, ambushes in ancient Rome and Egypt, fires, floods, races, parades, wounded men, many involving the fictitious character ‘Eddie Spanier’.’<sup>440</sup>

## 2. New avant-garde strategies<sup>441</sup>

Cut-up culture has its ancestry in the historic avant-garde aesthetics of fractured surfaces and multi-perspectival space. Léger’s and Murphy’s *Ballet Mécanique* arguably drew on the legacy of Cubism’s fragmented canvases, as did the ‘polyvision’ effect in the now-famous triptych sequence of Abel Gance’s *Napoléon* (1927).<sup>442</sup> The fragmented perception of space and internal dynamism of Dada’s cut-ups also parallels *Verifica Incerta*’s respliced found footage and illogical narrative sequences. Contemporary with its making, Eduardo Paolozzi’s 13 minute film *The History of*

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<sup>439</sup> Subrizi, p. 16. The found footage in *Verifica Incerta* is from 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox films. Beside other Hollywood genre films, most of the footage derives from: *House of Bamboo* (Sam Fuller, 1955), *A Farewell to Arms* (Charles Vidor, John Huston, 1957), *The Enemy Below* (Dick Powell, 1957), and *The True Story of Jesse James* (Nicholas Ray, 1957).

<sup>440</sup> Subrizi and Rabottini, pp. 200-201.

<sup>441</sup> The directors’ original film cut was forty-five-minutes long. Baruchello, ‘Baruchello. Cinema/Video e Altro, dal 1963 al 1986’, in Subrizi and Rabottini, pp. 15-62 (p. 30).

<sup>442</sup> ‘*Napoléon*’s final triptychs struck Professor Henri Chrétien who went on to invent the Hypergonar lens for the periscopes of tanks at first, and later for the French film industry.’ Kevin Brownlow, *Napoleon – Abel Gance’s Classic Film* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1983), p. 159.

*Nothing* (1962) created an exemplary illustration of the plastic qualities of film, demonstrating the application of technology to mixed media (animation, graphics, and collage/montage of film footage), and described by Paolozzi as ‘a homage to Surrealism’.<sup>443</sup>

As David Curtis observes, *Verifica Incerta* suggested that montage technique was the result of a neo-Dada gesture, a Situationist ‘détournement’ of the original text, and an example of innovative research.<sup>444</sup> According to Baruchello, in his 1978 article titled “Da Extra Media” (“From extra media”), the film represented both his and Grifi’s search for more immediate means of communication, enabling engagement with a wide and heterogeneous audience. What mattered to Baruchello was to demystify the technological aspect of filmmaking and its basis in class prejudice.<sup>445</sup> Similarly, in his article ‘Girare un film antagonista’ (‘Making an anti-film’), Grifi confirmed the importance of working with an innovative film language, formed of discarded material from popular culture, with its linear syntax and continuous narrative spaces in complete disarray, and the resulting fragmentation of surface marking a pronounced shift, not only the conventions of storytelling, but also in the distribution and communication patterns generally followed by the film industry.<sup>446</sup>

Baruchello also claimed that *Verifica Incerta* subsumes cinema and art. While allowing the filmmakers to be critical of Italian consumer society of the sixties and the invasiveness of the mass media, the film was formally bold and innovative, prompting a complacent audience to read a ‘canvas of moving images’. Thus, its non-narrative

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<sup>443</sup> On Paolozzi and *The History of Nothing*, see <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/paolozzi-history-of-nothing-p78339#:~:text=Paolozzi%20described%20History%20of%20Nothing,cityscapes%20to%20create%20uncanny%20panoramas>.

<sup>444</sup> According to Carla Subrizi, after seeing *Verifica Incerta* in 1970, David Curtis wrote an essay on the film that subsequently became part of his *Experimental Cinema. A Fifty-Year Evolution* (1971). Subrizi, ‘Verifica incerta e dintorni. Il racconto e le testimonianze’, in Subrizi, pp. 67-69 (p. 69).

<sup>445</sup> Gianfranco Baruchello, ‘Da Extra Media’, in Subrizi, pp. 73-74 (p. 73). Originally published in *Extra Media. Esperienze attuali di comunicazione estetica*, Catalogue Exhibition, ed. by Enrico Crispolti, (Torino: Studio Forma 1978).

<sup>446</sup> David Curtis, ‘Experimental Cinema. Uncertain Verification’, in Subrizi, pp. 70-73.

structure, based on fragmentation and aporia, retained only pivotal narrative moments from Hollywood films, while building up its own series of provocations in the spirit of Dada. *Verifica Incerta*'s provocative 'debasement' of narrative cinema as a commercial enterprise could be seen as a taboo-breaking gesture aimed at recovering the value of the photographic still image. By re-instating the original vision of discontinuous bodily movement, the film reveals that continuous bodily movement and linear narrative are constructed illusions. This deconstructive process placed images extracted from previous temporal dimensions in an arcade of chaotic, fractured movement; I suggest that this practice creates the concept of found footage as a 'mise-en-archive'.

Grifi and Baruchello's approach to found footage as artefact involved not only the dis-location of the image, but also a series of reflexive experimental techniques. Repetition, interrupted loops and 'stoppage' punctuate the film's flow, and thematic structures of similarity and difference; the moving image is revealed as a mere chain of signifiers in action. This practice not only recalls Cubism's plastic dynamism and the prismatic study of light by such Futurist painters as Giacomo Balla and his disciple Gino Severini, but also Duchamp's fascination with 'the study of movement and time in the stop-action and composite photographs of Etienne-Julies Marey', which were widely reproduced in popular journals in the early years of the twentieth century when the historic avant-gardes appeared.<sup>447</sup> However, unlike the Futurists' celebration of the speed of modernity and city life, in *Verifica Incerta* the smooth dynamism of the moving image has turned into a disrupted dynamic, constantly moving forward despite the continuous characters' movement and actions being stopped. Grifi and Baruchello

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<sup>447</sup> Kenneth Coultts-Smith, *Dada* (London: Studio Vista, 1970), p. 52.

were demonstrating how human communication in the sixties had turned into mere mimicry and parody. Their film's innovative architecture of this film, displaying a montage of disrupted archival fragments, would reveal an arcade of inconsequential images; a 'cabinet of gestures'.

### **3. Reclaiming the archive: towards a 'cinema of gesture'**

The ways in which Grifi and Baruchello broke down the boundaries of filmic texts marked by generic narrative conventions can be read through the lens of Eco's 'form as social commitment', within his wider project of the 'open work'. *Verifica Incerta's* poetics of an ongoing fragmentation, transformation, and the contestation linear generic narratives were experimental forms of expression through which the artists and viewers could transform their life experience.

This film's poetics generated an 'aesthetic of contradictions', displaying the incoherence and discrepancies lodged within the mire of popular culture. It responded to a desire in the arts to reflect a widespread feeling of uncertainty and anxiety among the newly enriched class that had benefited from the economic 'boom' of the early sixties in Italy. During the phase of profound social discontent which foreshadowed the crisis of '68, the film pivoted around a widespread feeling that there was no univocal, fixed narrative paradigm. Artists were seeking a new paradigm for art, starting from *aporia* and a crisis of all certainties, including the impulse towards verification: 'there was the need to verify not so much the absolute old and new enunciations, but what constituted the affirmation of the hypotheses suggested by the

work “left open”, unfinished: that is, the implicitly undefinable nature of such a theory, the uncertain nature of this paradigm in its making.’<sup>448</sup>

The film’s subtitle ‘(*Disperse Exclamatory Phase*)’ humorously refers to the fractured aesthetics of its narrative syntax, understood as a constellation of ‘punctuations’, remarks and interjections with no purpose other than seeking to validate narrative homogeneity. Baruchello stated:

The editing process allows you to rethink each individual element that must be situated within the flow of discourse. [...] What’s left after a process of deconstruction or, as I said for *Verifica Incerta*, ‘Exclamatory Dispersion’. If the fragments are shards of discourse, of narrative, time and story, their ‘montage’ is an attempt to rethink a work, a ‘small system’ whose equilibrium may be unstable, but which is definitely worth testing.<sup>449</sup>

By segmenting narrative discourse and enunciation, by combining film fragments and scenes in a non-linear manner, the filmmakers thus created an ambiguity of meanings, inspiring wonder and disconcerting expectations and questions. *Verifica Incerta*’s montage of dispersed syntagmatic elements supports hypotheses rather than offering any absolute certainties, since at the centre of its re-animated images there is the indeterminate and uncertain nature of the new open-work paradigm.

The subtitle supplies the subtext of Baruchello’s original plan for the film: after its screening, it would be cut up and its pieces distributed to the public. In this way, the filmmakers wanted to turn a conventional film exhibition into performance art, inspired by a Dada gesture against commercial narrative cinema. Even if this action was never taken to its completion, its intention remained an integral part of *Verifica Incerta*’s Happening style, based on the chance encounter between audiences and the

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<sup>448</sup> My translation. The original text reads: ‘la necessità di verificare non tanto l’assolutezza di vecchi o nuovi enunciati, quanto l’affermarsi costitutivo dell’ipotesi, avanzata dall’opera, lasciata *aperta*: la non-definibilità della teoria, la *incerta* natura del paradigma che si stava istituendo.’ Subrizi ‘L’arte oltre i confini (del cinema) dell’arte’, in Subrizi, pp. 13-44 (p. 15).

<sup>449</sup> ‘A conversation between Massimiliano Gioni and Gianfranco Baruchello’, in Subrizi and Rabottini, pp. 91-118 (p. 102).

moving image. The film reflects the disintegration and *potential dispersal* of a unified cinema language.

Another important aspect of the film was that it manifested a creative process open to potentially perpetual change. The script, instead of being the film's starting point, was only constructed in the final creative phase of the film's making, after the montage was complete, on the basis of randomly sequenced dialogue. Thus the creative process entailed not only deconstruction and reconstruction, but also reversal. The makers' anti-illusionist aesthetics also involved removing the anamorphic lenses used for projection of Hollywood CinemaScope films (widely deployed during the 1950s), and introducing mismatches between image and soundtrack.<sup>450</sup> All the images in *Verifica Incerta* are distorted, vertically elongated, apart from the shots of Duchamp and outtakes from Antonioni's first film in colour *Il Deserto Rosso* (*Red Desert*, 1964). After the first 35mm screening in Paris, a 16mm duplicate was made, from which were reproduced further copies in various formats now in circulation (16 mm, VHS, D2, Beta SP, Digital Beta and HD Cam).<sup>451</sup> The original images appear 'squeezed', as they would have been corrected by anamorphic lenses in projection. The duplicate retained the original films' colour, while 'the soundtrack was transcribed in optical form as well as possible from the four magnetic tracks of the CinemaScope films', and a mismatch between image and soundtrack, resulting from direct editing of positive prints, was kept.<sup>452</sup>

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<sup>450</sup> 'CinemaScope was introduced by 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox in 1953. [...] The commercial survival of CinemaScope has disconcerted critics, especially English-speaking ones, where many had condemned it from the start as a medium for anything other than the spectacular and the trivial. Its shape was apparently wrong for "serious" or "intimate" drama, for the kind of film and the kind of effects which a sensitive director aims at.' Charles Barr, 'CinemaScope: Before and After', *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 16 (Summer, 1963), pp. 4-24 (pp. 4-5). See also Subrizi, 'L'arte oltre i confini (del cinema) dell'arte', in Subrizi, pp. 13-44 (p. 35).

<sup>451</sup> Subrizi, pp. 13-44 (p. 16).

<sup>452</sup> Subrizi and Rabottini, pp. 185-480 (pp. 196-200).

In the Italian avant-garde landscape of the sixties, this constituted an innovative way of creating cinema with pre-existing images, which simultaneously evoked cultural memory and new artistic potential. According to Subrizi:

Thus there were the avant-gardes of the early twentieth century, and afterwards a second avant-garde, around the early sixties, which, while partly continuing with some of their forms and processes, pushed forward (in history we always must strive *forward!*) and transformed in other and diverse directions what Futurism, Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism had proclaimed. Early twentieth century transgressions and utopia became in the sixties critical procedures as new ways of thinking and making art work for society.<sup>453</sup>

While the avant-gardes of the sixties often proposed the ideal of art as a tool for social change, *Verifica Incerta* foregrounded its meaning in relation to those produced by popular culture. The film's significance arguably extended beyond its performance event, creating a form of thinking about film outside the parameters of theatrical cinema, leading to off-screen activity and participatory processes.

The opening sequence immediately plunges the spectator *in medias res*. A rapid succession of opening and closing sequences from Hollywood movies, displaying their production companies' logos, ironically overstate what is conventionally taken to be a mark of a (potentially) successful film. (Ill. 15-16). Hence, viewers' expectations are at once diminished as a general experience of chaos and disorientation starts to take shape. This 'open-work' structure reflects an 'aesthetic of crisis', characterised by repetitive forms of transition and instability, and the frantic mobility of the film's characters, with the repetition of names and changed identities. The same 'crisis aesthetic' underpins the film's montage, which connects images thematically and formally associations, seeming to create a multiplicity of micro-narratives and subplots. Characters' actions are systematically interrupted, with their movements

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<sup>453</sup> Subrizi, pp. 13-44 (p. 23).

stopped on the cusp of being accomplished, leaving the viewer unable to find any coherent narrative meaning in the film's overall montage, other than merely following it moment by moment.

Thus, montage here intensifies the fragmentation of characters' actions. The interrupted trajectories of their movements could be regarded as a way to illustrate humans' motor abilities preceding their learning how to co-ordinate their movements, and prior to the optical illusion of completed movement that film normally re-creates. Characters here seem to have lost the ability to function effectively. A 'cinema of gesture', it transpires, may be less concerned with offering narrative solutions to a social crisis than making visible the symptoms of non-communication, in the fragmentation of continuous bodily movement. The fragmented nature of the moving image in found film footage is thus foregrounded.

What then is the relationship between gesture and thought, and the unification of language and gesture that is relevant in neuro-cognitive approaches to the experimental language of film? For an analytical hypothesis, I draw on an article about 'gesture and thought' by the neuro-cognitive scientist David McNeill, who spoke at an international conference held in Italy in 2006: 'A language or rather [...] an old conception, long forgotten, that re-emerges as new: language as an imagery-language dialectic. In this dialectic gestures provide the imagery, and the dialectic itself fuels speech and thought.'<sup>454</sup> Close analysis of *Verifica Incerta* suggests an analogy with the temporal anatomy of gesture. As McNeill explains:

The neurogestural system converges on Broca's area [of the brain], where speech and gesture are orchestrated as motor actions.[...] Broca's area is more than a 'speech center'. It is the area of the brain orchestrating actions under some significance - that is, it is the area of the brain that assembles sequences of

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<sup>454</sup> David McNeill, 'Gesture and Thought', *The Summer Institute on Verbal and Non-verbal Communication and the Biometrical Principle*, Conference, Sep. 2-12, 2006, Vietri sul Mare (Italy), organized by Anna Esposito, pp. 1-14 (p. 1).

movements and/or complexes of moving parts into performance packages unified by goals, meanings, and adaptability.<sup>455</sup>

The question arises as to how or whether cultural circumstances can ‘rewire’ the brain, so as to affect humans’ behaviour and cause lapses in communication. As the montage in *Verifica Incerta* foregrounds interrupted movement, a series of gestures emerge as non-goal-oriented movements. An analysis of *Verifica Incerta* as a ‘cinema of gesture’ based on this neuro-cognitive theoretical framework would point to clusters of performative acts in the found footage classified by similar intention and theme. This analysis benefits further from McNeill’s framework:

The effect of injury to Broca's area lies especially in the interruption of the orchestration of articulatory and gestural movements. Both speech and gesture emerge as if not orchestrated. What remains is strikingly similar in speech and gesture. It is this residue, the same in both modalities, that above all points to a specialised function in this brain region for motor orchestration under some significance.<sup>456</sup>

I argue that the film may be interpreted as initiating critical thinking about the inner life and the social fabric of the individual, as if ‘impaired’ by the cultural conditioning of the mass media. McNeill’s notion of the ‘un-bound phase’ of gesture resonates with the purposelessness of the characters’ acts in the film: ‘The stroke is the gesture phase with meaning; it is also the phase with effort, in the dance notation sense of focused energy’.<sup>457</sup> In this sense, and within the filmic text, gesture can be explored as an integral component of language, not a mere accompaniment or ornament, as gestures are synchronous and co-expressive with speech. In *Verifica Incerta* characters’ frustrated goals serve the purpose of raising questions, prompting the audience to analyse what they see and to critical thinking about the film’s inner workings. Its innovative strategies lie, not only in illustrating filmmaking as process, but also in

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<sup>455</sup> David McNeill, *Gesture and Thought* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 211.

