



# EARLY FILM THEORIES IN ITALY 1896-1922

EDITED BY FRANCESCO CASETTI  
WITH SILVIO ALOVISIO AND LUCA MAZZEI



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## Early Film Theories in Italy, 1896–1922

# Film Theory in Media History

*Film Theory in Media History* explores the epistemological and theoretical foundations of the study of film through texts by classical authors as well as anthologies and monographs on key issues and developments in film theory.

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# The Throb of the Cinematograph

*Francesco Casetti*

There is one nuisance, however, that does not pass away. Do you hear it? A hornet that is always buzzing, forbidding, grim, surly, diffused, and never stops. What is it? The hum of the telegraph poles? The endless scream of the trolley along the overhead wire of the electric trams? The urgent throb of all those countless machines, near and far? That of the engine of the motor-car? Of the cinematograph?  
– Luigi Pirandello, *Shoot!*

## ‘Theories’ before Theory

This book assembles 60 texts on cinema that appeared in Italy between 1896 and 1922, most of which are printed here in English translation for the first time.<sup>1</sup> The texts are quite varied in nature: editorials from daily newspapers; essays from illustrated magazines; commentaries in film journals; medical and scientific reports; and fictional stories. The attitudes expressed within them are likewise quite varied: some pieces interrogate cinema from the standpoint of its novelty; others express perplexity, seeing it as a threat to established values; others still are descriptions and reflections from critics, screenwriters, and directors interested in understanding how cinema functions or should function. Taken as a whole, this ensemble of texts helps us to grasp the discourse around cinema that was emerging in the first two decades of the twentieth century. We might also say that it constitutes the core of Italian ‘film theory’ between the late 1890s and the early 1920s, provided that we clarify precisely what we mean by this term.

Early ‘theories’ do not possess those characteristics that the great reflections on film from the mid-1920s onward have made us accustomed to—whether in Italy or in the rest of the world. For example, they do not emerge from systematic thought carried out in books and essays. Instead, they are usually sporadic interventions, related to current events or cultural polemics, and are printed in daily newspapers, promotional journals, illustrated papers, and works of fiction. Only in the late 1910s did the success of sophisticated film magazines provide some sort of point of convergence; and only at the very beginning of the 1920s was there an attempt at a more organized study, such as Sebastiano Arturo Luciani’s *Verso una nuova arte*

(*Towards a New Art*), published in 1921. Furthermore, the authors are not individuals whose research deals entirely or even predominantly with cinema; rather, they are journalists, intellectuals, or writers on a wide variety of subjects, for whom cinema is only one of many interests.<sup>2</sup> Again, only at the end of the 1910s do we see the by-lines of Sebastiano Arturo Luciani, Lucio d'Ambra, and Emanuele Toddi recur. At the same time, there is not a 'discipline' as a frame of reference that clearly outlines how and why cinema should be examined; instead, the contributions respond to a range of different motivations, from simple curiosity about a recent invention to observations of the effects that films have upon social life. Finally, such discursive production seldom calls itself theory; when it does, it is with reticence. This is the case with Luciani, who, in a text written in 1919, '*Lo scenario cinematografico*' ('The Cinematographic Script'), although he assigns theoretical status to his ruminations, acknowledges that they can raise suspicion, and tries to dissolve the distrust by practically applying his ideas.<sup>3</sup> The word theory would become relatively common only in the first half of the 1920s, especially in France, Germany, and the US, as a framework in the broader attempt to define how cinema works at different levels.<sup>4</sup>

Nonetheless, if it is true that early 'theories' (in quotation marks) are not the same as classical theory (without quotation marks), it is also true that they respond to a need that classical theory would continue to take into account, even when its overt goal was to describe the basic laws of the medium. They share the need to provide an image of cinema that facilitates its social comprehension and acceptance. Indeed, the main concern of early 'theories' is precisely to offer a definition of a phenomenon that, at first sight, seems puzzling and even scandalous. How can one grasp an apparatus that seems to capture the fleeting moment and ensure the permanence of life? How can one justify a machine with a gaze that goes beyond human capacities? How can one adapt to something that glorifies ubiquity, simultaneity, speed, and details? And how can the enormous success of cinema be explained? The early 'theories', despite their sporadic character, quasi-anonymous writers, lack of a clear 'method', and hesitation toward self-designation, respond to the need for a practical and shared definition of a phenomenon that challenges our expectations and our habits. In this sense, early 'film theories' do not have the character of scientific theory; rather, they are similar to those personal *accounts* that we formulate to make sense of our daily actions. Described by ethnomethodology as a key component of our social lives,<sup>5</sup> accounts epitomize the ways members of a community signify, describe, or explain the properties of a specific social situation in order to clarify and share its meaning. Likewise, early

theories seek to make what at first might appear ambiguous and strange into something comprehensible and graspable: they show what cinema is and how we encounter it; what distinguishes it and how we can react to it; what it can offer us and why we must accept it. The result of all of this is a 'public image' of cinema that functions as both definition and legitimation.<sup>6</sup>

The status of early film 'theory' as an account—or even as a gloss—explains why it so often appears in disguise, as if it were something 'other' than a theory. Indeed, even if we limit ourselves to texts included in this anthology, 'theories' appear in the form of editorials, such as the ones signed by Giovanni Papini, Adolfo Orvieto, and Enrico Thovez in the dailies *La Stampa* (*The Press*) and *Corriere della Sera* (*Evening Courier*); or of cultural reports, such as Ricciotto Canudo's *Trionfo del cinematografo* ('Triumph of the Cinematograph'); or as political interventions such as those by Vittorio Emanuele Orlando and Antonio Gramsci; or as letters written to newspapers, such as the one by Giovan Battista Avellone, former General Prosecutor at the Appeals Court in Rome; or as pedagogical essays, such as Domenico Orano's *Il cinematografo e l'educazione* ('The Motion Pictures and Education'); or as scientific reports, such as those by experimental psychologist Mario Ponzo; or as clinical observations, such as those by the neurologist Giovanni d'Abundo; or finally as fiction, written by authors such as Guido Gozzano, Federigo Tozzi, and Aldo Borelli. And the variety of the texts is even wider still: 'theory' can surface in reviews, in interviews, and even in self-portraits written by professionals. There are also full-blown essays dedicated to cinema, especially near the end of the 1910s, by authors like Sebastiano Arturo Luciani and Goffredo Bellonci (included in this anthology), but this form would become dominant only midway through the 1920s. In the first two decades of the century, 'theory' is distributed across all the fields and divisions of social discourse: only this sort of presence allows for the true 'accountability' of cinema.

To this diversity of formats corresponds a variety of themes, not one of which is exclusive to a single discursive typology. Just to mention a few: cinema produces new forms of perception and reflection, as stressed by the fiction writer Pio Vanzani and the psychologist Mario Ponzo. It has a special ability to reflect new lifestyles that reconfigure both the structure of social relationships and the notion of subjectivity, as underscored by the philosopher Giovanni Papini and the neurologist Giuseppe d'Abundo. It opens up new aesthetic horizons, in which the value of art works depends not only on their intrinsic quality, but on their relationship to consumption, as highlighted by the art critic Enrico Thovez and the philosopher and pedagogue Francesco Orestano. It marks the advent of the new urban

masses as modern nations' social and historical protagonists, as stressed by columnist Angiolo Orvieto and commentator Giovanni Fossi. It generates social risks, but also offers great possibilities for the advancement of the masses, as suggested by Vittorio Emanuele Orlando (in a serious way) and Emilio Scaglione (in an ironic one). 'Theories' tried to parse the novelty of cinema both as a whole and in its more localized aspects through an extensive circulation of questions and remarks.