<sup>456</sup> McNeill, pp. 217-18.

<sup>457</sup> McNeill, 2005, p. 32

opening up possible new formations of meaning. They may generate cognitive conduits to realising an absence of critical distance from the aporetic text. Subrizi comments:

From the ever more explicit subtraction of a storyline, an accomplished meaning (even if in the form of fragments), of a beginning and end there nevertheless starts to form, as if by way of a mere shift of weight on a scale, a minimum unit of action, not the articulation of its meaning but of its outer layer, shell, a particle completely dis-connected from any articulation capable of yielding meaning: gesture.<sup>458</sup>

Through its montage of micro-accented actions, the film creates a provocative text, a constellation of gestures, like ‘growth points’. According to McNeill, ‘The smallest unit of the imagery-language dialectic is posited to be a ‘growth point,’ so named because it is theoretically the initial unit of thinking for speaking out of which a dynamic process of organization emerges’, which initiates cognitive content.<sup>459</sup> In this light, while illustrating symptoms of the breakdown of communication, the film’s experimental language may have initiated the potential for cognitive content out of its *aporia*.

#### **4. Dispersing the film’s materiality**

By positioning this film in the context of a ‘cinema of gesture’, questions about the material dispersal of found footage become relevant. Through its new conceptual language and structure, *Verifica Incerta* enacted and performed its reversal of industrial production processes. By exposing the hollowness of the myths created by

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<sup>458</sup> My translation. The original text reads: ‘Dalla sottrazione sempre piú esplicita di una trama, di un senso compiuto (anche se a frammenti), di un principio e di una fine ecco prendere tuttavia consistenza, quasi come per lo spostamento sui due piatti di una bilancia, una unità minima di azione, di articolazione non del senso ma del suo involucro, una particella sconnessa da qualsiasi articolazione capace di restituire un significato: il gesto.’ Subrizi, ‘L’arte oltre i confini (del cinema) dell’arte’, in Subrizi, pp. 13-44 (p. 32).

<sup>459</sup> As McNeil further elucidates: ‘A growth point combines imagery and linguistic categorial content, and the theory is that such a combination initiates cognitive events. A growth point is an empirically recoverable idea unit, inferred from speech-gesture synchrony’. McNeill, 2006, pp. 1-14 (p. 4).

genre films, it creates a *mise-en-abîme* of micro-narratives. Out of the false unity of such film narratives may come a grammar enunciating uncertainty, a build-up of expectations and false closures. Consequently, I suggest that *Verifica Incerta* effectively illustrates the disintegration of the ‘structural narrative plenitude’ of Hollywood genre films, the dispersed materiality of their narratives, formed from truncated movements, sounds, dialogue, performances and shot compositions.

Critical theory and Adorno’s wry attack on the culture industry in ‘The schema of mass culture’ provide further context for interpreting this film:

As far as mass culture is concerned reification is no metaphor: it makes the human beings that it reproduces resemble things [...]. Whoever goes to a film is only waiting for that spell to be broken, and perhaps ultimately it is only this well concealed hope which draws people to the cinema. But once there they obey. They assimilate themselves to what is dead. And that is how they become disposable.<sup>460</sup>

The film’s conceptual design gathers fragments from an ideal whole, as scraps of human disregard, a miasma of narrative debris that creates a mirror for its reified audience. As Adorno argued, spectators ‘assimilate themselves to what is dead’, which I argue is ‘dead time’, the re-cycled time of found footage with no ‘live image and narrative’; where narrative is dead, it is to be repurposed in order to be given new life.

Indeed, as a conceptual project, recycling found footage is a regenerative activity. Since the film’s duration is based on repetition and stoppage (continuous movement and actions are repetitively stopped), its syntax throughout is endowed with a distinctive internal rhythm. Before being transposed into a 16mm duplicate, all the found footage was roughly joined with adhesive tape. Thus, the film’s inner structural tension between materiality and intangibility, linear causality and randomness,

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<sup>460</sup> Adorno, 2001, p. 82.

testifies to the filmmakers' formal pledge of making visible the traditional invisibility of continuity editing. *Verifica Incerta* presents film as a ruined landscape.

Consequently, its spatio-temporal dimension could be thought of as a newly-mapped experience of cinematic spectacle, more objective than impressionistic.

Through a poetics of hesitation between speech and thought, these found footage gestures were re-purposed so as to destabilise gender stereotypes and conventions in Hollywood cinema. From the opening sequence, the character 'Eddie Spanier' invokes ideas of gender performativity and queerness in relation to sexual difference and identity. Baruchello and Grifi shaped their innovative take on the representation of heterosexual couples and gender by experimenting with audio-visual alignment concerning a character's name, and his or her changeable identity - doubtless inspired by Duchamp and his female alter ego Rose Sélavy.<sup>461</sup> This intervention underpins the filmmakers' irony and criticism of normative representations of gender and sexual identity, which are deemed to be biological determinations rather than cultural constructions.

At the beginning of the film, a man is about to undergo surgery. While showing him a photograph of two soldiers (clearly a shot from a war film, therefore completely out of context in relation to the initial scene), the surgeon asks him: 'Who is Eddie Spanier?' to which in the next shot he replies: 'My wife'. As this question will be repeatedly asked throughout the film, addressed to different characters from various films, viewers are left to wonder about the reasons for the filmmakers' choice of

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<sup>461</sup> 'Rose Sélavy, the feminine alter ego created by Marcel Duchamp, is one of the most complex and pervasive pieces in the enigmatic puzzle of the artist's oeuvre. She first emerged in portraits made by the photographer Man Ray in New York in the early 1920s, when Duchamp and Man Ray were collaborating on a number of conceptual photographic works. Rose Sélavy lived on as the person to whom Duchamp attributed specific works of art, Readymades, puns, and writings throughout his career.' 'Rose Sélavy', from *Philadelphia Museum of Art: Handbook of the Collections*, 1995, p. 241: <<https://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/56973.html>> [accessed 26 Sep 2019], ISBN 0-87633-096-0

utterances and acts. This might prompt consideration of what are meaningful links between image and action, and reflection on deconstructing narrative fabrications about gender and sexuality in Hollywood cinema.

The recurring character ‘Eddie Spanier’ stands for a critique of consumer society, the man-toy made of plastic, a decorative object; and his multiple identities throughout the film reflect the film’s enunciations. Eddie as either the product of automated, on-demand mechanisms of the culture industry, or the result of multiple image associations that the viewer generates; a series of acts hinging on cognitive mechanisms. As Baruchello stated: ‘the real lack of gravity lies in his serious lack of awareness of his actions.’<sup>462</sup> The multiple storylines around Eddie Spanier hinge on the casual combination of numbers, as he is ‘a random number’; the result of chance. What is his logic other than chaos: ‘he does not communicate, he acts [...] Only apparently, he disseminates disruption; in fact, he celebrates chaos.’<sup>463</sup>

There is also a mysterious ‘female’ character associated with ‘Eddie Spanier’, the so-called ‘Mariko Weber’, yet another red herring in terms of coherent character identity, whose purpose is to occupy a place in the film in order to show queerness and cross-dressing, and that such categories as gender and sexual identity are not fixed. Thus, as a creative critical practice, *Verifica Incerta* often turns these themes into parody and caricatures of heterosexual relationships. (III. 17-22)

Despite its apparently chaotic structure, it must be said that this montage of found footage to a certain extent revolves around a coherent structural core; gestures can be explored by groups of themes and stylistic motifs. The first part of the film repeats the theme of people running through corridors, then opening and closing doors and

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<sup>462</sup> My translation. The original text reads: ‘la vera mancanza di gravità sta nella sua profonda non coscienza dell’azione’. Gianfranco Baruchello, ‘Chi è? Chi è Eddie Spanier?’, in Subrizi, pp. 61-62 (p. 61).

<sup>463</sup> Ibid.

windows, until a background female voice exclaims: 'If I'd found a door I would have knocked first!'. This exclamation draws even more attention to the film's design, and its frustrating audiences' expectations. Its material is thus dispersed through an accumulation of 'exclamatory phases', which constitute the film's idiosyncratic grammar and punctuate its inner rhythm. Grifi's and Baruchello's montage of human gestures travels from frame to frame, through doors, corridors and alleyways, the halted actions of opening and closing windows, running, chasing, galloping on a horse before ending up on top of a train. (Ill. 23-30) *Verifica Incerta*'s overall play with the conventions of film genres contributes to reinforcing an overall sense of parody.

War and Western footage of people being killed, or close-ups of firearms and blunt objects, are clustered together in order to foreground popular obsession with the spectacle of violence. These are intercut with scenes depicting romantic love. By isolating sequences from contrasting genres, the film continues to foreground narrative form as formal excess, also as a way to surprise viewers' sensory perception, and to underline the artificial arousal of emotions that is implicit in cinematic storytelling techniques. (Ill. 31-32)

My analysis also shows how the film parodies illusionistic realism. A sequence of footage primarily portrays inhospitable landscapes and the natural elements hostile to humans. The artificiality of a 'realistic' mise-en-scène is made apparent. In this context, *Verifica Incerta* shows how nature can be at odds with the human being, inviting its audience to overcome emotional ennui and engage more proactively with constructive actions. (Ill. 33-34)

The filmmakers' experimentation with conventions of duration and temporal unity confirm the film's parody of narrative certainties. Near the end, there is a flashback, as a male character who is about to undergo surgery, declares that he secretly married

‘Eddie Spanier’ two months earlier. The ‘flashback’ as a narrative expedient is used humorously, and reflexively, as it correctly recalls an earlier point in the film, as if it had a conventional diegesis, although these scenes clearly belong to different films. While being formally coherent, the film flags up its ‘aesthetic of contradictions’, with its running parody of formal narrative conventions.

By de-contextualising pivotal movements and actions as narrative devices of narrative cinema, *Verifica Incerta* celebrates the structural openness of the artwork, and the dispersal of extra-textual references as utterances.

## 5. Revitalising found film footage

Having teased out the dispersal of *Verifica Incerta*’s materiality, I now turn to its reversal of mainstream film production processes, to explore how it virtually reanimated found footage.

Baruchello and Grifi started by assembling discarded film material according to a Random Number table;<sup>464</sup> their reverse production process involved making an artefact rather than a standardised product. They fabricated accountancy papers to recreate, retrospectively, and fictitiously, the whole process of film production, and gathered fictional expenditure by the actors and staff, for film equipment and set design, and other material.<sup>465</sup> Baruchello sketched a storyboard, and traced in pencil the discarded footage, re-constructing thirteen illustrations of key scenes, usually sketched in script development, and transposing them onto graph paper. He also made four pencil drawings, likewise on graph paper, tracing the length of the found footage to be re-used in the montage of *Verifica Incerta*.<sup>466</sup> He invented letters from real

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<sup>464</sup> Baruchello, ‘*Verifica Incerta 2* - descrizione’, in Subrizi, pp. 53-54 (p. 53).

<sup>465</sup> Subrizi, ‘L’arte oltre i confini (del cinema) dell’arte’, pp. 13-44 (p. 17).

<sup>466</sup> Ibid.

notebooks, meticulously dated, which actors supposedly wrote to each other to share their experiences while allegedly shooting the film. The filmmakers subtracted the anamorphic lenses from the projection phase so that the images appeared in their 'raw' distorted form, not being projected in CinemaScope. Finally, they wrote a script based on the dialogue unfolding throughout the whole film montage.

The 150,000 metres of Hollywood found footage was also meant to be the source of polyvinyl chloride, or PVC, a chemical composite of general purpose plastics with fire retardant properties.<sup>467</sup> Thus, the stock had to be first cleaned, re-glued together, re-wound and re-ordered according to the original narrative linearity, selected and finally mounted on a second-hand 1937 Gentilini Prevost movie camera, as if making something similar to a ready-made film.<sup>468</sup> The filmmakers executed the final montage by hand, on the eve of the film's first screening, in a Paris hotel, and only subsequently made a negative copy in 16mm. Hence, the value of both scriptwriter and script, deemed to be essential for the marketability of an idea in any narrative film, was 'downgraded' to show that the film montage did not depend on it; rather its progress often seemed to be spurred on by Eddie Spanier's chance adventures.

The film's re-production, and re-creation of new meaning out of older meanings, point to a crisis in the status of the artwork's originality and authorship, hence ghosting Benjamin's argument as famously expressed in his essay on 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction'.

In relation to the conventional production procedures for a mainstream film, Baruchello noted that the contribution of *Verifica Incerta* 'to the study of useless value is a prelude to further discoveries (perhaps even in addition to the notion of a

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<sup>467</sup> Subrizi, p. 53.

<sup>468</sup> Baruchello, in Subrizi, pp. 53-54 (p. 53).

“state of matter in which the matter is dispersed in a medium called the dispersed medium”)<sup>469</sup> Baruchello further explained that ‘if the actions that follow respond to the preceding visual provocations you will have, for example, the perfect measure of stupidity/vacuity of the material used’.<sup>470</sup> This statement is evidence of the filmmaker’s focus on the film’s formal challenge, announcing its intention and message.

Letizia Paolozzi’s article, written in 1968, contextualises the countercultural environment in which the Italian Cooperative of Independent Cinema operated, with its 30 members considering *Verifica Incerta* their canonical progenitor.<sup>471</sup> The film’s aesthetics and production ethics inspired the CCI with the idea of transforming filmmaking into a practice devoted less to spectacle than to filming with more spontaneity, using a more agile technology, either 8mm or 16mm film cameras, hence avoiding the figure of the film producer, whose involvement with commercial considerations turned him or her into a powerful figure of censorship.

Emancipation from censorship was paramount for the CCI, as was freedom of expression in using a more independent filmic language. *Verifica Incerta* was a clear starting point in this independent film practice, which no longer considered the filmmaker to be the ‘director’ of a film. The collaborative nature of CCI films was founded on each filmmaker’s use of a specific film lexicon. The absence of actors and dialogue was privileged, as was freedom in synchronisation between image and sound. After Grifi and Baruchello’s example with *Verifica Incerta*, the Cooperative

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<sup>469</sup> My translation. The original text reads: ‘L’apporto di quest’opera allo studio dei valori inutili prelude ad altre scoperte (forse addirittura a quella di uno “state of matter in which the matter is dispersed in a medium called the dispersed medium.”). Baruchello, in Subrizi, pp. 53-54 (p. 54).

<sup>470</sup> My translation. The original text reads: ‘se l’azione che segue risponde alle domande visive che la precedono si avra’ insomma, a titolo di esempio, la misura perfetta della stupidita’ del material usato.’ Ibid.

<sup>471</sup> Letizia Paolozzi, ‘Siamo tutti registi’ (‘We are all filmmakers’), in Subrizi, pp. 112-117. Originally published in *Vie Nuove*, No. 40, October 1968.

aimed to demystify technological ‘progress’ and the cinema of spectacle, dispensing with the camera operator, sound technician, producer, director, and most of the usual production apparatus.

In a 1977 ‘manifesto’ on Montage, Baruchello declared:

A pencil, a pen, a movie camera, a recorder, somehow taught me how to make a montage of words, images, objects, my own life. [...] It does not matter if each of these operations was never accepted for what it really was, as an object or gesture in its own right. [...] I have called this Montage a further attempt to say the same things through another medium. ‘To make a montage’ Eisenstein used to say, ‘is to combine images in different ways so that the spectator’s emotions and reason can fill the space in between’. However, perhaps there is more to montage than that.<sup>472</sup>

This statement can be further illuminated by Eco’s argument about the avant-garde open text providing a new view of how a human being’s integration into the world is inherently part of a process.<sup>473</sup> The isolation of narrative motifs of transition and the segmentation of temporal unity and continuity in *Verifica Incerta* reveal of disappointed expectations, disillusion, moments of crisis and shock. These are just some of the cognitive phenomena experienced by an individual trying to understand the world around them. As Eco suggested:

The artist who protests through form acts on two levels. On one hand, he rejects a formal system but does not obliterate it; rather, he transforms it from within by alienating himself in it and by exploiting its self-destructive tendencies. On the other, he shows his acceptance of the world as it is, in full crisis, by formulating a new grammar that rests not on a system of organization but on an assumption of disorder. And this is one way in which he implicates himself in the world in which he lives, for the new language he thinks he has invented has instead been suggested to him by his very existential situation.<sup>474</sup>

The ‘death masks’ of reified life coalesced into scraps of indifference, caused by a general existential condition. In turn, these non-narrative rituals – serialised gestures –

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<sup>472</sup> Vittorio Fagone, ‘Per un catalogo del cinema d’artista in Italia, 1965-1976, in Subrizi, pp. 124-131 (p. 128). Originally published as ‘Il montaggio’ in the catalogue for the art exhibition ‘Arte e critica’ at the art gallery Mercato del Sale, in Milan, in May 1976.