Attempts to define what cinema is often merge with an effort to detect what it will be, or can be, or must be. Hence the wide variety of perspectives from which cinema is approached: 'theories' address not only cinema's actuality, but also its possibilities, even its purported obligations. This is true in the obvious case of *La cinematografia futurista* ('The Futurist Cinematography'), a manifesto by the most relevant Italian avant-garde movement, which heralds a cinema that will never find its full realization (Marinetti and others 1916); but also of *Orizzonti del cinema avvenire* ('Horizons of Cinema to Come'), in which Giuseppe Fossa describes a cinema of the future that is amazingly akin to television or even Skype.<sup>7</sup> 'Theory' was often a 'promise' if not a 'dream' of cinema.<sup>8</sup>

Given the wide variety of formats, topics, and stances, no single text managed to dictate the terms of the debate. There are no key contributions functioning as paradigmatic or universal points of reference, as would be the case in the late 1920s with Sebastiano Arturo Luciani's *L'antiteatro* (*The Anti-Theatre*) or in the early 1930s with Alberto Consiglio's *Cinema. Arte e linguaggio* (*Cinema: Art and Language*).<sup>9</sup> Undoubtedly, certain texts gained widespread attention and resonance, and were paraphrased in subsequent contributions (often without proper acknowledgment, as occurred with Ricciotto Canudo's essay 'Triumph of the Cinematograph', published in late December 1908 in the Florentine newspaper *Il Nuovo Giornale* (*The New Daily*) and then republished, almost verbatim but under a pseudonym, in *La rivista fono-cinematografica* (*Phono-cinematographic Magazine*) in January and February 1909.<sup>10</sup> We do not, however, find a 'canon' in the proper sense of the word. Instead, we find a kind of muddled, crowded discourse, where different contributions emerge, side by side, even overlapping, in an apparently confused but effective dialogue with each other. For instance, within the timeframe of a few months, Giovanni Papini celebrated cinema's popularity in a widespread daily, while Gualtiero Ildebrando Fabbri described and fictionalized film audiences in a book produced as a gift for the most assiduous spectators of a cinema in Milan. At the same time, Angiolo Orvieto reported in the daily *Corriere della Sera* on the differences between cinema and theatre, while in the competing daily, *La Stampa*,

Enrico Thovez commented on cinema's affinity with contemporary life; Ricciotto Canudo, in correspondence from Paris, highlighted cinema's distinct aesthetic traits, while Mario Ponzio, in a scientific report, focused on the physiology of film reception. This amounts to an impressive circuit of discussion, without a clear and singular centre; Michel Foucault would call it a 'discursive formation'.<sup>11</sup> It is within this circuit that the image of cinema takes shape: an image whose contours are continually sharpened and which becomes the public portrait of the new invention.

Beginning midway through the 1920s in Italy and in many other countries, the theory of cinema would begin to arrange and order this rather chaotic circuit of discourses. More precise methodologies would emerge, key themes would become more widely shared, and the sketch of a canon would take shape. The need to define cinema in a practical way, however, would continue, albeit in connection with more specific contexts. What is the cinema as an art? As a national industry? As a language? Even within a more clearly-developed framework, the need for an 'account' would not completely disappear. This need fully re-emerged in recent years, at which point the convergence between different media obligated cinema to radically transform itself. Cinema's new forms of existence reactivated the need to offer immediate and shared definitions of the phenomenon, and theory rediscovered, at least in part, the modality of 'theory'.<sup>12</sup>

## A Tentative Periodization

Although the panorama of early 'theories' in Italy may appear varied and complex, one may nonetheless attempt to carry out a periodization of its stages.<sup>13</sup>

Reflection on cinema began just before the new invention's arrival, but real debate would only take shape midway through the first decade of the twentieth century, in conjunction with the opening of the first movie theatres, and in accordance with what was happening in much of the rest of Europe. 1907 is a crucial year: in addition to the interventions by Giovanni Papini and Angiolo Orvieto contained in this anthology, which begin by dealing, not coincidentally, with the increasing number of cinemas in cities and towns, Edmondo de Amicis wrote a short story associating film with the increased relevance of daydreaming, and Gualtiero Fabbri wrote the first Italian novel about cinema, which described the formation of a new public.<sup>14</sup> 1908 is equally dense, with the appearance of texts by Enrico Thovez and Ricciotto Canudo that advance cinema as an exemplary object of modernity.



The same year brings us three notable texts not included in this anthology, namely a brief essay by Pietro Tonini on the social influence of cinema, a text by Tullio Panteo on the personal experience of the spectator, and a discussion between Ettore Janni and Gabriele d'Annunzio, at the time the most popular Italian writer.<sup>15</sup>

The venues where these texts appear, the daily newspapers and the nascent magazines on cinema, deserve some attention. In the daily newspapers we find, between the end of the nineteenth century and the onset of the twentieth century, a growing interest in everything related to modernity, and urban modernity in particular. This period also sees the invention of the 'third page', which is devoted to cultural debates and helps Italian intellectuals, in general rather conservative, to familiarize themselves with and weigh in on various aspects of contemporary culture.<sup>16</sup> Finally, daily newspapers host columns (like those of Canudo in *Il Nuovo Giornale*, entitled '*Lettere di vita*' ('Life's Letters') and '*Lettere di arte*' ('Art's Letters'), which seek to keep the reader abreast of emerging phenomena. These developments explain why *La Stampa*, *Corriere della Sera*, *Il Nuovo Giornale*, and *La Tribuna* (*The Tribune*) begin to devote attention to the cinema. There even is a request that more space be devoted to it.<sup>17</sup> In any case, it is in newspaper pages that the presence of cinema in public discussion begins to be substantial.

In magazines, cinema is first placed alongside other forms of entertainment or other new phenomena.<sup>18</sup> The titles of several publications founded in 1907 are indicative: in Milan, *La Rivista fono-cinematografica e degli automatici, istrumenti penumatici ed affini* (*Review of Phonographs, Cinema, Automatic Technology, Pneumatic Instruments and the Like*), in Naples *Il Cinematografo. Giornale mondano illustrato di fotografia-elettricità-proiezioni luminose-macchine parlanti-musica e caffè concerti* (*The Cinematograph: Illustrated and Fashionable Journal of Photography-Electricity-Luminous Projections-Talking Machines-Music and Music Halls*) and *La Lanterna* (*The Lantern*). *Piccolo corriere politico-artistico, letterario* (*The Lantern: Little Politico-artistic and Literary Newspaper*). In the years immediately following, cinema would increasingly come to occupy centre stage: examples are *La Cinematografia italiana. Rivista dell'arte e dell'industria* (*The Italian Cinema: Magazine of Art and Industry*), directed by Gualtiero Fabbri, and *Lux. Rivista mensile di cinematografia, fotografia, fonografia e affini* (*Lux: Monthly Magazine of Cinema, Photography, and the Like*), edited by Gustavo Lombardo, both founded in 1908; but also *La Vita cinematografica* (*The Cinematic Life*), directed by Alfonso A. Cavallaro, founded in 1910, and *Cinema*, directed by Alfredo Morvillo, founded in 1911. The life of these publications is often brief and precarious, with mergers and frequent changes in title.<sup>19</sup>

Their contents, too, are often ephemeral, with many news items intended for those in the profession and with many advertisements. In any case, they consider cinema primarily as a 'modern' invention. Thus, many interventions inquire directly into the forms and meaning of cinematic experience, in both individual and collective terms, such as Maffio Maffii's 'Why I Love Cinema' in *La Lanterna* and Giovanni Fossi's 'The Movie Theatre Audience' in *La Cine-Phono e La rivista Phono-cinematografica (The Cine-Phono and the Magazine of Phono-Cinema)*. The first section of this anthology provides a good representation of this initial moment, both in the sources of the texts (daily newspapers and magazines) and the themes (cinema as emblem of modern experience.)