<sup>473</sup> Umberto Eco, ‘Verifica Incerta e Gruppo 63’, in *Baruchello e Grifi. Verifica Incerta*, ed. by Subrizi, pp. 150-155 (pp. 150-151). Originally published in Nanni Balestrini, *Il Gruppo 63. Il Romanzo sperimentale* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1966). Article written by Umberto Eco in 1965 presented on the occasion of the Gruppo 63 Conference in Palermo.

<sup>474</sup> Eco, 1989, p. 141.

illustrate a structure of returns and repetitions, which contribute to the education of a new and more attentive kind of spectator. A new avant-garde language could be created, with montage understood as a means of reactivating ‘the dead object of gesture’ in narrative cinema. What mattered, according to Eco, was that as a structured provocation, the film provided a framework for critical interpretation.<sup>475</sup> For him, the difference between the historic avant-garde and *Verifica Incerta* consisted in the unacceptable and incomprehensible ‘message’ of the former having value in itself: their primary concern, in the case of Marinetti for instance, was to shock and provoke the audience through the boldness of the new. With *Verifica Incerta*, however, the message was to sensitize the spectator to different forms through the paradigm of an open textuality.

### **5.1 Mimesis and the aporetic text**

The relationship between textual indeterminacy and perplexity caused by confronting an opaque text is considered in this Section, to explain how a new film grammar might activate the ‘dead’ object of gesture in found footage, and produce new meanings for gestures. The restructuring of filmic texts entailed not only a shift in the artwork’s scope, from content to aesthetics, but also that its formal changes and structure could in fact constitute the film’s inner meaning - as Eco maintained, it was now about ‘form as social commitment’. The re-contextualisation of discarded film footage meant that a productive tension between form and content would remain, allowing the audience to enter the cultural worlds of cinematic texts. For Eco

The moment an artist realizes that the system of communication at his disposal is extraneous to the historical situation he wants to depict, he must also understand

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<sup>475</sup> Eco, in Subrizi, pp. 150-155 (p. 155).

that the only way he will be able to solve his problem is through the invention of new formal structures that will embody that situation and become its *model*.<sup>476</sup>

The consciousness-rising work done in new avant-garde film practices such as the present one was centred not only on setting up, creating and proposing a new film language, but also on understanding the meaning and value of certain techniques that were being deployed. Thus, this would entail identifying and questioning the cultural residues of human value sedimented within the stratifications of the archive in the form of gestures that were shaped and shape our understanding of the world. In this sense, critical theory is a tool relevant to studying the aesthetic work of the new avant-garde, promoting a critical awareness of representations of human life that tended to override the difference between empirical and cultural life (thought and fact). In his ‘Schema of Mass Culture’, Adorno had provided an analytical study of the effects of the culture industry on society, and identified the extent to which consumer culture had clouded human beings’ understanding of empirical reality:

The commercial character of culture causes the difference between culture and practical life to disappear. Aesthetic semblance (*Schein*) turns into the sheen which commercial advertising lends to the commodities which absorb it in turn. But that moment of independence which philosophy specifically grasped under the idea of aesthetic semblance is lost in the process. On all sides the borderline between culture and empirical reality becomes more and more indistinct.<sup>477</sup>

Thus, found footage could be considered as the lost and found object re-contextualised in order to recover the importance of empirical matter for culture.

As we have seen, the critical theory in Adorno’s 1932 ‘Idea of Natural-History’, transmitted via Lukàcs and Benjamin, suggests ways in which the individual philosophically approaches a reified and ‘dead’ world; and this can illuminate the re-purposing of found footage in *Verifica Incerta* as a rescue of empirical residues,

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<sup>476</sup> Eco, 1989, p. 143.

<sup>477</sup> Adorno, 2001, p. 53.

gestures of a reified human life. In this sense, the experimental language of filmmaking triggers critical analysis and lets the cultural and the empirical elements of life enter into a productive and reflexive dialogue. This activity promotes *physis*, involving natural growth and transition from archaic, dead matter, buried within the archive, into renovated contexts. Thus, this activity turns into a film that thinks itself.

The film's gestures, to paraphrase Adorno, caught in a terrifying grimace before death, are unearthed and depicted in *Verifica Incerta* in all their farcical truth, casting new light on allegorical visions and interpretations, as described by Benjamin:

[...] in allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history, a petrified primordial landscape. [...] This is the heart of the allegorical vision, of the Baroque, secular exposition of history as the passion of the world; it is only meaningful in the stations of its prostration. The greater the signification, the greater the subjugation to death, for death digs most deeply the jagged demarcation line between *physis* and signification.<sup>478</sup>

Applied to this film, the reference to historical, archaic matter implicit in the definition of 'archive' is purely conceptual. The found footage re-deployed for this montage of gestures is sourced from the primordial reservoirs of narrative cinema and genre films, ostensibly harking back to the birth of filmmaking as industry. As a new generation of independent filmmakers was becoming increasingly attuned to new technologies and means of expression, the boundaries of signification were being redrawn. In offering a rich gallery of 'death masks', the allegorical worlds depicted in *Verifica Incerta* represent meaningful gestures towards liberation and mimesis. In his 'Idea of Natural-History', Adorno mentions Benjamin's work on the allegorical text in literature, arguing that

Mimesis explains the enigmatically empty ecstasy of the fans in mass culture. Ecstasy is the motor of imitation. It is this rather than self-expression and individuality which forcibly produces [...] the motor reflex spasms of the maimed animal. The gestures are not identical with those in transports of ecstasy and yet

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<sup>478</sup> Adorno, 2006, 252-304 (p. 263). For Benjamin's notion of 'natural history', see Chapter 1, Section 4.

they are the most impassioned expression of these same human beings: under the force of immense pressure the identity of the personality gives way, and since this identity itself already originates in pressure, this is felt as a liberation.<sup>479</sup>

In this study, mimesis may be deemed to be the expression of *aporia*, which could be recognised and understood as humankind creating within the constraints of the culture industry. It exemplifies a critical aesthetic strategy, as Eco discussed in relation to the artist striving to overcome a generalised dis-affection with the world. Mimesis could be understood as not only bearing the ‘death masks of meaningless necessities’, as Benjamin wrote, but also as a series of acts, which expose society’s imitation of a life ostensibly fulfilled; film as an archive, a repository of reified and disavowed certainties. Thus, the artist imitates the alienated world by consigning mimicry to visibility, by performing the aporetic text, indeterminacy itself. As Eco suggested: ‘The real content of a work is the vision of the world expressed in its way of forming (“modo di formare”); that is, how this vision shapes the world we live in.’<sup>480</sup>

In relation to Adorno’s claim that ‘there is no true life within a false life’,<sup>481</sup> this film’s reflexive techniques of repetition and difference activate the mimetic acts of film genres aesthetics thus revealing them as shaping a ‘false life’. These techniques are also important for instructing the viewer about history as allegory, and its perennial ‘possibility’. Hence, the value of the archive in *Verifica Incerta* lies in this found footage aesthetic whereby the ‘possibility’ of history engenders a ‘variety act’ allegory. As Adorno argues:

What really constitutes the variety act [...] is the fact that on each occasion something happens and nothing happens at the same time. Every variety act, especially that of the clown and the juggler, is really a kind of expectation. It subsequently transpires that waiting for the thing in question, which takes place as long as the juggler manages to keep the balls going, is precisely the thing itself.

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<sup>479</sup> Adorno, 2001, p. 82.

<sup>480</sup> Eco, 1989, p. 144.

<sup>481</sup> Hauke Brunkhorst, *Adorno and Critical Theory (Political Philosophy Now)* (Wales: University of Wales Press, 1999), p. 64. Originally in Adorno, W.T., *Minima Moralia. Reflections from Damaged Life*, 1951.

[...] The trick of the variety act consists in this betrayal of the temporal order. [...] The trick is played upon time itself and not merely upon the viewer. Thus variety already represented the magical repetition of the industrial procedure in which the selfsame is reproduced through time – the very allegory of high capitalism which demonstrates its dominating character even as it appropriates its necessity as the freedom of play.<sup>482</sup>

This condition of textual and human aporia is expressed by the film's historical material, devoted to awakening true consciousness. Referring back once again to Eco's 'form as social commitment', it could be argued that *Verifica Incerta* proposes a *model* of social crisis: mimetic gesture, which is both symptom and strategy.

## 5.2 The dialectical image

As explored in Chapter 3, with regards to Silvio and Vittorio Loffredo's *Le Court Bouillon*, Benjamin's notion of the 'dialectical image' was related to his idea of 'natural history', questioning and disconcerting 'the nature of commodities'.<sup>483</sup> As Buck-Morss reminds us, for Benjamin 'the principle of construction is that of montage, whereby the image's ideational elements remain unreconciled, rather than fusing into one "harmonising perspective"'.<sup>484</sup>

A question may arise then as to how the 'natural history' of found film footage, and the primordial gestures of narrative cinema, can be innovative for a new avant-garde film language. Here, Benjamin's 'dialectical image' could be used to argue that, as he wrote: 'To thinking belongs the movement as well as the arrest of thoughts. Where thinking comes to a standstill in a constellation saturated with tensions – there the dialectical image appears.'<sup>485</sup>

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<sup>482</sup> Adorno, 2001, pp. 60-61.

<sup>483</sup> According to Susan Buck-Morss, Benjamin expressed his idea of a 'dialectical image' in relation to how to avoid mythic thinking by saying 'no historical category without natural substance; no natural substance without its historical filter', in a note in the earlier phase of the composition of his *Arcade Project*, that is between 1927 and 1940. Buck-Morss, p. 59.

<sup>484</sup> Buck-Morss, p. 67.

<sup>485</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 475.

Resonating with the relationship between gesture and thought, as explored through David McNeill's neuro-cognitive approaches earlier in this Chapter, is also Benjamin's theory of the de-constructive force of montage.<sup>486</sup> I argue that, within the landscape of moving images, montage animates a productive tension between natural growth (*physis*) and the history of film's generic conventions, challenging any illusion of a unity of homogeneous narratives. This forms 'the dialectical image', which in *Verifica Incerta* is underpinned by the recombination of binary meanings, through the mis-alignment between signifier and signified, thereby generating new references. The film's formal and cultural binaries, such as repetition/difference, opening/closing, male/female, nature/city, wilderness/civilisation, Native Americans/American soldiers, break away from unified meanings and cultural stereotypes. In the new avant-garde text, these form open structures of signification, allegories and 'variety acts'; as autonomous referents, they carry their message on toward off-screen processes of re-signification. In this sense, the figurative, associative montage, dispersing harmonious older filmic texts, produces a new conceptual framework of critical gestures.

*Verifica Incerta*'s philosophical incarnation of natural history, marking out the growth and flow of meaning in perpetual transition, emphasizes the points of rupture of binaries. Out of narrative plenitude and certainty comes utter uncertainty, a build-up of potentialities. The educated reader understands how these techniques are related to the critical methodologies of the ambiguous text, commenting on transience and the

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<sup>486</sup> Benjamin's notion of 'the dialectical image' entailed 'the use of archaic images to identify what is historically new about the "nature" of commodities', which I think could also apply to the nature of found footage. Buck-Morss, p. 67.

consciousness of a compromised language.<sup>487</sup> Eco's 'form as social commitment'

foreshadowed this process:

Since language can be dislocated only according to a dialectic that is already part of its inner evolution, the language that will result from such a dislocation will still, somehow, reflect the historical situation that was itself produced by the crisis of the one that had preceded it. I violate language because I refuse to express, through it, a false integrity that is no longer ours, but, by doing so, I can't but express and accept the very dissociation that has arisen out of the crisis of integrity and that I meant to dominate with my discourse. There is no alternative to this dialectic. As already mentioned, all the artist can hope to do is cast some light on alienation by objectifying it in a form that reproduces it.<sup>488</sup>

Hence, the integrity of the dislocated dialectical image for the new avant-garde text became manifest through the productive tension at work within found film footage; the artwork reflects this experience of a crisis in communication, and re-produces the crisis by breaking down the flow of moving images, by unearthing gestures.

### 5.3 'Repetition and stoppage'<sup>489</sup>

In his essay 'Difference and Repetition. On Guy Debord's Films', Agamben writes about the historical character of cinema and 'images charged with movement', a dynamic charge he identifies already in the photographs of Marey and Muybridge, which belong to the origins of cinema. Most importantly, he draws on Benjamin's 'dialectical image', conceiving historical experience as having this kind of force;

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<sup>487</sup> 'As for the novel's characters, they may themselves suggest many possible interpretations; they may, according to the preoccupations of each reader, accommodate all kinds of comment – psychological, psychiatric, religious, or political – yet their indifference to these 'potentialities' will soon be apparent ... the future hero will remain, on the contrary, there. It is the commentaries that will be left elsewhere; in the face of his irrefutable presence, they will seem useless, superfluous, even improper.' Eco mentions Robbe-Grillet in relation to the *Nouveau Roman* in his 'Form as Social Commitment.' Eco, 1989, p. 152.

<sup>488</sup> Eco, 1989, p. 154.

<sup>489</sup> In relation to the notions of 'repetition and stoppage', Agamben wrote: 'The specific character of cinema stems from montage, but what is montage, or rather, what are the conditions of possibility for montage? In philosophy since Kant, the conditions of possibility for something are called transcendentals. What are the transcendentals of montage? There are two transcendental conditions of montage: repetition and stoppage. Debord did not invent them, but he brought them to light; he exhibited the transcendentals as such. And Godard went on to do the same in his *Histoire(s)*. There's no need to shoot film anymore, just to repeat and stop.' I have written about the specific relevance of these techniques in my previous Chapter 7, Section 1. Agamben, in McDonough, 2002, pp. 313-319 (p. 315).

images are charged with history.<sup>490</sup> Agamben discusses the notion of a ‘messianic history’ – different from a chronological history – of the image, and two aspects of this distinction should be emphasised. One is the relationship between image and history considered as salvation, which can be associated with the value of rescuing found footage from its seemingly inevitable fate of destruction; second is the relationship between the image and a ‘final’ or ‘eschatological history’: the moment of final judgement conferred on the image taking place in ‘some other time’.<sup>491</sup> Drawing on Benjamin, Agamben argues that these are mechanisms of the dialectical image pivoting around advance and relay, ‘repetition and stoppage’, which could be seen as a series of acts of salvation of the ‘meaningless’ and disposable, the image in found footage. The historical image is committed to an ‘eschatological history’, since its value depends on its re-integration and ‘salvation’.

In Agamben’s terms, the images of *Verifica Incerta* can be seen as a series of signifiers surrendering to their ‘messianic history’: ‘to bring the word to a stop is to pull it out of the flux of meaning, to exhibit it as such’.<sup>492</sup> This work of *détournement*, located between uniqueness and repetition, marks textual uncertainty.

Adorno’s view of the mutual importance of nature and history in relation to transition and transformation, acting upon the ‘rotten interiorities’ of second alienated nature is relevant to this film. Likewise, Agamben’s argument about difference and repetition, closely related mechanisms generated by montage, illuminates *Verifica Incerta*’s gestures which are repetitively presented as mere signifiers in motion and, as

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<sup>490</sup> Agamben, 2002, pp. 313-319 (p. 314). On Benjamin’s concept ‘the dialectical image’, see also the earlier Section 5.2.

<sup>491</sup> Agamben writes: ‘But what is the history involved? Here it must be stressed that it is not a matter of a chronological history in the strict sense, but of a messianic history. Messianic history is defined by two major characteristics. First, it is a history of salvation: something must be saved. But it is also a final history, an eschatological history, in which something must be completed, judged. It must happen here, but in another time; it must leave chronology behind, but without entering some other world.’ Agamben, 2002, pp. 313-319 (p. 314).

<sup>492</sup> Agamben, 2002, pp. 313-319 (p. 317).

bearers of past forms of life, to be ‘judged’ in some time by other audiences. In this context, the natural history of the rescued images has a specific socio-cultural purpose in a historical time to come, charged with a messianic purpose.

Together with repetition, the mechanism of stoppage in montage reveals the film’s poetics of mimetic gesture; a hesitation, as it were, between sound and image, historical image and meaning, similar to Paul Valéry’s evocation of the poem as ‘a prolonged hesitation between sound and meaning’.<sup>493</sup> Such a technique is necessary to express a situation surrounding a cluster of found images, whereby the new avant-garde found footage paradigm relies on the relational nature of groups of images.

## **6. A ‘cinema of gesture’**

To consolidate a theory of the ‘cinema of gesture’, it is necessary to consider closely the poetics of deployed techniques. The separation between sound and image, image and meaning, gesture and thought initiate the poetics of hesitation of found footage. This can be explored further in relation to ‘mimesis’. Adorno invoked dance as a model for how in film people are represented as if imitating life:

When people dance to jazz for example, they do not dance for sensuous pleasure or in order to obtain release. Rather they merely depict the gestures of sensuous human beings, just as in a film individual allegorical gestures on their own represent modes of behaviour in general, and that is precisely the release.<sup>494</sup>

Agamben also described dance as gesture, as primarily a medium through which to express movement:

If dance is gesture, it is so, rather, because it is nothing more than the endurance and the exhibition of the media character of corporal movements. The gesture is the exhibition of a mediality: it is the process of making a means visible as such.<sup>495</sup>

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<sup>493</sup> Valéry as cited by Agamben, 2002, pp. 313-319 (p. 317).

<sup>494</sup> Adorno, 2001, p. 82.

<sup>495</sup> Agamben, 2000, p. 58.

In this light, it could be argued that the critical mode of the cinema of gesture in *Verifica Incerta* not only foregrounds symptoms of dis-functionality, the inability to communicate properly, but also marks the desire to reclaim something lost, something that is natural for human beings, such as bodily movement. It may be argued that since the inception of commercial cinema, with its standardised technology and industry, mediating bodily movement entails appropriating biological life with a naturalised mechanization of motion embodied in gesture. In this sense, the critical mode of this experimental cinema strives to reawaken human engagement with the technological medium, whilst invoking a clearer understanding of human alienation. As Agamben argues:

Cinema leads images back to the homeland of gesture. According to the beautiful definition implicit in Beckett's *Traum und Nacht*, it is the dream of a gesture. The duty of the director is to introduce into this dream the element of awakening.<sup>496</sup>

I argue that *Verifica Incerta* is a cinema of gesture that parades human beings' imitations of life. For Agamben, the mime seeking to unite image to meaning, sound to image, gesture to thought, exhibits the nature of the medium as such:

[...] the mime, when gestures addressed to the most familiar ends are exhibited as such and are thus kept suspended between desire and fulfilment, perpetration and its recollection – in what Mallarmé calls a *milieu pur*, so what is relayed to human being in gestures is not the sphere of an end in itself but rather the sphere of a pure and endless mediality.<sup>497</sup>

This poetics of hesitation – to paraphrase Valéry – is what Baruchello and Grifi's cinema ultimately manifests: a cinema of gesture whose inner tension thrives on re-appropriating natural ways of creating meaning, and displaying gesture as, essentially, mediality in perpetual transition. As Agamben argued: 'In the cinema, a society that has lost its gestures tries at once to reclaim what it has lost and to record its loss'.<sup>498</sup>

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<sup>496</sup> Agamben, 2000, p. 55.

<sup>497</sup> Agamben, 2000, p. 59.

<sup>498</sup> Agamben, 2000, p. 52.

This striving, I would argue, is exemplified by a ‘cinema of gesture’. Moreover, his mentioning Kant’s ‘purposiveness without purpose’ can be considered in relation to the film’s flaunting its own mediality, that is, exhibiting it as such; gesture as a means with no end.<sup>499</sup> These signifiers are accountable for themselves as images waiting to be judged, enslaved to their own messianic history: ‘For human beings who have lost every sense of naturalness, each single gesture becomes a destiny’.<sup>500</sup>

Through Baruchello and Grifi’s experimental approach to film production and to film as a plastic medium, *Verifica Incerta* exemplifies the category of the artists’ film. Its relevance for art theory has a long history, as Vachel Lindsay’s 1915 book, *The Art of the Moving Picture* attests: ‘theorizing cinema’ has long been a creative space in which to generate new ideas.<sup>501</sup> Lindsay argued that cinema does not imitate reality, rather its visionary activity expresses the idea of an image, which frees its structure from the temporality of the present: ‘a thought based on the visual and temporal properties which produce humanity and therefore existential experience’.<sup>502</sup> A cinema of gesture does exactly this: it exposes human dis-functionality and the loss of motor ability in an epoch of cultural and artistic transition.

With this close critical analysis of *Verifica Incerta* I have attempted to explore the communalities between art, cinema and critical theory, considering experimentation with film form and structure as testing artistic propositions and scientific hypotheses

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<sup>499</sup> ‘It is only in this way that the obscure Kantian expression “purposiveness without purpose” acquires a concrete meaning. Such a finality in the realm of means is that power of the gesture that interrupts the gesture in its very being-means and only in this way can exhibit it, thereby transforming a *res* into a *res gesta*. In the same way, if we understand the “word” as the means of communication, then to show a word does not mean to have at one’s disposal a higher level (a metalanguage, itself incommunicable within the first level), starting from which we could make that word an object of communication; it means, rather, to expose the word in its own mediality, in its own being a means, without any transcendence. The gesture is, in this sense, communication of a communicability.’ Agamben, 2000, p. 59.

<sup>500</sup> Agamben, 2000, p. 52.

<sup>501</sup> Maria Rosa Sossai, *Percorsi e confronti tra arte e cinema* (Milano: Silvana Editoriale, 2008), pp. 26-27.

<sup>502</sup> My translation. The original text reads: ‘un pensiero basato su proprieta' visive e temporali che producono umanita' e quindi esperienza esistenziale.’ Sossai, p. 25.

in order to overcome aporia – producing what might be described as a film that thinks, or an essay film. Baruchello wrote that for him film was a way of thinking about a range of forms of expression: ‘film as the representation of a group of words, or a film of selected words or phrases. [...] *Verifica Incerta* grew out of the same mental atmosphere that led to drawings, images, films and even texts.’<sup>503</sup> In relation to the unmaking and remaking of found footage films, it may be relevant to note Laura Rascaroli’s comment on essay films, inspired by Deleuze: ‘Our thinking implies an image of thought, which constantly changes and is challenged and produced by what lies outside of it: the unthought’.<sup>504</sup> If the human brain is constantly affected by external factors, how do the arts explain this phenomenon? It could be argued that here lies the undetermined nature of an aporetic cinema based on found film footage, eliciting a neuro-cognitive approach in practices of dispersal, fragmentation and recuperation of human gestures; that productive tension between image and thought.

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<sup>503</sup> ‘A Conversation between Carlo Gioni and Gianfranco Baruchello’, in Subrizi and Rabottini, p. 96.

<sup>504</sup> Laura Rascaroli, *How the Essay Film Thinks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 47.

**Figures: 12-34**



*12: 00:56"*



*13:13:53"*



*14: 13:59"*



*15: 00:39"*



*16: 00:46"*



17: 01:51". *Mariko Weber*



18: 2:11". *'I'm your friend, Eddie Spanier!'*



19: 2:18"



20: 2:19"



21: From 2:52" until 04:22".  
*'Who is Eddie Spanier?'*  
*To which he replies: 'My wife'*



22: 04:31". *'It's a boy!'*



23: 02:29"



24: 2:35"



25: 04:45"



26: 04:46"



27: 04:49"



28: 04:51"



29: 05:06". *An offscreen female voice says to Clark Gable: 'If there was a door I would have knocked'.*



30: 05:08"



31: 14:56"



32: 14:57"



33: 18:48"



34: 18:50"

## Chapter 9. For a Critique of Violence with the Archive

Following the poetics of hesitation between image and thought articulated by a ‘cinema of gesture’ in *Verifica Incerta*, this Chapter turns to the study of experimental films which directly address past forms of violence, through the use of archive materials,

Across a range of films neglected in the history of experimental filmmaking in Italy, it contextualises archival traces of inhumanity, personal memories of abuse, physical and psychological aggression on the human body, and ultimately on life itself. I explore how these films referenced Fascist politics and their imperialist wars, the Holocaust, the abominable treatment of human beings in jurisdictional spaces and governmental institutions, such as extermination and refugee camps and prisons, and anti-Vietnam sentiments. By mapping these experimental films across the terrain of the Italian film avant-garde of the 1960s, this Chapter explores the thesis that there had been a sustained interest in representing the persistent abuse of human rights, which had become accepted practice in episodes of social unrest in the sixties, foreshadowing not only the violent protests of 1968, but also a long period of crisis in human values.<sup>505</sup> The Chapter seeks to demonstrate the immense cultural value of films that sourced documents of violence from the archive, seeking to create a purposeful political aesthetics based on preventing the repetition of such abuses against humanity, and counteracting the oblivion that followed the widespread social anomie of the sixties.

Hence, my research emphasises the significance of historical sources for embodying a personal and collective cultural memory, which is brought back to life

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<sup>505</sup> ‘The political culture of ’68 was contradictory on the question of the value of human life and the relationship between politics and morality. There was a wave of protest against injustice and inhumanity in the world; its targets were not only imperialist war, but the everyday exploitation in the factory which resulted in heavy casualties [...]’. Lumley, 1999, p. 288.

by the visionary deployment of techniques of montage and compilation. My contextual analysis of these films draws upon Agamben's theories of 'homo sacer', 'bare life' and the archive as a 'de-subjectivised testimony', which in turn partly drew on Benjamin's critique of violence. My study aims to establish the conceptual framework of experimental film forms that have engaged with cultural memory, in order to demonstrate how archive images matter for an 'eschatological history, in which something must be completed, judged'.<sup>549</sup> The themes explored in these films are thus concerned with how moving image artists have delved into the past with a view to forewarning the inheritors of its legacy.

### **1. Alfredo Leonardi: *Indulgenza Plenaria* (1964)<sup>506</sup>**

Leonardi's first documentary *Indulgenza Plenaria* explicitly exposed, and implicitly criticised, a prevailing culture of oppressive policing and censorship, a widespread state authoritarianism in Italian society in the sixties.<sup>507</sup> For this reason, the film was initially prosecuted for its allegedly subversive material. The filmmaker was however pardoned in a subsequent amnesty, hence the wording of the title 'Plenary Indulgence', which refers to the Roman Catholic Church remission of punishment after the absolution of sins.<sup>508</sup>

Although only implied here, the theme of violence runs through this entire film. It shows Mussolini's imperialist enterprises etched in the form of celebratory declarations on marble megaliths, plinths and classical statues portraying Olympic

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<sup>506</sup> *Indulgenza Plenaria (Plenary Indulgence)*, 1964, 35mm, col., 10'

<sup>507</sup> Cesare Zavattini wrote: 'The damage done by censorship is not to be found principally in the highly visible veto or in seizures of works but in the more hidden intimidations and secret pressures to which authors are subjected ... we know very well that even those authors who believe themselves to be most free and in good faith are exposed to these pressures.' Cited by Forgacs and Gundle, p. 221.

<sup>508</sup> A 'Plenary Indulgence' is granted by the Pope as remission of the punishment in purgatory still due for sins after absolution. *Oxford Dictionary of English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 884.

athletes at the 'Foro Italico' (Sports Stadium) in Northern Rome, originally erected by the Dictator in 1928 and known as the 'Foro Mussolini'.<sup>509</sup> The commemorative inscriptions are the epitaphs of a national past dominated by colonialist designs in North Africa, dating from 1930 to 1936, memories that Leonardi's film sets against images of innocence and freedom as children play in the courtyards, and mothers stroll under the sun with babies in prams; a stark contrast between monuments to past violence and the repression of Fascism and the simple, ostensibly natural unfolding of everyday life twenty years later in the same suburbs.

While the documentary is a record of apparently harmonious existence, the historical space in which it takes place reveals the cultural remains of an imperialistic past. This deceptively unimportant background gains relevance once we look more attentively, and realize how the film provides a critical commentary on society's obliviousness and neglect in addressing its past. Specifically, it indicts Italy's inability to see the cultural legacy of Fascism in the rapid economic changes that led to the formation of corporations which started regulating everyday life through the mass media.<sup>510</sup> The *Cinegiornale Incom* newsreel, which used to precede the cinema exhibition of every feature film, was a typical example of this state intervention through the mass media.<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>509</sup> 'Breve sintesi storica' in *Istituto Luce - La Roma di Mussolini*, <http://www.chisciotte.it/foroitalico/storia.htm> [accessed 10 March 2014]. Also see: [http://www.artefascista.it/roma\\_foro\\_mussolini\\_fascismo\\_architettura.htm](http://www.artefascista.it/roma_foro_mussolini_fascismo_architettura.htm) [accessed 10 August 2019]

<sup>510</sup> The legacy of Fascist state interventionism is reflected in Forgacs and Gundle's statement: 'a number of studies of mass communications and mass culture under Fascism have suggested that they were harnessed more or less efficiently to a totalising political project that used them as instruments to organise "mass consent"'. Philip V. Cannistraro's book *La fabbrica del consenso (The Factory of Consent)*, published in 1975, was, as its title suggests, an example of this "instrumentalist" approach.' Forgacs and Gundle, p. 199.

<sup>511</sup> About the *Cinegiornale Incom* newsreels, Forgacs and Gundle write: 'Despite the fact that Incom was a private company, and newsreel production was contracted both to its own crews and to a number of small private documentary-producing firms, the content of the newsreels was determined by the Centro Documentazione, a body set up by [Christian Democrat] Alcide De Gasperi within the Prime Minister's Office, and therefore the newsreels were still, as they had been under Fascism, an official voice of the government. The main discontinuities were in the treatment of the principal themes. [...] the newsreels were still propagandistic, but the propaganda was differently inflected.' Forgacs and Gundle, pp. 217-8. I have analysed the *Cinegiornale Incom* newsreels in Chapter 5, Section 1. Furthermore, with his experimental montage film *Cinegiornale* in 1967, Leonardi confirmed his criticism of the cinegiornale still used as a form of governmental cultural influence. For further information about cinegiornali LUCE and *La Settimana Incom* newsreels, as these were produced until 1965, and Leonardi's *Cinegiornale* (1967), see Chapter 5.

*Indulgenza Plenaria* establishes a critical commentary on the continuing exploitation of mankind, allied to an historical lack of social consciousness, by means of a jarring collage of sound and visual images. Leonardi's critical aesthetics is based on the interweaving of archival sounds of radio broadcasts announcing Mussolini's victories and speeches, and newspaper headlines announcing tragic events with loss of life due to war. The mixed media collage is thus formed from sound and photographic archives, with superimposed news-cuttings. Perhaps surprisingly, a brief audio commentary, intercut with Mussolini's voice, praises forgiveness and understanding. This advocates generosity of the human spirit, looking forward to the dawn of a new future, in the voice of the Christian faith. Alongside it, however, clashing sounds and images seems purposefully to emphasise discordant formal and thematic associations, as if to discourage passive viewing in favour of a more consciously critical engagement with the messages generated by the film's collage. Through this experimental documentary, and like other experimental filmmakers, Leonardi meant to draw attention to his own processes of media manipulation, such as the production of documents and records, to invite a comparison between past colonialism and current forms of cultural imperialism.

The film's focus is on social commitment as, by deploying archival sounds and images of Mussolini addressing the masses, Leonardi draws together Fascism and the mass media of the 1960s, letting his audience reach uncomfortable conclusions about its own past and present. Hence it could be argued that *Indulgenza Plenaria* offers firstly, an indirect criticism of the Catholic Church for leading society into a lifestyle of moral hypocrisy. It was Christian morality that had maintained a pervasive and substantial censorship in popular culture from the Fascist era and into the postwar years, when works were censored because they were considered "offensive to

decency” (“il buon costume”) or contrary to Christian morality.<sup>512</sup> Secondly, the film constitutes a direct criticism of the country’s political and cultural life in the sixties, for having chosen to forget its past in favour of a false sense of wellbeing.<sup>513</sup>

*Indulgenza Plenaria* deals indirectly with the uneasy reality of a contemporary politics that aimed to subdue society by promoting Christianity and the fear of a Third World War, while limiting cinema’s cultural autonomy and independent artistic practices.