This vein of reflection continued in the following years, albeit in slightly different ways and in a different tone. In the 1910s, the cinema was no longer a novelty, but a familiar presence; this fact had consequences both for the venues and the themes of the interventions. Now, in newspapers we find lengthy reports (like the one on the place of the cinema in national culture, published in 1913 in Florence's *Il Nuovo Giornale*)<sup>20</sup> or vibrant exchanges of opinion (like the one published in *Il Giornale d'Italia* in 1913 on the possibility that the cinema could supplant the theatre).<sup>21</sup> Magazines also gave more space to general reflections, which seek a deeper understanding of some of cinema's most important characteristics. This is particularly true of a new generation of magazines founded in the second half of the 1910s, including *Apollon*, *L'Arte Muta (The Silent Art)*, and *Penombra (Shadow)*. These elegant and sophisticated journals bear witness to the increasing penetration of cinema within the middle- and upper-middle class: the topics discussed reflect the curiosity and the taste of these social strata. Indeed, we find portraits of and interviews with the main divas of Italian cinema, behind the scenes reports, but also essays on the aesthetic nature of film, its capacity to transform habits and gestures (especially in women), the type of language that it constructs (e.g. the use of the close-up), the new forms of perception it introduces (particularly in terms of attention), the different sense of space and time that it creates (in making us assign greater value to the fleeting moment), and eventually its influence on fashion, interior design, and lifestyle. The tone and style of this publication is neatly characterized by the words that open the first issue of *Penombra*: 'A cinema magazine, as it must be now that the cinema occupies so much of the public interest and influences more or less everything, can only be one of supreme elegance, varied, pleasing, interesting, and stylish.'<sup>22</sup>

In this approach to cinema there is no lack of contradictions. One is particularly apparent: the prevalence of the male point of view. Italian

society was even more deeply patriarchal than today. The iconic depictions penned by Emilio Scaglione in one of these sophisticated journals, and by Edoardo Coli in a more popular publication offer good examples: underlying the transformations in women's body language and in their attitudes towards sex, the two authors capture a relevant novelty, and at the same time express a subtle fear. And yet we can find counterpoints in the endorsement of cinema by Haydée and in the passionate first-person report by Matilde Serao, at the time a very successful writer, which introduce female voices to the choir.

The second section of this anthology tries to capture this sense of novelty and contradiction. We entitled it *Film in Transition* because it offers a snapshot of the broader evolution—whose apex was in the mid-1910s—from film as unexpected invention to film as an already established presence, able to attract the middle- and upper-middle classes. Consequently, it also charts the change from an approach based on surprise to a more focused exploration. In this vein, even though these texts do not adopt a scientific approach, as do a series of studies rooted in empirical research that are collected in two following sections of the book, they treat with great insight specific phenomena, such as the reconfiguration of social groups and castes (Serao), the transformation of ethical values (Scaglione, Haydée), the construction of new forms of consumption (Toddi), the possible development of an art based on mechanical reproduction (D'Amico), and eventually the ideal of a more active and self-determined man (Bertinetti). The cinema is not only the emblem of modern experience, but also a cultural object that merits careful attention.

Located almost exactly in between the two moments I have sought to summarize above there is a brief period of great interest. This develops in tandem with the Italo-Turkish War, fought between September 1911 and October 1912, over the Italian conquest of Libya. As Sila Berruti and Luca Mazzei clearly demonstrates in their research, the Libyan war is a mediated war—perhaps the very first in the world. The war is not only widely covered by the press, which offers regular correspondence from the front and numerous nationalistic editorials, but also characterized by the military's use of communication technologies like the telegraph and aerial photography, and finally by a substantial use of cinema.<sup>23</sup> Regularly-produced newsreels shot in combat zones and in Italy, are supplemented by fiction films related to the conflict and what Luca Mazzei calls 'postcards from Italy', or films of soldiers' family members meant to be projected for combatants in Libya.

Commentators stress three aspects of cinema pertinent to this new wartime milieu. Primarily, cinema captures reality with an intensity and

truth absent from other media. The realism of war reportage, among other things, makes the traditional genres of cinema seem completely inadequate. As Salvaneschi writes in a text we included: 'The tragedies, sentimental comedies, and gloomy dramas fell by the wayside as soon as the living and vibrant early visions of the war presented themselves with their modern spirit and sharp eyes.' Second, cinema elicits a strong reaction from the public, who gain a sense of patriotic pride from watching the endeavours of the soldiers (this is particularly the case, as Salvaneschi suggests, for the working-class public). Third, cinema has a function that we might call 'telepathic': not only does it allow spectators to experience combat as though they were participating in it directly (and without putting their lives in danger, as Salvaneschi and Giovannetti add ironically), but also allows the soldiers, thanks to the 'postcards from Italy', to see their loved ones on the screen, and to interact with them as though they were really there. Luigi Lucatelli offers an excellent account of this phenomenon: attending a projection in Tripoli, he writes of the enthusiastic reactions of the spectators when they saw their loved ones on the screen, but also the sense of sadness that emerged when the relatives of dead soldiers appeared.<sup>24</sup> There were, of course, also critical interventions, in particular those of Renato Giovannetti, who is scandalized by the replacement of real reportage by false documentaries in which soldiers had to perform roles, seeing this as a way of tricking the public rather than making it a participant in the action. And there were claims for a more radical role by cinema: in an intervention written during the First World War, Saverio Procida predicts that military historians will be able to use filmed images as a primary source for their research; thanks to their fidelity to the real, these images allow for a better understanding of how battles unfolded than traditional forms of documentation—but also show the extent to which war is a collective crime and a universal madness. The third section of this anthology, edited by Luca Mazzei, deals with the discussion that war cinema generated within the context of 'theories'.