## 2. Mario Schifano: *Vietnam* (1967)<sup>514</sup>

*Vietnam* is an unfiltered and non-narrative rendition of violence and death, shown through a rapid montage of televised newsreel and documentary footage about the horrors of the Vietnam War. It graphically illustrates people being beaten, killed and buried, alongside images of artillery and of the military, and of political leaders such as Mao Tse-Tung, together with soldiers marching and airplanes dropping bombs. Soldiers acknowledge the camera and smile; children and women are also shown taking part in patriotic celebrations of the end of the World War Two. However, the film ends on gloomier images of further torture and the death of Vietnam soldiers, while children are seen crying. A radically critical anti-war commentary challenges the politics of the mass media, with the abrasive aesthetics of their war reportage, based on rapidly montaged images, chosen to alienate the audience perception of suffering and death. (Ill. 35-36)

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<sup>512</sup> Forgacs and Gundle, p. 221.

<sup>513</sup> Alfredo Leonardi, in Bacigalupo, 1974, pp. 111-129 (p. 112).

<sup>514</sup> *Vietnam* (1967, 16mm, b/w, silent, 3’).

### 3. Giorgio Turi and Roberto Capanna: *Non permetterò* (1967)<sup>515</sup>

*Non Permetterò* (*I will not allow it*) is an anti-militarist montage film whose aesthetics were closely linked to Turi and Capanna's anti-war politics. Through its title's imperative outcry and explicit opening sequence, the film immediately introduces its audience to a direct criticism of war violence fuelled by nationalistic sentiments. The following text appears in the title sequence: 'Campagne per l'Indipendenza d'Italia 1848-1870 ('Campaigns for the Independence of Italy 1848-1870'), and is accompanied by classical musical freighted with patriotic overtones. Turi and Capanna's film can be seen thematically as a companion piece to Ugo Nespolo's *La galante avventura del cavaliere dal lieto volto* (*The gallant adventure of the knight with a happy face*, 1967). Although contemporary, *La Galante Avventura* is however completely different in tone: in the spirit of Dada, it stages a parodic adaptation of a children's book entitled *Cuore* (*Heart*, Edmondo De Amicis, 1889), written in praise of patriotism and the Italian Risorgimento. Conversely, *Non permetterò*, with its initial reference to the three Italian wars of Independence that led to the Risorgimento, addresses the reactionary politics of violence that these wars created. Repeated images of a village band playing are intercut with a statue of a man triumphantly riding a horse, who must be either Garibaldi or Mazzini, the heroic leaders of the Risorgimento wars. Thus *Non permetterò* repurposes historical material to revive collective and re-mediated memories of the Fascist rhetoric of violence as a commentary on the legacy inherited by contemporary national popular culture. As the film historian Mary Wood observed:

Key events in Italian national history have regularly been visited. The Risorgimento, the struggles for national unity in the 1860s, gave rise to many potent myths, such as the notion that an active minority could succeed in heroically

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<sup>515</sup> *Non permetterò* (*I will not allow it*, 1967, 16mm, b/w, 12').

founding the nation. Fascist cinema evoked the Risorgimento to cement the idea of continuity for the regime.<sup>516</sup>

The film's anti-war politics are also underlined by Bruno Di Marino, when he studied it as part of a 'trilogy of attractions', along with *Voy-age* and *Scusate il Disturbo* (discussed in Chapter 7). Di Marino notes that the montage of images from television, cinema newsreels and national newspapers in *Non permetterò* aimed to dismantle the rhetoric of imperialist wars. Through its fast cutting, the film attacks how broadcast media wage their war on public sensibilities and perceptions. Turi and Capanna's deep interest in the experimental film language can also be seen in this film's emphatic exposure of the false comfort of wellbeing, of a country portrayed as united, rather than suffering the actual trauma of a wounded cultural memory.

The 'apocalyptic' tone of *Non permetterò* became palpable through the materiality of the filmmakers' handling of images aimed at unambiguously criticising other forms of 'silent and invisible' offences against culture. The text 'Non permetterò che calpestino la nostra testa' ('I will not allow them to walk over us') encapsulates the film's anti-war protest while emphasising the loss of love, life and humanity.

Footage of an elderly woman throwing roses from her balcony to soldiers returning from war, is repeated as a loop, symbolising peace, although accompanied by a montage of soundtrack extracts from Westerns. These provide sinister and sardonic accompaniment to footage of artillery and soldiers in battle. There is also a male voice expressing the desire for human contact, for a chance to look into people's eyes, to hold their hands, see their smile, and caress a woman's hair. However, the same voiceover insists he cannot do so, as he must continue killing.

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<sup>516</sup> Mary Wood, *Italian Cinema* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), p. 74.

By alternating soundtrack extracts from Westerns (from Hollywood and mainstream Italian cinema) with the male voice mourning the loss of life and longing for human contact, Turi and Capanna voice their criticism, not only of commercial cinema, but also of the cultural myths of the ‘American dream’, built on projects of conquest and cultural imperialism. A superimposed text reads ‘A man can only dream’, while the same male voiceover keeps repeating his wish for sharing human feelings of compassion and kindness, a sense of harmony with nature – until he stops and repeats that he cannot, since he must carry on killing.

These images play in a loop, with the elderly woman continuing to scatter roses from her balcony, welcoming back the war’s survivors. But as the montage accelerates, the images become abstract shapes, finally closing in on a close-up of a large gun. The critical tension created in the film’s intricate montage becomes a meditation on the media’s objectification of human tragedy.

#### **4. Mario Lombardi and Anna Lojolo: *A Corpo* (1968)<sup>517</sup>**

Turi and Capanna’s *Non permetterò* and Vergine’s *Ciao ciao* dealt in different ways with the fragility of life and a desire for human empathy. Similar concerns and aesthetic strategies are more specifically addressed by Lombardi and Lojolo in their *A Corpo*, showing the destructive impact of violence on the human body. More figurative than *Non Permetterò* and *Ciao ciao*, this film depicts the horrors and ravages of war, and shows an American flag being burned by protesters, in an image that was common from this period of protests against American intervention in Vietnam.

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<sup>517</sup> *A Corpo* (*Corporeality*, 1968, 8mm, silent, 31’).

*A Corpo* provides a graphic portrayal of the physical effects of war on the human body. At the beginning, archival documentary footage shows the powerlessness of minorities, and not only physical but also cultural vulnerability, initially represented the image of a naked woman. This is followed by that of a man stripping down, implying martyrdom and heroic suicidal anti-war gestures, with his body and blood being relished by the camera. The grain and pixilation of the footage suggest the original footage may have been shot on 8mm, with its camera's mobility and ability to amplify everyday detail. Here we are encouraged to reflect on the abuse perpetrated on the person, with the proximity between filmic material and a human being further exemplifying the power and violence potentially administered by the military on human life. The destruction of the American flag is an indictment not only of one country, but of Western civilisation for validating and supporting the massacre of innocent people.

*A Corpo* is a montage of images portraying violence in the everyday, in all its raw immediacy. It shows heavy artillery and police weapons, in television reportage on the Vietnam War and on the uprisings of '68 repressed by aggressive police intervention. Such television footage plainly illustrating violence also provides a strong critique of representation in everyday life, as its realist newsreel aesthetic creates a sense of the surreal, which may remind us of Benjamin's notion of the material nature of commodities being 'other' than the subject.<sup>518</sup> Deformed television screen images of the Democratic Party leader Aldo Moro seen at a conference suggest the filmmakers' opposition to Italy's support (through NATO membership) of United States' policies. Such aesthetic deformation may also be seen as standing for hostility to television

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<sup>518</sup> In relation to 'second nature', Buck-Morss argued that for Benjamin 'material nature was "other" than the subject, and this remained true no matter how much human labour had been invested in it.' Buck-Morss, p. 70. About Benjamin's approach to the 'second nature' of commodities, please also see Chapter 3, Section 4.1.

broadcasting as a medium of support for the state and its cultural hegemony through apparently matter-of-fact yet biased narratives. The film's ending unequivocally states the filmmakers' opposition to abuse of human rights.

*A Corpo* may perhaps usefully be compared with two works that have similarly subjected the human body in close-up to symbolic forms of violence in Martin Scorsese's early short *The Big Shave* (1967), a man seen shaving cuts himself and is soon bathed in blood – a scene of self-mutilation which has often been interpreted as a commentary on America's involvement in Vietnam. A decade later, *This is not a television receiver* (1976) by the British video artist David Hall performed a 'materialist' attack on the screen image of authority of the television news-reader Richard Baker, reducing this to electronic disintegration. Lombardi and Lojolo's film exposes the 'otherness' of alienation through a de-constructive process; it effaces mass-media transparency and exposes the constructedness of news broadcast

**5. Alberto Grifi: *L'occhio è per così dire l'evoluzione biologica di una lacrima / Autoritratto Auschwitz* (1965-1967/2007)<sup>519</sup>**

**5.1 The film's structure**

*L'occhio è per così dire l'evoluzione biologica di una lacrima / Autoritratto Auschwitz* (*The eye is, so to speak, the biological evolution of a tear / Self-Portrait Auschwitz*) is a film diptych dealing with cultural memory, with the compilation of the film's audio-visual elements updated by Grifi in 2007. Its two film components are fragmented and interlaced. *The eye is so to speak ...* contains found footage from Michelangelo Antonioni's *Deserto Rosso* (*Red Desert*, 1964), using outtakes of Monica Vitti's

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<sup>519</sup> *L'occhio è per così dire l'evoluzione biologica di una lacrima* (*The eye is, so to speak, the biological evolution of a tear*, 35mm) / *Autoritratto Auschwitz* (*Self-Portrait Auschwitz*, 16mm) (1965-68/2007, colour, 35'). This found footage compilation film can be viewed in its entirety on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAki5ZSmMXA> [accessed 24 July 2019].

screen tests displaying various attempts at crying. (Ill. 55-58); *Self-Portrait Auschwitz* is a documentary and self-portrait, which contains images of Grifi walking through the grim wasteland of Auschwitz, speaking to the camera. This section of is a compilation of archival photographic, epistolary and oral evidence about Auschwitz during the war, with photographs of human corpses and tortured bodies, and the prison in the 1960s, the refugee camp, and Holocaust survivors (Grifi served a jail sentence between 1968 and 1970<sup>520</sup>). In 2007, Grifi edited this material together in a non-chronological sequence, added live documentary footage and new sound recordings to form what I would describe as an essay film diptych, together with *The eye is so to speak ....*

This film is thus a compilation of found footage, film outtakes, documentary and archive materials, interwoven to form a conceptually coherent, essayistic whole. A significant formal element is also a series of dis-embodied voiceovers, the reading of letters and a variety of audio recordings, which give the film as a whole a polyphonic, hybrid narrative voice that is both stream of consciousness and critical commentary. The frequent non-alignment of images and sounds creates a visual and aural dialectical tension; for example, the vocal testimony and memories of an Auschwitz survivor given in an interview, a Mr Terracina, are juxtaposed with images of Vitti, displaying her efforts at summoning tears for a fictional account of bourgeois spiritual apathy. This audio-visual montage provides the underlying core structure of the film, underpinning Grifi's stern criticism of an alienated consumer society and spectatorship of mainstream narrative cinema.

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<sup>520</sup> 'Atheist and philo-Chinese/Maoist self-styled film director Alberto Grifi falls in the net of the police'. This is the title of the article published on the national newspaper *Il Tempo* on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1968. My translation. The original text reads: 'Ateo e filocinese, è caduto nelle mani della mobile un sedicente regista cinematografico, Alberto Grifi'. Quoted by Bruno Di Marino, 1999, p. 53. Di Marino writes that Grifi was arrested after being found with two grams of hashish, during a time of witch-hunting and repression.

The chapter titled 'A letter from Regina Coeli, 1968' is read by Alessandra Vanzi, a friend of Grifi's involved in avant-garde theatre, who is filmed for the opening sequence. (Ill. 37-38) In his letters from the Roman prison (Regina Coeli), Grifi describes his experience and what he saw in Auschwitz, including archive records of the camp and the Holocaust, when shooting *Self-Portrait Auschwitz* earlier between 1965 and 1967. Grifi's epistolary and oral records are read by Vanzi, who thus provides the voiceover to Grifi's letters and memoirs. These audio-visual images are interwoven with harrowing photographs from the Auschwitz archive (Ill. 39-48). Vanzi's reading is intercut with the voice of the Holocaust survivor Mr Terracina, recounting his horrific memories of the camp.<sup>521</sup> His memories, also involving his family, lend the film a raw authenticity, the perfect corollary for the archive images from Auschwitz shot by Grifi. Although, Terracina speaks in the first person, we do not know for certain whether the images we see are of his family or not; his voice may serve here to evoke reflection on private and public memory.

Documentary evidence of memories of abuse and violence is present in the legal case brought by prisoners against guards for having committed horrific acts of physical abuse, and also caused death to inmates. Carlo Silvestro, another friend of Grifi's, reads this document, which provides the voiceover to archive photographs of the camp interspersed throughout the entire film.

Whilst the outtakes and found footage in *The eye is...* are from the 35mm film *Red Desert*, *Self-Portrait Auschwitz* was shot by Grifi on 16mm. In *Self-Portrait*, he also included film of other high security prisons and refugee camps, taken from other documentaries shot on 35mm, including footage of the exteriors of Regina Coeli (Ill.

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<sup>521</sup> As the film's end credits state, Benedetta Caldarulo (who works in radio) conducted the interview with Mr Terracina.

49-50), and images from a documentary for television on refugee camps in Lebanon.

(III. 51-52)

I suggest that the film's elaborate structure enhances the aesthetics of an essay film with non-chronological narratives and, together with its diverse materials, can generate reflection about history and the past, thus enhancing the significance of cultural memory

## 5.2 The film's aesthetics

The imbrication of media technologies and the human body is central to the aesthetics and philosophy of Alberto Grifi's *L'occhio è per così dire l'evoluzione biologica di una lacrima / Autoritratto Auschwitz*. The dualities of film camera/human eye and technology/human biology form the conceptual basis of this Chapter. Grifi's film is a diptych, tapping into the artistic climate of the Italian film avant-garde of the sixties, in large part indebted to the legacy of the historic avant-gardes. From the idea of a 'mechanised' human body, to technological innovation, the fragmentation of a uniform and homogeneous space into a non-diegetic narrative space, and the integration of a sensibility for the fine arts into independent and experimental filmmaking, these are only some of the aspects of Grifi's film aesthetics.

Many Italian filmmakers of the sixties were creatively engaged with the possibilities afforded by film materiality and editing techniques to convey different ways of seeing. Among these, Alfredo Leonardi's philosophical filmmaking associated montage with a mental image process, leading to his claim that 'seeing is a way of thinking' in his newsreel montage *Cinegiornale* (1967), discussed in Chapter 5, and *Indulgenza Plenaria* (1964) discussed earlier in this Chapter. Grifi, however,

conceived the experience of seeing not only in relation to the world of phenomena, but also to human biology in symbiosis with technology.<sup>522</sup>

From a close reading of Grifi's title, *The eye is, so to speak, the biological evolution of a tear*, one may deduce the metonymical significance of the film's aesthetics. While the title explains that the eye, or 'seeing', is the biological evolution (so to speak) of a tear, this may suggest that 'seeing the world', or images of this world, is the natural continuum of an emotion. The camera, like a human eye, sees and records what it 'feels', through a process of empathy. By referring to the physiological organ of sight, Grifi relates his philosophy of 'seeing' to human biology and subjectivity, according to which, however, seeing is not the mere acquisition of sensory data, but more importantly a philosophical positioning and moral stance of the subject. Consequently, the title provides a conceptual rationale, starting with camera's technological basis, its lens, and the technological extension of the human eye, for capturing a subjective being in and seeing the world. Hence, the recorded image embodies not only the biological trace of human emotion and perception, a tear, but also the world that makes possible 'seeing this world' from a personal perspective. I suggest that this philosophical basis is essential to Grifi's subjective positioning in his historicised critique of violence and exploration of cultural memory.

For Grifi, the phenomenological apprehension of the moving image is inextricably connected to the trace of biological human life, the primary affective response and, as it were, the 'poor' component of seeing 'life itself'; a tear, the barest and pre trace of a human emotional reaction to this world, and as a bodily fluid, also the trace of a human life form. Thus follows the relevance of Grifi's montage and compilation

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<sup>522</sup> About Leonardi's 'seeing as a *modus vivendi*' (as discussed by Di Marino), see Chapter 5, Section 4.

techniques, which provide a thinking space in which to shape the emotional and experiential planes afforded by the reproduced archival records. This process, I suggest, has the force of animating the still image in the archive, re-injecting life, as it were, into its object-state, its 'being-in-death'.

This differs from Leonardi's approach, in which the moving image is the direct consequence of a mental, cognitive process. For Grifi, the authenticity of lived, raw emotions summoned his and the camera's documentary gaze, thus provoking an essayistic philosophical approach to cultural memory, the production of a searching critical analysis of modern human apathy. Here, by articulating this approach through his film's polyphonic narratives and images, filmmaking has truly realised Umberto Eco's 'form as social commitment'.

Grifi's engagement with history in the archive also finds expression in his segmenting the films into chapters, with titles such as 'Una lettera da Regina Coeli, 1968' (A letter from Regina Coeli, 1968) and 'Cos'è che trasforma Auschwitz in Sabra e Shatila?' (What transforms Auschwitz into Sabra and Shatila?) (Ill. 53-54). As these have the appearance of intertitles from the silent era, usually signposting significant narrative turns, in Grifi's compilation they may prompt viewers' engagement with a re-contextualised history. Such silent-film aesthetics also invoke the sense of a loss, of memory fragmented and full of gaps, as well as the limitations of the archive with its multiple histories and ontologies – especially for transmitting a personal experience.

This essay register of this film encourages a thoughtful engagement with its archival records, deployed reflectively in the film's own materialities. If the two films are aesthetically similar, they are also conceptually quite dissimilar. The film attempts to draw attention to the documented authenticity of cases of abusing mankind through

archive materials, and to explore an empathetic approach to engaging with and regaining awareness of the past. The stark connotation of Grifi's diptych recalls other memorable archive films that have confronted memory and culpability by deploying newsreel footage, documentary and photographic records about the horrors of Nazi concentration camps. Among these, films such as Alain Resnais's *Nuit et brouillard/Night and Fog* (1955), Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi's *Oh! Mankind* (2004), or Andre Singer's *Night Will Fall* (2014) have all taken precise, and different positions on the legitimacy of using archival film for such a subject – with Lanzmann refusing its use, in favour of modern interviews with survivors. Collectively, however, these films also account for the important role of the archive in recounting mid-twentieth century history, and avoiding the danger of amnesia.

### **5.3 The archive as testimony**

Through all the films analysed in this Chapter, the archive can be seen as a source of poignant testimony, yet we may question its status as testimony when facing violence. In Grifi's essay diptych, this issue is intensely resonant. The harrowing archive photographs of people being tortured, corpses in heaps, gas chambers, people hanged electrocuted, and mutilated bodies, accompanied by oral accounts of physical abuse and acts of cruelty suffered by prisoners, are all deployed by Grifi in order to evoke the ghosts of continuity across decades. The historical testimony is central here.

Terracina is the voice of survival in the camp. In his interview, he talks about his sister suffering the consequences of trusting a flirting Fascist, who then led her to an SS officer. Terracina insists that without the Fascists' cooperation and betrayal there would not have been any deportation of Italian Jews. All of his family were deported,

with sixty-four people standing in a van for five days, living amid human excrement. His interview details the rituals of their days spent trying to retain physical and mental resilience, which started to wear out after being subjected to daily punishment lashings and beatings that had to be counted in German, or hanging prisoners and aligning corpses.

Grifi compares this oral testimony with his personal memories of Auschwitz a year earlier, to the feelings of hopelessness and despair, about which he wrote in his letters from prison. In these, he wrote that it was like being surrounded by the shadows of death, as if irremediably trapped in an airless black hole. He could not help comparing such mental pain and fear to the feelings experienced by the Jews in the concentration camp.

The second chapter of the film titled ‘Cos’è’ che trasforma Auschwitz in Sabra e Shatila?’ (What transforms Auschwitz into Sabra and Shatila?), presents extracts from a television documentary in which a Palestinian soldier tells about the abuses his militia had to suffer in the Sabra area of Beirut and the Shatila refugee camp. This was during the Lebanese civil war of 1982, in which thousands of Palestinian and Lebanese Shiite civilians lost their lives to Lebanese Christians. Talking about this genocide, the soldier explains that the Lebanese did not have the Vietcong, but they would have chosen to end their lives rather than live like dead people in refugee camps. The archive footage from a television report shows a Lebanese man explaining how he was treated like an Iraqi man by Americans, without dignity. In his words: ‘In winter it was cold, they’d leave them naked. In the summer, it was hot, and they would throw tear gas bombs into their cells.’<sup>523</sup>

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<sup>523</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAki5ZSmMXA&list=PL4DI6pQHupvWgsxVVgKq9WA39BcZNizb\\_&index=3&t=0s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAki5ZSmMXA&list=PL4DI6pQHupvWgsxVVgKq9WA39BcZNizb_&index=3&t=0s), at 10mins [accessed 5 August 2019].

These horrific accounts of lost human lives include Carlo Silvestro's reading of a lawsuit in which ex-prisoners denounced the Italian State for allowing the guards, so-called 'bocche di lupo' ('wolves' mouths'), to commit physical and mental abuse in the penitentiary of San Vittore in Milan, while they were being transferred to the Mamone prison in Sardinia, and during their incarceration there for six months. Silvestro's voiceover reading this document accompanies both documentary footage of a meeting between Grifi and Antonioni, and Monica Vitti's screen test for *Red Desert* (summoning up her tears).<sup>524</sup> Through these aesthetically and thematically jarring testimonies Grifi voices his criticism of violence and of society's emotional and spiritual apathy, not excluding the bourgeois Roman intelligentsia who have tried to make films about 'petit-bourgeois themes' such as 'non-communication'.<sup>525</sup> For him, Vitti's character represented all those who did not feel any solidarity with the prisoners' pleas, or were unable to feel sympathy for those being treated without dignity.

Grifi's stern criticism conjures up a barren landscape of human emotions, suggesting that the archive may not be able to carry the burden of history through his use of the Monica Vitti character and her seemingly inert inner life, whose emotional void provides a backdrop for his evocation of the bleakness of late modernity. Her emotional unavailability stands for the ineffable ontology of the archive, the possibility of it being unable to draw in the public towards sharing personal experiences of horrific events. In *The eye is ...*, it is Grifi's contrapuntal strategy that

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<sup>524</sup> Associazione Culturale Alberto Grifi, 'Biografia', <http://www.albertogrifi.com/105?testo=26> [accessed 20 April 2014].

<sup>525</sup> These are Grifi's thoughts written in his letters 'Regina Coeli, 1968' and read by Alessandra Vanzi in [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAki5ZSmMXA&list=PL4DI6pQHupvWgsxVVgKq9WA39BcZNizb\\_&index=3&t=0s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAki5ZSmMXA&list=PL4DI6pQHupvWgsxVVgKq9WA39BcZNizb_&index=3&t=0s), at 14mins [accessed 6 August 2019].

comments on experiences of violence in the past, and the limitations of archival testimony in mediating and communicating these.

The archive materials utilised for this film also contribute to conveying the unadulterated, essentially ‘poor’ status of bare life. Grifi’s film evokes the phenomenon of *physis* in the archive, where the nature of these primary materials offers their potentially meaningful growth out of history and, following Adorno’s ‘idea of natural history’, the primordial landscape of reified meaningless interiorities.<sup>526</sup> It could be argued that the jarring audio-visual montage of this diptych powerfully illustrates the idea of activating *physis* in the archive; that is, the formation of a plurality of new meanings based on the intertwining of nature and history.

*L'occhio è, per così dire, l'evoluzione biologica di una lagrima / Autoritratto Auschwitz* was screened at the 64th International Venice Film Festival in 2007, soon after Grifi’s death in April of that year.<sup>527</sup>

## 6. For a critique of violence with the archive

Agamben’s *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life* raises questions that are relevant to all the films examined here and especially, as I argued above, to Grifi’s philosophical stance in his ‘seeing as a form of social commitment’. Considering Agamben’s ideas more fully provides an opportunity to reflect further on films which use archive materials to examine the place of history in relation to the present. At the centre of *Homo Sacer* is ‘bare life’, that is, the life of *homo sacer* (sacred man), ‘who may be killed and yet not sacrificed’.<sup>528</sup>

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<sup>526</sup> On Adorno’s ‘The Idea of Natural-History’, see Chapter 1, Section 4.

<sup>527</sup> <http://www.albertogrifi.com/123?testo=35> [accessed 10 March 2014].

<sup>528</sup> Agamben, 1998, p. 12.

By studying a figure of archaic Roman law, ‘bare life’, Agamben found that the juridical status of human life consists only in terms of its exclusion (that is, in terms of its capacity to be killed); this was the essence of the sacred tests of sovereign power. He draws on Michel Foucault’s influential theories regarding the relationship between natural life and politics and how, at the threshold of the modern era, the human body was included in the calculations of State power. Thus, at the end of *La Volonté*, the first volume in *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault initiated a study of biopolitics, the theoretical framework which allows for philosophical meditation on how modern man’s biological life is regulated by political interests: ‘modern man is an animal whose politics calls his existence as a living being into question’.<sup>529</sup> In *Dits et Écrits* (1980-88), Foucault focused on ‘a kind of bestialization of man achieved through the most sophisticated political techniques. For the first time in history [...] it becomes possible both to protect life and to authorize a holocaust.’<sup>530</sup> Agamben adds:

In particular, the development and triumph of capitalism would not have been possible, from this perspective, without the disciplinary control achieved by the new bio-power, which, through a series of appropriate technologies, so to speak created the “docile bodies” that it needed.<sup>531</sup>

Thus, Agamben’s study of biopolitics in *Homo Sacer* starts by exploring the etymology of the term ‘life’ which harks back to the Greek differentiation between ‘zoē’ and ‘bios’:

The Greeks had no single term to express what we mean by the word “life”. They used two terms, that, although traceable to a common etymological root, are semantically and morphologically distinct: *zoē*, which expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods), and *bios*, which indicated the form or way of living proper to an individual or a group.<sup>532</sup>

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<sup>529</sup> Giorgio Agamben cites Foucault. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 10. Originally published in 1995.

<sup>530</sup> Agamben, 1998, p. 10.

<sup>531</sup> Ibid.

<sup>532</sup> Agamben, 1998, p. 9.

Positing the imbrication of human ‘bare life’ and sovereign, political power, Agamben writes: ‘It can even be said that the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power’, carrying on from where Benjamin stopped in his *Critique of Violence* (1921).<sup>533</sup> As Agamben explains, Benjamin uncovered in his historical investigation different types of violence, notably ‘mythical’ and ‘divine’ violence, and found that in mythical thought the notion of the ‘sanctity of life’ was life itself, mere existence. Yet, this was deemed ‘higher’ than ‘just’ existence. In tracing a connection between ‘sacred life’, ‘mere life itself’ and violence, Benjamin marked out a distinction, and a productive connection, between a ‘law-preserving violence’ and ‘law-making violence’. This finally led Benjamin to the conclusion that ‘the critique of violence is the philosophy of its history’<sup>534</sup>, from which Agamben draws the idea of *Homo Sacer* in relation to biopolitics. Agamben also explores Foucault’s ideas of biopolitics, which he developed in a seminar in 1982, where he expanded on two distinct areas of research:

The study of the political techniques (such as the science of the police) with which the State assumes and integrates the care of the natural life of individuals into its very center; on the other hand, the examination of the technologies of the self by which processes of subjectivization bring the individual to bind himself to his own identity and consciousness, and at the same time, to an external power.<sup>535</sup>

I am suggesting that through the lens of biopolitics a critique of violence, which is a philosophy of its history, can elucidate further the critical aesthetics of the experimental films discussed in this Chapter. The theoretical framework of biopolitics applied to an exploration of violence in the archive, the re-contextualisation of references to the past and the jarring juxtaposition of audio-visual materials all

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<sup>533</sup> Agamben, 1998, p. 11.

<sup>534</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Reflections. Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by Peter Demetz, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), p. 299. His essay *Critique of Violence* was originally published in 1921.

<sup>535</sup> Agamben, 1998, p. 11.

emphasise the filmmakers' critical approach to violence: anti-militarism, an interest in foregrounding the essential and primary meaning of a 'bare life', also bound up with technology and the political power of the sovereign state. Agamben mentions Foucault's argument, that such a terrain of media governance could be seen as a 'real political double bind', whereby the masses were, on the one hand, objectively regulated and policed as political entities by the media, and on the other, they were also under the illusion of being self-regulated individuals, through their own subjectivised, technological selves; whereas in actuality their identity and consciousness was bound up to an external power as a source of self-validation.<sup>536</sup> This can be seen in the overwhelming presence of the mass media, marked by its perpetual re-contextualisation in all the films analysed in this Chapter. This methodology has in turn made visible the technological mediation of the human body as a form of control of human life naturalised as a regulated political entity, whose biological status exists in a cultural dichotomy with political authority and State institutions, such as Fascism, the Church, police and the prison.

Grifi's *The eye is... / Auschwitz* especially exemplifies Agamben's study of biopolitics and 'bare life'. Both the prison and the camp represent realms of sovereign State power over 'bare life', a naturalised form of appropriation of 'mere existence', which marks out the zone of State power that irreducibly includes and excludes the bare life of *homo sacer*, 'who may be killed and yet not sacrificed'.<sup>528</sup> Benjamin found that 'sacred man' was a concept generated by 'mythical thought' in its 'law-affirming', 'law-making' violence; these were notions rooted in militarism, about which Benjamin wrote: 'Militarism is the compulsory, universal use of violence as a

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<sup>536</sup> 'Foucault argues that the modern Western state has integrated techniques of subjective individualization with procedures of objective totalization to an unprecedented degree, and he speaks of a real "political double bind constituted by individualization and the simultaneous totalization of structures of modern power"'. Agamben, 1998, p. 11.

means to the ends of the state'. By drawing on archaic Roman law, according to which human life is included in the juridical order only by way of its exclusion, Agamben concludes that:

Together with the process by which the exception everywhere becomes the rule, the realm of bare life – which is originally situated at the margins of the political order – gradually begins to coincide with the political realm, and exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, *bios* and *zoē*, right and fact, enter into a zone of irreducible indistinction. At once excluding bare life from and capturing it within the political order, the state of exception [of sovereign power] actually constituted, in its very separateness, the hidden foundation on which the entire political system rested. When its borders begin to be blurred, the bare life that dwelt there frees itself in the city and becomes both subject and object of the conflicts of the political order, the one place for both the organisation of State power and emancipation from it.<sup>537</sup>

In films grappling with cultural memory and staving off cultural obsolescence, both the prison and the camp, for their control and disposal of human lives, could be deemed to be geopolitical sites whose boundaries in relation to life and non-life are blurred. This is reflected in the films' aesthetics. The compilation of documentary footage and archive materials, and audio-visual montage, contribute to calling into question the films' narratives, whose internal boundaries contain non-fictional and expressively non-linear spatio-temporal dimensions. These 'aesthetic fields', and the topographical jurisdictions of the camps and the prison may initiate a criticism of forms of 'law-preserving' and 'law-making' violence which have considered human life as 'bare' – hence, its subjection to all forms of abuse being deemed natural. Consequently 'bare life' could be treated as a (disposable) commodity, the 'sacred life' potentially loses the human right to dignity, a condition maintained by its existing in a liminal temporality and topography. This condition also pertains to the enforcers of justice whose life is in a liminal state, between humanity and bestiality, a terrain

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<sup>537</sup> Agamben, 1998, p. 12.

where the difference between *zoē* and *bios* is unclear – and the reason why the term ‘life’ has semantically lost this distinction. From the perspective of State sovereign power, the bare life of the citizen exists in a state of exception, as both included and excluded in relation to governmental organizational power.