In the first half of the 1910s, we find two other types of reflections that move beyond the discourses we have encountered up to this point in an attempt to become deeper and more specific. They exhibit professional or scientific skills, not relying on simple and impressionistic observations, but adopting precise points of view based on data, and following pre-existing methods. This starts to be clear in the texts collected in the fourth section: the overriding theme there is the effect that cinema has or could have on the public, in particular the working class, children, and adolescents. Cinema presents itself as a formidable instrument for the education of the masses, but the voice of the expert is needed to truly explore and activate

its full pedagogical potential. We find this in Domenico Orano, whose observations are based on a teaching experiment in the Roman district of Testaccio, or on the opposite ideological front, in the priest Romano Costetti, who advocates the use of an intuitive method, taking into account both his experience as an educator and his theological knowledge. (His justification for the use of images relies, although not explicitly, upon the arguments of the iconodules at the Second Council of Nicea). Another expert is Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, the future prime minister, whose expertise lies in politics and who seeks to align the use of cinema with the process of Italy's modernization. Also from the political field is Giovan Battista Avellone, whose intervention expresses a deep cinophobia as he advocates a potent censorship to prevent the social damage caused by cinema; but here, too, the discourse is marked by an indisputable expertise, acquired by Avellone in his role as General Prosecutor.

In the fifth section, the scientific and disciplinary orientation of the discourse becomes much clearer. Here, the texts revolve around the relationship between cinema and the study of the mind: particular attention is devoted to the way that art, including cinema, externalizes emotions, giving them a more solid form and allowing them to become more widely shared (Pasquale Rossi), to the perceptual modalities activated by a film and to synesthetic processes in particular (Mario Ponzo), to cinema's ability to provoke reactions in neurotic subjects (Giuseppe d'Abundo) or in people with psychic and moral weakness (Mario Umberto Masini and Giuseppe Vidoni), and to the possibilities of exactly rendering feelings in a film through facial expressions and physical posture (Mariano Luigi Patrizi). The expertise of these authors is even more clearly marked: a scholar of collective psychology; a disciple of Gestalt psychology; three psychiatrists, two of them with an interest in criminology; and a physiologist. Ponzo's text, which closes the section and deals with the social effects of cinema, clearly exemplifies the dialogue between sociological and psychological approaches.

The fourth and fifth sections illustrate how early discourse around cinema quickly develops a clearer set of thematic concerns and its own internal specializations. The cinema is a complex object with many different facets, and thus must be dealt with from the perspective of many different specialized approaches. Its many links with mass society and its deep influence upon new types of subjectivity, in particular, call for a deepened and specialized attention. While we are certainly not dealing with established research paradigms, we can see in these efforts the beginnings of what would become scientific approaches applied to cinema (which Filmology,

thirty years later, would seek to gather together into a unified approach). These two sections document the opening of 'theory' to new horizons (even if in some senses the subtlety and sensitivity of a Papini or a Thovez remain unsurpassed). Both sections are edited by Silvio Alovio, whose research offers a detailed picture of the presence of pedagogical, social, and cognitive sciences in early discussions of cinema.<sup>25</sup>

In a completely different direction, a wide debate on the aesthetic status of cinema develops. This debate finds fertile ground in the appearance of a new type of magazine, which is supported by abundant and lavish advertising, characterized by inventive layouts and sophisticated contents, and directed towards a more educated and demanding bourgeois public. The years between 1916 and 1919 are crucial, representing a phase of consolidation of the Italian film industry, after the boom of the beginning of the decade and prior to the emergence of a crisis that will make itself apparent in the years with which this anthology closes. Among the most representative publications we find the aforementioned journals *L'Arte muta*, published in Naples from 1916 to 1917 under the direction of Antonio Scarfoglio and Francesco Bufi; *Apollon*, a Roman monthly connected to the Giannantoni family's Cosmopoli Film and published from 1916 to 1921 under the direction of Goffredo Bellonci; and *Penombra*, directed by Tomaso Monicelli, which after two issues published in late 1917 and early 1918, takes the title *In Penombra (In Shadow)* and continues publishing from June 1918 to November 1919.<sup>26</sup>

In these magazines, we find frequent contributions inquiring as to whether or not the cinema is an art, and what sort of art it is, signed by authors like Sebastiano Arturo Luciani, who in 1921 collects his essays in the first Italian volume of theoretical scope or Goffredo Bellonci, who would become one of the leaders of Roman intellectual circles.<sup>27</sup> Their approach is more traditional than, for example, that of Canudo's 'Triumph of Cinema', published in 1908, and perhaps the first attempt to deal with the aesthetic problems posed by film: rather than locating the novel characteristics of cinema, they attempt to find analogies between it and the art of forms of the past, or trace within it traits that connect it to artistic processes in general. Bellonci, for example, suggests that cinema (unlike photography) is an art because it implies an author able to transform the reproduction of reality into something expressive, while Luciani sees it as a revival of pantomime and hopes that it will merge with music. Such texts legitimate cinema as an art, rather than show how it challenges the idea of art itself. There are also some more advanced voices, such as those of Lucio d'Ambra and most of all, Emanuele Toddi; but even a text like *Cinematografia Futurista* ('Futurist

Cinematography'), while it praises cinema for being the most innovative art and heralds the ultimate demise of older means of expression, it advances a very traditional idea of film as mere tool for depicting unusual situations or putting side by side contrasting elements.

And yet, the presence of a vibrant debate on the aesthetic nature of cinema is full of interest: it offers evidence of how many worries film raised in a society still imbued with classical values and anxious to re-absorb anything new back into tradition. In this framework, we are far from any clear and univocal definition of cinema as an art. What emerges, instead, are strategies of resistance and negotiation. At the same time, the great variety of aesthetic doctrines professed at the time—each of them claiming to have an answer about cinema, as Silvio Alovio and Luca Mazzei state in their introduction to Section 6—does not help locate a convergent solution to the question. The aesthetic debate in the 1910s is looking neither for a film specificity—as it would be in the following decade—nor for a specificity in its own approach.

Alongside all of the phases noted above, we find the emergence of a rich body of narrative fiction dedicated to cinema. Stories dealing with cinema in a way that carries great theoretical value appear early on: we might think of *Cinematografo. Scene famigliari per fanciulle* (*Cinema: Family Scenes for Girls*), the theatrical piece by Anna Vertua Gentile, or the previously mentioned Edmondo De Amicis novella *Cinematografo cerebrale* (*Cerebral Cinema*) as well as Gualtiero Ildebrando Fabbri's novella *Al cinematografo* (*At the cinema*).<sup>28</sup> Of course, the most famous example is Luigi Pirandello's *Si gira...* (*Shoot!*), published serially in *Nuova Antologia* (*New Anthology*) between 1 June and 16 August 1915, and then printed as a book in 1916 (and almost immediately translated into English).<sup>29</sup> The field, however, is much wider, thanks to numerous short stories published in magazines, both by well-known authors such as Guido Gozzano, Rosso di San Secondo, or Federigo Tozzi, and lesser known ones demonstrating an extraordinary sensitivity to the cinema and what it represents within the context of modern experience. Section 7 of this anthology represents only a small selection of this narrative production.