Although also criticised by Grifi, the outtakes and screen tests of Monica Vitti from *Red Desert* where Antonioni attempted to represent anomie, as he saw bourgeois existence disconnected from ‘real’ life, may in fact express ‘bare life’ itself, whereby emotion has merely become a performative dimension of human existence. This found footage lays bare the inability to engage with real emotions, as ‘bare life’ consists in a de-subjectivised human ‘I’, and the eye of the camera. For this reason, this part of *The eye is...* is especially generative of meaning when considered in interaction with the other audio-visual parts of the film.

Another relevant contribution of Agamben’s theory of ‘bare life’, and biopolitics in *Homo Sacer* is that it evokes the idea of the impossibility of saying the ‘unsayable’, especially the experience of ‘bare life’ in the camp. For this reason, we can also reflect on the historical value of the archive and its function in relation to testimony – to what extent it can be considered a reliable source, and personal space, of evidence. This topic is also relevant to raising the question of the subject’s ability, in a de-subjectivised position, to communicate, or even only convey, memory. Despite the epitaphs about and monuments to Fascist violence and imperialist war in *Indulgenza Plenaria*, and the archive being regarded as testimony to violence in all of the films in this Chapter, as Agamben asked in his *Remnants of Auschwitz*: ‘what does it mean to

be subject to de-subjectification? How can a subject give an account of its own ruin?’.<sup>538</sup>

Considering the significance of the archive for experimental films which have wanted to address the problem of a cultural legacy of violence, I find the linguistic function of enunciation – an event of language – especially in relation to subjectivisation, particularly relevant. Drawing on the linguist Emile Benveniste, Agamben writes about the semantics of discourse in order to connect the archive to enunciation, with this taking the place of text.<sup>539</sup> Agamben adds that enunciation concerns the pure fact that it is spoken in discourse, the event of language as such, which is by definition ephemeral. Agamben refers to Foucault’s *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) to emphasise the study of enunciation, of ‘statements taking place’.<sup>540</sup> Also relevant to the function of the archive as a source of valid and reliable testimony in found footage films is Agamben raising the question: ‘how can something like a subject, an “I”, or a consciousness correspond to statements, to the pure taking place of language?’.<sup>541</sup>

From this perspective, as the films of this Chapter have exemplified, the enunciation of the archive demonstrates an inability to communicate precise memory and experience, due to the de-subjectivised subject (whose subjectivised status has been forcefully removed) and the archive’s historical *a priori* condition. Yet, the ‘taking place’ of its text – enunciation – has reactivated through montage and compilation the dead object of violence buried in history. Discrete parts of the film, as intertextual references to history, comment on each other, often acting as a

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<sup>538</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz. The Witness and the Archive. Homo Sacer III*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999), p. 143. Originally published in 1998.

<sup>539</sup> Agamben, 1999, p. 138.

<sup>540</sup> Foucault wrote: ‘the statement is not therefore a structure ...; it is a function of existence’, and Agamben argues that ‘enunciation is [...] pure existence, the fact that a certain being – language – takes place.’ Agamben, 1999, p. 139.

<sup>541</sup> Agamben, 1999, 140.

counterpoint, in order to open up a dialogue in order to seek out authentic experiences of the camp, or the prison, or of war itself, which entails approaching life as such; survival. By drawing on Foucault, Agamben wonders:

What happens in the living individual when he occupies the ‘vacant place’ of the subject, when he enters into a process of enunciation and discovers that ‘our reason is the difference of discourses, our history the difference of times, ourselves the difference of masks?’<sup>542</sup>

In this sense, the filmmakers considered here have inhabited the archive not only as a site of enunciation, but also, as a place of incompleteness. Thus, I maintain that the archive must be deemed a site that manifests gaps and difference.<sup>543</sup> In its foretelling or prophetic capacity, devoted to warding off the repetition of similar atrocities in the future, the archive could be seen as founded on the predicate of a ‘future perfect’ paradigm (for example, ‘it will have done so’), on the discourse of archive as the enunciation of its materials, which posits the taking place of other texts. Thus, the archive as testimony could be considered an assemblage of dis-located, already-made constructs linked by gaps; the archive as ‘the *corpus* that unites the set of what has been said, the things actually uttered or written’.<sup>544</sup> Yet, its caesurae foreclose proliferation, hence *physis*; the archive is thus semantically poised in the future perfect tense.

For Agamben, the archive as testimony corresponds to the plane of enunciation, ‘the fragment of memory that is always forgotten in the act of saying “I”’.<sup>545</sup> In relation to the archive, ‘testimony’ reveals the subject as stripped of all substance, the ‘subject is a nonexistence’, and sited in the empty place of the subject, whose

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<sup>542</sup> As cited by Agamben, 1999, p. 142.

<sup>543</sup> ‘Foucault gives the name “archive” to the positive dimension that corresponds to the place of enunciation, “the general system of the formation and transformation of statements.’ Agamben, 1999, p. 143.

<sup>544</sup> Agamben, 1999, p. 144.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid.

‘enunciation marks a threshold between inside and an outside, its taking place as pure exteriority.’<sup>546</sup> The strength of testimony may lie in its preserving a relationship between the possibility of speech, in its taking place (enunciation) and the impossibility of speech, defined by de-subjectivisation, and its incapacity to have language (the historical remnant as the ‘dead object’).

In their aggregation of a series of testimonies, both of personal and collective memories, aimed at addressing violence, the filmmakers explored in this Chapter attempted to generate a critical attitude towards biopolitical powers in “making survival”: ‘the decisive activity of biopower in our time consists in the production not of life or death, but rather of a mutable and virtually infinite survival’.<sup>547</sup>

Arguably, re-purposing archive materials constitutes an attempt to endow with speech the experience of ‘bare life’. The fractured narratives that techniques such as compilation and montage of audio-visual archive material generate represent shattered and scattered memories, and the lack of coherent authorial accounts of events surrounding violence against mankind. These films engage with an honest and raw directness with the unsayability of those historical events, with the incomplete testimony of the archive marked by the blurred distinction between human and non-human life. As Agamben writes: ‘Biopower’s supreme ambition is to produce, in a human body, the absolute separation of the living being and the speaking being, *zoē* and *bios*, the inhuman and the human – survival’.<sup>548</sup> By engaging with forms of violence through archive materials, it could be argued that these filmmakers performed a critique of biopower.

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<sup>546</sup> Agamben, 1999, pp. 140-1.

<sup>547</sup> Agamben, 1999, p. 155.

<sup>548</sup> Agamben, 1999, p. 156.

As redeployed in the films analysed in this Chapter, the archive is presented as incomplete, a source of uncertainty; yet, it manifests possible narratives founded on human life deemed ‘bare’. The possible meanings it generates rely on the hesitation between the past and the future perfect tense, for historical images are subjected to a ‘final history, an eschatological history in which something must be completed, judged’.<sup>549</sup> Narrative gaps within decontextualized footage and archive materials provide the de-subjectivised space of the subject, the lacuna of the unsayability of historical events. As Rascaroli reminds us, documents from Auschwitz represent traces of the incommensurability of the un-imaginable Holocaust, with which, perhaps, only the interstitial gap that montage generates can be associated – the site of the unthought, the unthinkable.<sup>550</sup> She writes:

I would rather argue that filmmakers who have chosen the essay form have done so for its capacity to summon the unthought – seen as an incommensurability that brings about a new image of thought. The interstitial thinking mobilized by the essay film is “a radical calling into question of the image” [Deleuze], which is necessitated by the crisis of rationality and of representation instigated by the Holocaust; it is also a way of moving thought beyond the impasse of the Holocaust’s unthinkable.<sup>551</sup>

The question then arises as to how these images attempting to represent the unthinkable can be subjected to a (Benjaminian) ‘Messianic history’: how can humankind be exposed to a ‘history of salvation’ and a ‘final history’? Through the incommensurability of the archive as a testimony of violence, especially in view of the performativity of emotions in a world inhabited by spiritual ennui, and partly neglectful of the past, one may realise that by summoning the ‘unthought’ what may be found, however ineffable, are perceptions of cautionary testimonies.

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<sup>549</sup> Agamben, 2002, pp. 313-319 (p. 314).

<sup>550</sup> Rascaroli, 2017, p. 52.

<sup>551</sup> Rascaroli, 2017, pp. 51-52. Rascaroli draws on Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1989), p. 174.

**Figures: 35-58**

**Mario Schifano, *Vietnam* (1967)**



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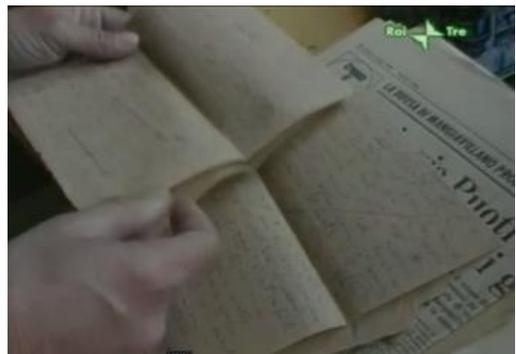


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**Alberto Grifi: *L'occhio è per così dire l'evoluzione biologica di una lacrima* (*The eye is, so to speak, the biological evolution of a tear*, 35mm) and *Autoritratto Auschwitz* (*Self-Portrait Auschwitz*, 16mm) (1965-68/2007, 35', colour)**



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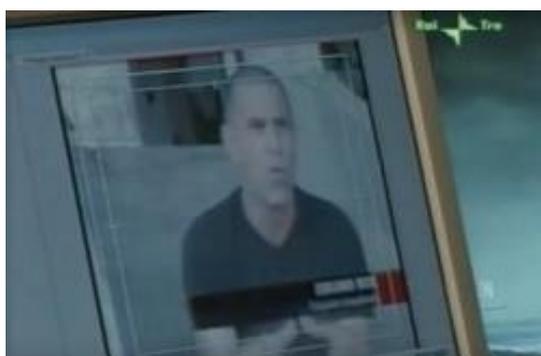
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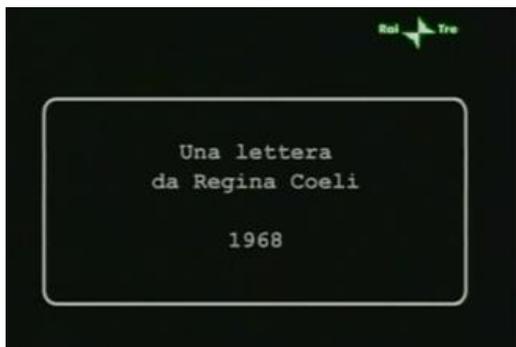
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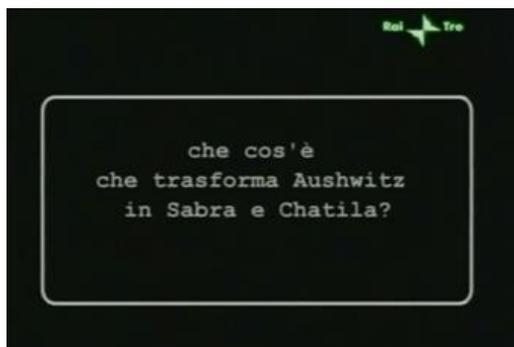
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## **Conclusion**

This research has contextualised the Italian film avant-gardes of the 1960s in relation to the conceptual significance of archival artefacts in experimental films that have been collected by the Cineteca Nazionale (the national archive) of the 'Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia' in Rome (the Centre of Experimental Cinematography). My study has uncovered a shared methodology, the consistent integration into these films of the archive as a cultural object in transition, and explored this practice in depth, in light of the filmmakers' critical aesthetics. This epistemological approach, I suggest, posits a new direction of research into the formal possibilities of a 'third avant-garde'.

The close analysis of a range of little-studied artists' films, positioned at the forefront of formal innovation, has revealed essayistic modes of filmmaking, repurposing archive materials and formats in order to engender rumination on the past and cultural memory, and opening up spaces for creativity and innovation in filmic language. My study has clarified how these avant-garde films had started to move away from an exclusively modernist approach to the specificity of film, and increasingly offered reflections on aesthetic attitudes towards the archive. Thus, it has focused interest on the heterogeneous, polymorphous nature of the archive, the plurality of its contexts, and developed a philosophical enquiry into what I have termed the 'ontologies of the archive'. This is also underpinned by the artists' exploration of the possibilities invoked by moving image works, both historical and contemporary. It has proposed a theoretical framework concerning a new critical dialectical mode with the archive in experimental film, which has been primarily drawn from Adorno's essay 'the idea of natural-history' and Eco's essay 'Form as social commitment'.

I have invoked the filmmakers' aesthetic attitude towards the archive as a repository of both the everyday and the art objects of the past. Their sensibility for the inclusion of cultural memory has foregrounded the 'natural-history of the archive', that is to say, the transitive nature of archival histories and structures. This approach, investigating 'ontologies of the archive', has sought to exemplify ways of thinking about the 'meaning of being' through the archive.

I have found that the transformative and innovative ambition of these filmmakers consisted in aiming to jolt their audiences out of a passive consumption of mass culture, and thus dispel post-war Italy's cultural oblivion. In order to offer a constructive critical methodology when recognizing and combatting, alienation, these films formulated self-reflexive modes of engagement, adopted historic literary texts, and re-staged film narratives, all demonstrating how their aesthetic strategies relied on the archive. This is substantially the reason why Eco's essay 'Form as social commitment' can be deemed so pertinent.

They provide useful opportunities to complement existing historiographic perspectives and analyses of the aesthetics of the essay film. Max Bense wrote 'he writes essayistically who writes while experimenting [...] under the conditions established in the course of writing.'<sup>552</sup> This reminds us of Adorno's 'the idea of natural-history', the 'historical dynamic' of 'real being', which suggests that the practice of historicising the cultural object in transition may forestall cultural oblivion. From an avant-garde perspective, this study thus proposes that both Bense's article, originally published in 1947, and Adorno's 'The Essay as Form', originally published in 1958, have helped me theorize aesthetic approaches and formal paradigms related

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<sup>552</sup> I cited Max Bense in Chapter 1, footnote 92. Bense, in Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', 1984, pp. 151-171 (p. 164).

to archive materials and formats, which I propose as constituting the ‘essay film turn’ in the Italian film avant-gardes.

This paradigmatic shift is not only historically relevant, connected to the legacies of the historic avant-gardes; it also reveals a notable semantic connection between the term ‘essay’ and ‘experimenting’. The French verb ‘essayer’, from the Latin *exagium*, meaning ‘weight, test, trial’, has been situated parallel to ‘trying’. For Bacigalupo, the notion of ‘trying’, which he drew from T.S. Eliot’s emphasis on ‘trying to use new words’ in the *Four Quartets*, was central to experimental filmmaking. Also for experimental filmmaker Guido Lombardi ‘trying’ entailed ‘transformation’, and connected experimental techniques to practice. Both the study of experimental film and the filmmakers’ intent to provide ways of thinking about life in its immediate unfolding through the archive have conjured the union of ‘real being’ and history. Thus, the ruminative aspect of thinking through film, an experimental attitude which is analogous to the essayistic mode affording the possibility of exploring ontological questions such as ‘the meaning of being’ of the archive with its transitive qualities.

My research suggests that the experimental filmmaker can be like an archivist, taking a historian’s or collector’s approach to historical artefacts. This concept is drawn from Benjamin’s critical dialectic to explain the experimental filmmaker’s dislocation of historical elements, interwoven with samples from the mass media and popular culture, in order to create a range of innovative cinematic forms, such as: ‘aesthetic ruining’, ‘cine-portraiture’, ‘interruption aesthetics’, ‘a cinema of gesture’, and in the Italian context, a ‘film povero’, and ‘experimental *cinegiornali*’.

From naturalistic representations of the world, to conceptual narratives in order to recreate archives of the future (imagined histories, and dreams of positive outcomes); historic newsreel formats were closer to the realistic register of the documentary, and

to a neorealist humanist sensibility than to allegorical representations. Yet, these avant-garde *cinegiornali* were also cast in the speculative and reflective mode of the essay form. They re-deployed the historic formats of cine-newsreels in order to change these traditional texts from within, and address social alienation and aporia.