In his introduction to Section 7, Luca Mazzei argues the distinctiveness of a 'theory' in a 'narrative form'. On my side, I want to highlight two primary themes that emerge within in this section. On one hand, we find a constant comparison between cinema and life in which the former substitutes for the latter, to the point that life either no longer matters or eludes the grasp of those who want to live it. This is the case, for example, with the two brothers in Pio Vanzi's '*Lungometraggio*' ('Feature Film'): the heroic feats

of the one brother, a film actor, seem more real and are more appreciated than those of the other brother, a soldier at war. This issue also arises in Aldo Borelli's *'Il duello di Miopetti'* ('Miopetti's Duel'), which deals with an actor who can no longer manage to be himself, only the character he plays on screen. On the other hand, there is constant reflection on the body, as if by idealizing the bodies of the actors, cinema shows the feebleness of real bodies; Federigo Tozzi's *'Una recita cinematografica'* ('A Cinematic Performance') and Guido Gozzano's *'Il riflesso delle cesoie'* ('The Shears' Reflection') are two interesting examples of this theme. One can easily locate Pirandellian echoes in both of these themes, but the variations in less well-known stories are, nonetheless, quite symptomatic.

After 1922, the year with which this anthology closes, cinema would continue to be at the centre of a rich series of reflections, but the atmosphere had partly changed. I am referring here to the political atmosphere: 1922 is the year when fascism took power and started to assert increasing control over Italian civil society, introducing an alternative way to modernize the country. Even though the direct supervision of cinema by fascism will come about only in 1934, with the creation of a special Governmental Agency on Cinema, the *Direzione generale della cinematografia*, its interventions were clear from the beginning through entities like L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa or LUCE, founded in 1925, and whose task was to promote the production of educational films and documentaries from the point of view of their political utility. As for the cultural atmosphere, the early 1920s saw the collapse of Italian film production—a crisis that lasted for more than a decade—and Italian screens were invaded by foreign films, especially American. The effects on 'theory' were manifold. On the one hand, whilst many professionals were obliged to migrate elsewhere (mostly to Germany and France), many intellectuals, formerly engaged in cinema as critics, screenwriters, or even directors, moved back to literature, theatre, or journalism. A good example is Lucio d'Ambra who resumed literary activity in the early 1920s. At the same time, the sophisticated journals that defined the second half of the 1910s were no longer generously supported by the Italian film companies and had to cease publication. Although a certain kind of film discourse lost its usual space, new formats and champions arose. Firstly, a stable critical apparatus emerged, responding to an established audience. This was manifest in the fixed sections in newspapers and magazines. Examples here would include the reviews of Alberto Savinio in *Corriere Italiano* (*Italian Courier*) between 1923 and 1924, and of Piero Gadda Conti in *La Fiera Letteraria* (*The Literary Fair*) from 1926 onward; other nationwide dailies would follow, like *Corriere della Sera* in 1929, with a regular column



by Filippo Sacchi, and *La Stampa* in 1932, with one by Mario Gromo. Second, cinema became of interest to a wider category of highbrow critic, who took up film in literary and art journals. Exemplary of this tendency is the March 1927 issue of the Florentine magazine *Solaria*, dedicated to 'Letterati al cinema' ('Writers at the Cinema'), and including pieces by authors, poets, and intellectuals such as Eugenio Montale, Giacomo Debenedetti, Riccardo Bacchelli, Giacomo Alberti, Ugo Betti, and Anton Giulio Bragaglia.<sup>30</sup> Finally, there was a wider presence of contributions dealing with cinema in depth, examining its specific modes of expression and production through the lens of established philosophical or ideological paradigms. These become particularly prominent at the beginning of the 1930s from the standpoint both of aesthetic research and political debate. On the aesthetic front, a key role was played by scholars like Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti and Alberto Consiglio, and by magazines like *Cine-Convegno* (*Cine-Conference*).<sup>31</sup> On the political side, a 'national' cinema debate was first hosted in newspapers like *L'Impero* (*The Empire*), directed by Mario Carli, or *Il Tevere* (*The Tiber*), directed by Telesio Interlandi, and later led in particular by Alessandro Blasetti in magazines such as *Il mondo a lo schermo* (*The World Onscreen*) (1926), *Lo Schermo* (*The Screen*) (1926–1930) and *Cinematografo* (*Cinematograph*) (1927–1930). Such a change in atmosphere, at the political and cultural level, resulted in a deep transformation of the tone of discourses on cinema: in the second half of the 1920s and even more forcefully in the 1930s, in Italy as elsewhere, 'theory' (with quotation marks) became theory (without quotation marks).

### An 'Imperfect' Globalization

What about Italian 'theories' in relation to the debates taking place in other countries? Sourcebooks such as Richard Abel's on French film theory 1907 to 1939, Jaroslav Anděl and Petr Szczepanik collection of Czech theory 1908 to 1939, and Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer and Michael Cowan's compendium on German theory 1907 to 1933, offer an invaluable wealth of documents that form a benchmark for comparison to Italian situation.<sup>32</sup>

Firstly, the unsystematic character of early 'theory' is not a uniquely Italian trait. During the first two decades of the twentieth-century, both in Europe and, to some extent, in the United States, theoretical discourse is not a precisely-defined category, but rather advances through a variety of approaches that offer a description and explanation of what cinema seems to be.

Second, many themes at the centre of the Italian debate can also be found in other national contexts. The contrast with the other arts, the speculation about audience reaction, and the pedagogical use of cinema are all widespread topics. In particular, the close relationship between cinema and modern experience (speed, ubiquity, mass consumption, mechanical reproduction of life, etc.) is common in debates everywhere. Such commonality can be traced through the recurrence of certain terms across different languages: '*cinema educatore*' (which expressed the hope that film would have a pedagogical role) corresponds to the French '*le film éducateur*'. The Italian '*arte meccanica*' (which underscored the new art's technical qualities) matches the French '*art mécanique*'. '*Scuola di vizio*' (which was meant to capture the fear that film provoked bad behaviour) is reminiscent of the English term 'school of vice' and the French '*école de débaucherie*', etc.

Third, the major phases that Italian 'theory' passes through recall the precise trajectory of theoretical discourse in other countries. Particularly in France, we find an extremely varied period first, with many sporadic accounts, as well as a specialized press attentive to a wide variety of subjects, from the technical innovations of cinema to its moral implications, from its ability to create new types of occupations to its connection with other areas of modern life, like sports.<sup>33</sup> This phase in France is followed by a second one, surrounding the period of the First World War, which is more attuned to the bourgeois public and is characterized by a greater interest in aesthetic themes, more refined and high-brow publications, and a series of cultural initiatives dedicated to cinema.<sup>34</sup> The same sequence of development can be traced almost exactly in Germany, as Kaes, Baer, and Cowan have brilliantly proven.

Film is the first modern object that in reaching a universal audience also raises world-wide interest. The parallels between different national and cultural contexts help us to understand the extent to which this was convergent interest. We can recognize the presence of a sort of 'globalization', even though, at the beginning of the twentieth century, we do not find the systemic and deliberate action that would later come to characterize it. And yet, if it is true that early debates speak the language of 'globalization', it is also true that such globalization was 'imperfect'. The lack of systematic references to foreign authors is symptomatic of this insufficiency, except in certain academic essays, where citations are customary,<sup>35</sup> or in Catholic journals like *Civiltà Cattolica* (*Catholic Civilization*) based on pre-existing circuits of information,<sup>36</sup> and surprisingly in military sources.<sup>37</sup> Still, a need to demonstrate being *au courant* is expressed in an assortment of 'news

from the world’—sometimes off the mark or faked, as in Edipi’s text that opens this anthology. It is also voiced through indirect references: Giovanni Papini’s claim about the role of money in the modern world could quite easily lead to Georg Simmel, even though the German philosopher is not directly mentioned.<sup>38</sup> This need also finds expression in a series of learned references that connect the discourse around cinema to on-going cultural debates that are not necessarily about cinema: Fausto Maria Martini describes the characters on the screen as ‘men hounded by a nightmare,’ evoking Maurice Maeterlinck, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Abel Bonnard as well as Emanuel Swedenborg and Jaufré Rudel. Finally, the way in which the authors playfully and ironically adopt aliases that refer to famous literary characters by foreign writers and critics—such as Fantasio, a character from the eponymous play by Alfred De Musset, or Crainquebille, the protagonist of a novel by Anatole France—conveys a certain need to stay current.

The ‘imperfect globalization’ of early Italian film ‘theories’, however, calls attention to elements that are unique to Italy—most importantly, the historical context. In terms of modernization processes, Italy lagged behind England, Germany, and France. At the end of the nineteenth century, it remained a barely industrialized country, and its artistic world had yet to experience avant-garde movements. When modernity arrived, it not only had an extremely powerful impact, but also advanced at an accelerated rate, as though seeking to make up for lost time. Cinema became an emblem and an agent of this violent change. Why else would Giovanni Fossi place it among the inventions capable of liquidating the old world and shaping a new one? ‘New discoveries create new places and new customs—after having destroyed the old ones. In the same way, the destruction of certain neighbourhoods and the opening of new roads create new ways of living together and do away with old and traditional customs.’<sup>39</sup>

These transformations affected living conditions and lifestyles, but also forms of expression. In this respect, Italian ‘theories’ are perhaps more advanced than those found elsewhere. In Europe, the first theoretical writings presented themselves above all as ‘testimonies’ to the transformations that cinema brought about in the modern individual’s habits, values, and ways of thinking; they often express sympathy for and acceptance of these transformation, though rarely indicate that they might change the writer’s own discourse. There are exceptions: in France, authors like Blaise Cendrars or Jean Epstein—and here we are already near the beginning of the 1920s—adopted a form of writing that sought to imitate the object it dealt with, and thus used a syntax rather close to that of film. In Italy, Futurism favoured this mimetic character: a *parolibero* work like Carlo Carrà’s

*Cineamore* ('Cine-love') attempts to find equivalences between verbal and cinematic expressions.<sup>40</sup> Pirandello's *Si gira...* also attempts to incorporate the sensibilities created by film from into novelistic writing.<sup>41</sup> But most of all, the syntax and iconography of film is visible in the layout of several film magazines: *L'Arte Muta*, for example, adopts innovative elements like fold-out pages in order to reproduce the big screen, and pages made of different materials to evoke the content (rice paper used for an ad for a film with a Japanese subject, and so on). In short, in Italy cinema at times modifies the very medium of theoretical discourse. And yet, we also find the opposite situation: you will find in this anthology many texts written in a quite traditional manner, laden with literary references, tainted by a stylish—if not baroque—prose. It is as if certain authors must display their traditional culture in order to speak of cinema. Do they aim to leap into the most advanced modernity or to relish lagging behind it? Film 'theory' reflects this typical Italian dilemma.

Indeed, the radical transformation brought about by modernity inevitably elicited resistance. As an exemplary modern object, cinema counted on legions of enthusiastic followers, but also paid the price for its success. Hence, two opposing fronts emerged: on one hand, we find '*cinématophiles*' and, on the other hand, there are '*cinématophobes*', to use two terms introduced in France by Paul Souday in 1917. Resistance to cinema was quite widespread in Europe: and we find these radical positions in Italy as well, like the letter by former General Prosecutor Giovan Battista Avellone, contained in this anthology, or a book by Piero Pesce-Maineri (not contained here) that accuses film of being at the root of an infinite number of cases of criminality, serious mental disturbances, and a general debasing of taste.<sup>42</sup> Most common, however, is a tentative attitude: critics admit that cinema has threatening aspects, but declare themselves certain (or at least hopeful) that it will manage to avoid these in favour of more positive effects. A sort of 'conditional faith' can be found in many contributions, and constitutes a shared attitude among a rather diverse range of writers (after all, an interest in cinema unites nationalists in favour of war such as Nino Salvaneschi, pacifists like Lucio d'Ambra, Marxists like Ettore Fabietti, radicals like Domenico Orano, and Catholics like Romano Costetti). We find it, for example, at the core of the 1913 speech given in Milan by Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, future prime minister: there is no doubt that cinema propagates models of antisocial behaviour, but it is, at the same time, an exceptional instrument for the elevation of the masses. On the opposing political front, we find the same attitude among Catholics: a magazine hardly sympathetic to cinema like *Civiltà Cattolica* (*Catholic Civilization*), while condemning the new

invention, recognizes its extraordinary effectiveness and hopes that it can be used for educational ends.<sup>43</sup> On the aesthetic level above all, 'conditional faith' is practically the norm. Luciani provides a good encapsulation of this tendency: 'Although the cinema is not yet art, it carries within itself the possibilities of becoming one; of becoming, in fact, the most representative and only original art of our times.'<sup>44</sup> Even an enthusiast like Giovanni Fossa adheres to the same formula: 'I love, I adore, the cinema. I love it for what it is, and I adore it for what it could become.'<sup>45</sup> In short, in Italy a compromise is sought between detractors and enthusiastic: all agree that the cinema not only *is*, but most importantly, it *will be*.

The three particularities of the Italian film 'theories' that I have noted (related to historical context, the forms of critical discourse, and the attitude towards the new) reinforce the idea of 'imperfect globalization'. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, film debates tend to ignore national boundaries, as they do with borders separating nations, types of discourse, discipline, and ideology; at the same time, they reflect and respond to a national context. 'Theories' are transnational, trans-discursive, trans-disciplinary, and trans-ideological, but also circumstantial. The following years would untie this paradox. During the course of the 1920s, and even more distinctly during the 1930s, a more accentuated national identity emerged. Discussions about cinema would typically refer to Italian philosophical contexts and political processes; in the case of the first, to neo-idealism, and in the case of the second, to fascism and then to anti-fascism. Foreign contributions—including Soviet film theory—would be appropriated by institutions like the State School of Cinema (the *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia*) and would then become the core of a nationally-oriented project. After the war, the balance was reversed: Italian film theory gained an international echo, and the neo-realistic dogmas influenced foreign debates. The 1970s, in Italy like elsewhere, saw film theory finally reach a global dimension: auteur theory, semiotics, psychoanalysis, Marxism, and avant-garde film theory provide a language that is irreversibly universal.

## Notes

1. Many of these texts are hardly accessible, even in Italian, because they have not been republished since their first appearance. For the status of the text included in this anthology, see the section 'Sources'.
2. Many of these authors, despite having occupied prominent positions in intellectual debates of their time, have vanished from historical memory.

Their biographies, which close this volume, and whose reconstruction often entailed substantial effort, allow historical gaps to be filled. For a comprehensive account of the relationship between intellectuals and cinema in the early twentieth century, see Gambacorti, *Storie di cinema*; Brunetta, *Intelletuali italiani*; Andreatza, *Identificazione di un'arte*; Alovizio, *Voci del silenzio*; and Mazzei, 'Quando il cinema'.