During the 1960s, a new experimental strand of films connected archive materials to the open boundaries of the arts and their spatial contexts, influenced by the distant spirit of Happenings and Fluxus. The art gallery and the artist's studio space welcomed these new avant-garde films, bound-up with sculpture and the spherical artefact made of recycled newspapers; it encountered performance art. The polymorphous aspect of the newspaper archive involved film as one component of the arts, and dispelled the importance of the modernist sculpture as an object of contemplation; it manifested a shift towards the ephemeral nature of the arts and of the archive itself (thus gesturing towards digital art).

This study has posited the central conceptual significance of the archive as steeped in 'gesture and play', thus marking a shift towards a new sensibility in art. I have termed this form of engaged experimental practice *film povero* in order to foreground its epistemological basis in Arte Povera, its vocation for uniting the physical to the metaphysical, and the relational qualities and participatory practices that the multivocal nature of the archive invokes.

This thesis has also explored the idea that the language of experimental film could be a valid tool of scientific research, especially when re-purposing archival matter. Thus, I have examined how film's perceptual strategies were being deployed in Italy during the 1960s. Termed 'interruption aesthetics', 'cine-portraiture' and 'aesthetic ruining', these aesthetic devices encouraged the opening up of frames of reference of

self-reflexive films' structures, and foregrounded their audio-visual materialities engaging with the 'second nature' of the archive.

In contrast, the repurposing of found film footage, which revitalized the archive, could also demonstrate that cinema may offer no scientific tools for research and provide no certainty. In the type of experimental film that we have seen with *Verifica Incerta*, the cinematic imagery of its found film footage has been deemed illustrative of alienated life and aporia, hence resulting into the symptomatic language of a 'cinema of gesture', which thinks through the gaps of montage and manifests at once symptom and (potential) resolution. A 'cinema of gesture' re-casts the 'natural-history of the archive', through which it advocates the dispersal of the specificities of film narratives. This Chapter has consolidated a neuro-cognitive approach to the archival nature of the essay film, through which it has been possible to analyse expressions of a crisis in human communication and locomotor skills, as also evinced by the perceptual strategies adopted in films discussed in the previous Chapters.

A de-subjectivised archive has been examined as the core component of artists' experimental films which addressed violence, and where the empirical property of the archive, providing documentary evidence, could be called into question as testimony. When harking back to the Holocaust, for example, and other historical episodes of violence, the testimony of the empirical archive could be deemed de-subjectivised. Centred on the notion of 'bare life', as proposed by Agamben, the study of these films has manifested the 'messianic' character of the archive. Their intricate and layered audio-visual fabric also strongly resonates with Adorno's 'idea of natural-history', interweaving heterogeneous archival audio-visual references (accounts of personal experiences of both the camp and the prison), and forming the observational and speculative mode of the essay film. Particularly relevant is what Rascaroli writes

about archival testimonies in relation to the incommensurability of the Holocaust. The gaps of montage provide spaces for reflection, which generate the idea of the 'unthought' of montage in the essay film.

Finally, the notion of 'ontologies of the archive' has sought to offer a new theoretical framework for the study of avant-garde and experimental film, founded on a critical aesthetics of the natural-history of the archive.

## **Appendix A: The London Underground Film Festival (1970)<sup>553</sup>**

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<sup>553</sup> This document was kindly provided by the British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection, London.

Monday September 14th.

- 10.30am. Arrival and registration of film-makers and visitors
- 2.00pm Sydney Film-makers' Co-op programme (Australia). films by David Perry, Albie Thoms\*, Aggy Read, Garry Shnead, Mike Glasheen and others - including: BOOBS A LOT, THE ABSOLUTE ELSEWHERE (Read); DAVID PERRY (Thoms); ALBUM, MAD MESH (4½ mins), SKETCH ON ABIGAIL'S BELLY (2½mins) (Perry); THE DAVID COLES FILM (7mins) (David Coles); BETTER TO REIGN IN HELL (Noyce); LIVE BETWEEN EVIL (feature) - (Shnead)
- 3.30pm Films by Klaus Wyborny (Germany): THE ADVENTUROUS BUT LUCKLESS LIFE OF WILLIAM PARMAGINO (23mins) and PERCY MCPHEE - AGENT OF HORROR (15mins)
- 4.00pm Films by Gregory Markopoulos (New York and Zurich) including: MING GREEN (9mins), THROUGH A LENS BRIGHTLY, MARK TURBYFILL (5mins), BLISS (6mins), GAMMELION (60mins) - a P. A. P. presentation.
- 6.15pm Films by George Kuchar (New York) including: PAGAN RHAPSODY and ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF THE BLESSED
- 8.30pm Hamburg Film-makers' Co-op programme (Germany) - films by Alfred Hifsberg\* Jochem Hamann\*, Wlm Wenders, Matthias Weiss and others - including: BLUE VELVET (Weiss), SILVER CITY (Wenders), Film No 1 (Hamann).
- 10.30pm Feature film by David Larcher\* (England) MARE'S TAIL (2½ hours).

Tuesday Sept. 15th

- 10.30am Pop Film Programme (International) - films include:  
UNDER MY THUMB (Rolling Stones) - Peter Ungerleider\* (Amsterdam/New York), P. 3. Verner Schretzmeier (Stuttgart), GETTING IT STRAIGHT IN NOTTING HILL GATE - Eyeball Films, London. OOBIELAND No's 1 & 2 - Walter Ungerer (New York).
- 12.00noon Helmuth Costard\* (Hamburg) - films on Super-8mm - Multiscreen.
- 2.00pm New York film collection of Piero Heliczer\* (U. S. A.) including: COSMIC SUTRA (Kenny Schneider), YOGHURT SUBCULTURE (Patilee Chenis), CENTRAL PARK THOUGHTS (Gerard Malanga), BRIDGES GO ROUND (Shirley Clarke), COUCH (Andy Warhol), SCOTCH TAPE (Jack Smith), JACK SMITH (Dexter Kelly), and the films of Piero Heliczer - THE STONE AGE, JOAN OF ARC etc....
- 4.00pm Films from the ABCinema group (Denmark) including: EFTERSOGNINGEN (SEARCH) (collective) 35mm, FRAENDELOS (FRIENDLESS) (Leth, John, Kirkeby, Lundbye, Dewaal, Norgard Jensen.) MOTION PICTURE (John & Leth).
- 6.15pm Feature film by Steve Dwoskin\* (England): TIMES FOR (premiere)
- 8.30pm Films from the Italian Co-ops:- films by Guido Lombardi, Pia Epreman, Gianfranco Barucello,\* including: A, B, C, D, (Lombardi), MEDEA (Epreman), and new films by Barucello.
- 10.30 pm/ over.....

Wednesday Sept 16th

- 10.30am Films by Sheldon Rochlin\* (New York)  
VALI (1966) and DOPE (1968)
- 12.00 noon: 2-hour feature by Arakawa (U. S. A.) (unconfirmed. ....)
- 2.00pm Films from Los Angeles - films by Chick Strand, Judith Reidel, William Moritz, Alvin Tokunow, and John Stehura, including:  
ANGEL BLUE SWEET WINGS, ANSELMO, WATERFALL, KULU SE MAMA. (Strand),  
E. F. (Reidel), GERTRUDE STEIN FILM (Moritz), TOMO (Tokunow), CYBERNETIC 5.3  
(Stehura).....
- 3.30pm Films from the New Arts Lab/London Film-Makers'Co-op (England); films by Mike Leggett\*, Fred Drummond\*, Malcolm LeGrice\*, Graeme Ewens\*, including:  
SHEET (Leggett), FEMME, "69 30 SPACE FRAME"(Ewens) HOW TO SCREW THE C. I. A. series  
(LeGrice), SHOWER, LOOP, VIDEOMIX, GLOBESTROBE (Drummond).
- 6.15pm Two Austrian Film-Makers: Peter Kubelka\* and Kurt Kren\*  
This programme will include the complete works of Peter Kubelka and many of the works  
of Kurt Kren, including:  
MOSAİK IM VERTRAUEN, ADEBAR, SCHWECHATER, ARNULF RAINER, UNSERE AFRIKAREIS  
(Kubelka), 20, SEPTEMBER, GRUN-ROT, VENECIA KAPUTT, SCHATZI, HAPPY END,  
UNDERGROUND EXPLOSION, WESTERN, etc (Kren). Kurt Kren is a P. A. P. film-maker.
- 8.30pm Films from the Dutch film-Makers'Co-op and Films from Belgium  
Including films by Mattin Seip\*, Willum Fillum\*, Franz Zwartjes\*, Jos Schoffelen\*, Piet  
Verdonk, Wim Van der Lindon, (Holland) Roland Lethem, Jean-Paul Vroom, Jean Mari  
Buchet, Guy Corps (Belgium)
- 10.30pm Spanish Film Programme. Films by Roc Villas, Antonio Padros, and J. A. Sistiago  
including:  
ERE ERERA BALEIBU ICIK SUBUA ARUAREN (Sistiago) PIM, PAM, PUM. ICE CREAM  
(Padros) AUTORETRAT (Villas)

Thursday September 17th

- 10.30am ABCinema - Super 8 programme. Films for 6-8 Super-8 projectors including:  
LASST HUNDERT BLUMEN BLUHEN (MAO)
- 12.00noon Cambridge 8mm programme (England). films by Tony Raynes\*, Robert Short\*, Andrew  
Smyth\*, Tim Rainer, Daphne Clarke including:  
HELLHOUND ON MY TRAIL (Raynes), BARBAREVEUSE (Short)
- 2.00 pm Oxford and London Film-makers' Co-ops 8mm programme: Films by Tim Harding\*,  
Tim Cawkwell\*, Philip Drummond\*, (Oxford), Mike Dunford\*, Al Deval\*, Barbara Schwartz\*  
David Curtis\* (London).
- 4.00 pm S. L. O. N. films: films from the French and Belgian political film-making collectives  
including:  
A BIENTOT J'ESPERE, CLASSE DE LUTTE, NEW SOCIETY films, 11th OF JUNE.
- 6.15 pm/ over.....

8.30pm Three San Francisco Film-Makers: Bruce Baillie\* (Founder of the Canyon Film-Maker Co-operative), Will Hindle, and Bruce Conner, including:  
ALL MY LIFE, VALENTIN DE LAS SIERRAS, QUIXOTE. (Baillie). BILLABONG, CHINESE FIRE DRILL (Hindle) REPORT, LIBERTY CROWN, THE WHITE ROSE, BREAKAWAY (Conner)

10.30 pm Expanded Cinema Event by Jeff Keen\* (England) based on the RAYDAY Film Cycle

11.30 pm approx. Expanded Cinema Event by Carolee Schneemann\* (New York and London)

Friday September 18th

10.30am Australian film programme - films by Arthur and Corinne Cantrill and Albie Thoms\*  
Including:  
EIKON, BOUDI (Cantrill), MARINETTI (Thoms)

12.00noon The films of Ernst Schmidt\* (Austria) including:  
DENKAKT, JA/NEIN, WEISS, SCHNIPPSCHNAPP, DOPPELPROJEKTION, FILMKRITIK, ODERPRADIKAT, WERTLOS, DAVID & ZORRO.....

2.00 pm New York Programme: films by Walter Gutman and Sandy Daley\*  
THE GRAPEDEALER'S DAUGHTER (Gutman) ROBERT HAVING HIS NIPPLE PIERCED (Daley)

4.00 pm New York Programme continued - Hollis Frampton -  
ZORN'S LEMMA, SURFACE TENSION, ARTIFICIAL LIGHT.

6.15 pm International Programme from P. A. P. - films by Marc Adrian (Vienna), Dieter Meier\* (Zurich), Klaus Schoenherr\* (Zurich), Vlado Kristl (Munich) including:  
BLACK MOVIE (Adrian) KOPF/SELF, AAAA (Meier) THALERS, MEIERS, SADKOWSKS LIFE IN THE EVENING. GEDANKEN BIEM BEFUHLEN EINER MADCHENHAUT. PLAY 4/5/6 (Schoenherr) FILM ODER MACHT. 100 BLATT SCHREIBBOCK. (Kristl)

8.30 pm P. A. P. programme continued - films by Stan Brakhage and Paul Sharits\* (USA)  
SCENES FROM UNDER CHILDHOOD Part 1 (Brakhage). WORD MOVIE, PIECE MANDALA/END WAR. N. O. T. H. I. N. G. T. O. U. C. H. I. N. G. (Sharits)

10.00 pm Unscheduled

11.00 pm German Film Programme - films by Ed and Irm Sommer (Stuttgart), Adolf Winkelmann (Kassel), Rainer Boldt (Berlin) Including -  
AMICOTHEK. RHYTHMUS 1. NITSCH/7 Abreaktonsspiel (Sommer) "ADOLF WINKELMANN KASSEL 9. 12. 67. 11. 54h" HEINRICH VIEL (Winkelmann) THE MASTER COPY (Boldt)

12.20 pm approx All night programme: film by Antonio DeBernardi\* (Turin, Italy)  
LE OPERE E I GIORNI (DAYS AND WORKS) - this film will last at least until dawn, and perhaps till.....

Saturday September 19th

10.30 am The films of Robert Nelson (San Francisco USA) including:  
1/2-OPEN AND LUMPY. HOT LEATHERETTE. WAR IS HELL. THE GREAT BLONDINO. BLUE SHUT and others

12.00 noon / over.....

- 2.00 pm. Films from the Italian Film-Makers Co-op - films by Silvio Loffredo, Massimo Bacchiagalupo\* and others including COURT BOUILLON (Loffredo) MIGRATIONS (Bacchiagalupo).
- 4.00 pm New York Film-Makers: Wheeler Dixon and Tom Chomont\* films include: OPHELIA AND THE CAT LADY, OBLIVION, A PERSIAN RUG, LOVE OBJECTS (Chomont)
- 6.15 pm English Film-Makers Programme: films by Peter Gidal\* Simon Hartog\* Robert Leach, Kati Neiser\* and others, including: LIFE AND DEATH OF A WIZARD (Leach) and new films by Peter Gidal
- 8.30 pm Films from XScreen Cologne - films by William and Birgit Hein\* and Hans Peter Kochenrath including: WORK IN PROGRESS, MANSION BIGGS AND HEIN (Hein), DISSONANT LINES OF HISTORY (Kochenrath)
- 11.00 pm Lithuanian Underground - Jonas Mekas\*  
European premiere of NOTES DIARIES AND SKETCHES (3 hrs, 5 mins)

Sunday September 20th

- 2.00 pm Films from the Hamburg Film-Makers Co-op - films by Verner Nekes, Dore O and Werner Schroter: Kalek (Nekes) LAWALE (O) Neurasia (Schroter)
- 4.00pm. Films from New York (Theatre of the Ridiculous) Films by Bill Vehr and Mobius. BROTHEL. footage from the film of MARILYN MONROE'S LIFE (Vehr) THE MOKE EATER (Mobius)
- 6.15 pm Films from the Vienna school of Direct Art: Otto Muehl\* including: FUNEBRE. ZOCK EXERCISES. AMORE. SODOMA.
- 8.30 pm JOHN PLAYER FORUM OF UNDERGROUND FILM-MAKERS

An International forum of Underground film-makers: among those taking part will be: David Perry, Albie Thoms, Alfred Hilsberg, Jochen Hamann, David Larcher, Peter Ungerleider, Helmuth Costard, Piero Heller, Patilee Chenis, Ole John, Jens Bukh, Steve Dwoskin, Gianfranco Barucello, Peter Welbel, Valle Export, Hans Scheugl, Sheldon Rochlin, Mike Leggett, Fred Drummond, Malcolm LeGrice, Graeme Ewens, Peter Kubelka, Kurt Kren, Willum Fillum, Jos Schoffelen, Tony Raynes, Robert Short, Andrew Smyth, Tim Harding, Tim Harding, Tim Cawkwell, Phillip Drummond, Mike Dunford, Al Deval, Barbara Schwartz, David Curtis, Jeff Keen, Carolee Schneemann, Ernst Schmidt, Dieter Meier, Klaus Schoenherr, Paul Sharits, Antonio DeBernardi, Warren Sonbert, Silvio Loffredo, Massimo Bacchiagalupo, Tom Chomont, Peter Gidal, Simon Hartog, Robert Leach, Kati Neiser, William and Birgit Hein, Jonas Mekas, Verner Nekes, Dore O, Otto Muehl, (?) and representatives of many other independent film-makers organisations.....

\* denotes that the film-maker will be there in person

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