3. 'This kind of considerations, I know, raise distrust in professionals. [...] And yet, to demonstrate how these theories can be substantial, I will apply them to a well-known story[...]' Luciani, 'Scenario cinematografico'. It may be interesting to compare Luciani's argument with Freeburg, *Art of Photoplay*, who claims for himself the 'role of theorist and philosopher,' and, at the same time, recognizes the primacy of producers in dealing with cinema. A few years later, Louis Delluc, in an ironical self-portrait also depicts himself as a 'théoricien' and, at the same time, he makes light of such a designation. See Delluc, 'Quelques personnes'.
4. A key role was played by the extremely successful Bálazs, 'Visible Man,' who openly advocates the need of a film theory mostly but not only associated to a *Kunstphilosophie des films* ('art philosophy of films'). As evidence of the circulation of the word in the 1920s, see Seldes 'Open Letter,' who praises the usefulness of a competence that apparently is useless. And yet, the pre-Bálazs occurrences of the word must not be forgotten. Contrary to what David Rodowick's *Elegy for Theory* claims, film theory emerged relatively early, and it was not exclusively focused on aesthetic questions.
5. Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*.
6. We can also say that 'early theories' provide a first 'consciousness' about film, if we take the word 'consciousness' in its cultural aspects, instead of in its cognitive ones. On the concept of 'consciousness' as an alternative to the idea of theory, see Hidalgo, 'Early American Film'.
7. Fossa, 'Orizzonti cinematografici avvenire' suggests that the cinema of the future will serve above all to allow us to keep in touch with faraway loved ones—as well as those taken from us by death.
8. On theory as 'promise of cinema,' see the 'Introduction' to the impressive anthology of German theories from 1907 to 1933 by Kaes, Baer and Cowan, *Promise of Cinema*. However, it is worth mentioning that Italian 'theory,' even if it is open to the subjunctive and conditional, is less generous than German theory in imagining 'possible cinemas' and more inclined in describing—or even in disdaining—the 'actual cinema'.
9. Luciani, *Antiteatro*; Consiglio, *Cinema*.
10. Canudo, 'Triumph of the Cinema,' included in this anthology. It was republished in two installments, respectively signed B.C.V and Frac, as 'L'avvenire del cinematografo' in *La rivista fono-cinematografica* (3), 46–47 (20–26 January 1909), p. 10, and (3), 48 (5 February 1909), p. 10. It is unclear whether Canudo approved the republication of his essay—and, moreover, it is unclear whether the pseudonyms refer to Canudo himself.

11. I describe early film 'theories' as 'discursive formation' instead of an 'episteme', as Albera does in his extremely interesting 'First Discourses on Film', precisely because I primarily want to highlight their 'dispersion' instead of their convergence. An actual convergence would come after, as an effect of an accumulation, and as a symptom of a necessity.
12. I have explored this return of theory to 'theory' in Casetti, 'Theory, Post-theory, Neo-theories'.
13. A first attempt at periodization can be found in Mazzei, '*Percorsi della teoria*' that I take up here with some substantial changes.
14. Fabbri, '*Al cinematografo*'; De Amicis, '*Cinematografo cerebrale*'.
15. Tonini, '*Influenza sociale*'; Panteo, '*Cinematografo*'; Janni, '*Colloquio con Gabriele d'Annunzio*'.
16. The 'third page' was introduced by *Il Giornale d'Italia* in 1901. On the role of the 'third page' in the early film debate, see Mazzei, '*Papini, Orvieto e Thovez*'.
17. See in particular a report entitled '*La stampa quotidiana e il cinematografo*' ('The Daily Press and the Cinematograph') hosted by the monthly magazine *Lux*, directed by Gustavo Lombardo and first appearing in March 1909.
18. A review of early film magazines can be found in De Berti, '*Le riviste cinematografiche*'.
19. One exception is *La Vita cinematografica* (*The Cinematic Life*), founded in 1910 and active until 1934.
20. The report is published in twelve installments from 20 November to 8 December 1913.
21. La Valle, '*Il teatro e il cinematografo*', p. 5; Angeli, '*Teatro contro il cinematografo*', p.3.
22. *Penombra*, 1/1 (December 1917), p. 1.
23. Berruti and Mazzei, '*Giornale mi lascia freddo*'.
24. We can find a brilliant illustration of the 'telepathic' function of cinema in an older text, previously mentioned in Fossa, '*Orizzonti cinematografici avvenire*'.
25. See Alovisio, '*Occhio sensibile*'; Alovisio and Venturini, '*Cinema e scienze*'.
26. It is worth noting that *Cronache d'Attualità* ('*Chronicle of Current Events*'), founded by Anton Giulio Bragaglia and whose first run, now lost, was released in 1916, also published a second and third series in 1919 and 1921–1922. Although not programatically dedicated to the cinema, the magazine—whose collaborators included Matilde Serao, Luigi Pirandello, and Corrado Govoni—devoted much space to it, with articles by, among others, Luciani, B. Galaragi an anagrammatic pseudonym for Bragaglia, Diego Angeli, and Donatello d'Orazio. Also see Riccardo Redi, *Cinema scritto. Il catalogo delle riviste italiane, 1907–1944* (Rome AIRSC, 1992). This and other texts can be downloaded for free at the Associazione Italiana per le Ricerche di Storia del Cinema or AIRSC website at [www.airscnew.it](http://www.airscnew.it).

27. Luciani, *Verso una nuova arte*. It is telling that in the change from *Penombra* to *In Penombra*, the subtitle changes as well, from *Rivista del cinematografo* (*Cinema Magazine*) to *Rivista d'arte cinematografico* (*Magazine of Cinematic Art*). On the role of *In Penombra* and the magazines cited above more broadly, Raffaele De Berti writes, 'Until the second half of the 1910s, critical interventions dealing with single films are hardly systematic, and are limited to simple general observations, without ever approaching an aesthetic analysis. [...] Between 1918 and 1919, thanks in particular to the publication of a magazine like *In Penombra*, edited by Tommaso Monicelli, there is a real leap in the quality of writing on cinema in Italy in relation to the other arts and the overall cultural context.'
28. Vertua, *Cinematografo*.
29. The first English translation of Pirandello, *Si gira* is based on the 1925 edition published under the title *Quaderni di Serafino Gubbio operatore*.
30. On this issue of *Solaria*, and on Italian journals of 1920s in general, see Santoro, *Letterati al cinema*.
31. See Raghianti, 'Cinematografo rigoroso', and Consiglio, 'Estetica generale'.
32. See Abel (ed.), *French Film Theory*. Anděl and Szczepanik (eds.), *Cinema All the Time*; Kaes, Baer, and Cowan (eds.), *Promise of Cinema*.
33. Perhaps the most characteristic example of this type of newspaper is *Le Cinéma*, which begins publication in March 1912.
34. The most characteristic example would be *Cinéa*.
35. It is of some interest the fact that d'Abundo's essay included in this anthology was carefully reviewed on 22 February 1912, in the column 'Au Cinéma' in the influential French newspaper *Temps*.
36. 'Cinematografo e moralità pubblica' and 'Cinematografo e scuola' have a wealth of references to foreign texts; the two Italian essays are in turn quoted by Ramon Rucabado, *El Cinematògraf en la Cultura i en els Costums. Conferència llegida el 21 de desembre de 1919 a l'Institut de Cultura i Biblioteca Popular per la Dona*, (Barcelona: Editorial Catalana, 1920). On the connections between the Spanish and Italian cinephobic attitudes, see Joan M. Minguet Batllori, 'L'Eglise et les intellectuels espagnols contre le cinéma', *Une invention du Diable? Cinéma de premiers temps et religion*, (eds.) Roland Cosandey, André Gaudreault, Tom Gunning (Sainte-Foy, Quebec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1992), pp. 12–20.
37. A review of Boleslas Matuszewski's booklet *Une nouvelle Source de l'Histoire* (*A New Source of History*), published in Paris in March 1898, appeared three months later in the *Rivista di artiglieria e genio* (*Journal of Artillery and Engineering*). See 'Creazione di un deposito di cinematografia storica'.
38. See Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*.
39. Fossi, 'The Movie Theatre Audience'. Included in this anthology.
40. Carrà, *Cineamore. Parolibero*, or literally 'free-word', refers to the free-form style and word associations of Futurist poems.



41. This is particularly true of the opening of the third book, which describes a car passing a carriage as though seen in a shot/reverse shot structure, alternating between the point of view of the car and that of the carriage. On this passage, see Moses 1995.
42. Pesce-Maineri, *Pericoli sociali*.
43. 'Cinematografo e moralità pubblica'.
44. Luciani, 'Idealità del cinematografo'.
45. Fossa, 'Orizzonti cinematografici avvenire'.

## Section 1



# Cinema and Modern Life

*Francesco Casetti*

The birth of cinema raised a great deal of attention all over the world. Italy was no exception: between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, we encounter several accounts dealing with the new discovery. Interest was first captured by film's technical aspects. A good example is Edipi's text, which opens this section:

Do you know what a *cinematograph* is? The photographic reproduction of the 'fleeting moment' through the succession of hundreds of thousands of operations.

You embrace a pretty young woman. Then, 800 instantaneous photographs gather the different gradations of your embrace in an orderly fashion. Then a machine sets the numerous photographs into vertiginous movement. A continuous series of sparks illuminate them. An electric reflector *slams* them up against a canvas. A magnifying lens brings the very small dimensions of the photograph to almost natural proportions. ...And you present a spectacle of the intensity of your affection to the cultured audience.<sup>1</sup>

Edipi's report, published in 1896 in the lavish and fashionable journal *Fiammetta*, is based on inaccurate information and free imagination—in some ways, it looks like the Medieval description of monsters and chimeras—and yet it bears witness to how technology elicited popular curiosity.

The presence of the 'machine' was relevant for at least two reasons. On the one hand, it distinguished cinema—as well as the gramophone—from traditional forms of representation, so much so that both media earned the widespread appellation of 'mechanical arts'.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, it connected film to Modernity, an age characterized by an overwhelming usage of machines. This second aspect led critics, journalists, and writers to consider film itself as a symbol of a new epoch, characterized by new habits and values. Cinema mirrors the conditions of existence that emerge in a 'twilight hour such as our own—the twilight of the dawn!' as Ricciotto Canudo writes.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, it embodied the forms of perceiving, and of relating to the surrounding reality, typical of modern times.

## The Characteristics of Modern Civilization

Giovanni Papini, then one of the most perceptive intellectuals in Italy, heralded such an approach in a provocative intervention published in the daily *La Stampa* (*The Press*) in 1907: 'Those who reflect a little on the characteristics of modern civilization will not find it difficult to link certain facts related to motion pictures with other facts, which reveal the same tendencies.'<sup>4</sup> Hence an appeal to the philosophers: if they want to understand the current reality, they must get out of the libraries and attend the movies. In the new leisure establishments, the true philosopher 'could uncover new concepts for reflection, and—who knows? —he may even find new moral emotions and new metaphysical suggestions to explore.'

Among the tendencies of Modernity spotted by Papini, the first was the presence of an economic orientation: we regularly try to save money, time, energy, not because we are lazy, but because of our desire to do and to have more. Film delivers short stories of great intensity, which we may enjoy with negligible expense, minimal effort, marginal cultural involvement, but with a greater satisfaction than the usual theatrical spectacles.<sup>5</sup> Economy also applies to our senses: we tend to use sight more than hearing or touch because we can grasp whatever we encounter more readily and completely. Cinema, again, follows such a tendency: 'It also has another advantage, in that it occupies only a single sense—sight—[...] and this unique focus is ensured even further, in an artificial manner by the dramatic Wagnerian darkening of the theatre, which prevents any distraction.'

Second, Modernity urges us to possess—physically and symbolically—the world: to conquer its whole parts; to unfold its multiple states and its inner laws; to control its processes for our own ends; to exploit its resources for our own purposes and projects. Cinema satisfies such a need: on the screen, the world becomes available to our eyes. Cinema offers 'the reproduction of vast and complicated events over long periods of time,' impossible to access through other means; it also 'can show important true events only a few days after they have actually occurred'; moreover, it is able to show 'a succession of movements taken from actual events and full of vitality.' And while it is true that images on the screen do not make reality as such available to us, it is also true that the 'impression of reality' they create is so perfect that they look like a double of the real world.

Third, Modernity means a richer mental life. Movies go beyond factual reality; on the screen, we face a *possible* world that expands the borders of our *actual* world. 'Anything that man could possibly envisage in his

wildest dreams or strangest fiction' becomes at the movies as real as what we encounter daily. Cinema feeds our imagination.

There are other characteristics of cinema that Papini does not mention, but that surfaced within the early debates. Film's ability to capture life—an aspect that almost all 'theorists' touched on—is often connected with an emphasis on contingency. Modernity recognizes contingency as the counterpart of necessity; it appreciates not only what must be, but also what may be. Film, once again, reflects such an orientation: one of its most valuable capacities is to arrest the 'fleeting moments,' as Edipi claims in the aforementioned text, and as Lucio d'Ambra, in a text included in the next section, asserts even more strongly.

Another characteristic is the way spectators are implicated: Modernity considers an observer not as a subject detached from what s/he looks at, but someone who activates an embodied vision.<sup>6</sup> Film, in offering an incomplete albeit persuasive image of the world, asks spectators to supply the lack of information and to connect fragments through their imagination, and in this way to cooperate in creating the representation on the screen, as Maffio Maffii underlines.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, cinema captures some of the emerging social strata: its audience is mostly composed of workers, women, kids, and young people—ready to merge all together, as if they were drawn in by a common stream of life. As Giovanni Fossi writes, 'Upon entering a movie theatre, one is instantly struck by the aforementioned diversity of the audience—which is more mixed here than at any other kind of performance.'<sup>8</sup>

A further aspect worthy of attention is the scientific inclination that affects Modernity: film provides representations that are as accurate and exact as the ones offered by the most advanced tools used for experiments. It is not by chance that Ricciotto Canudo in 'The Triumph of the Cinema' speaks of a 'scientific theatre' whose essence is based on 'precise calculations and mechanical expression.' Canudo also underlines the most evident characteristic of Modernity: the acceleration of life, the vortex of existence.<sup>9</sup> He does so through an impressive metaphor: 'The driver who watches a cinematic spectacle after having just finished the craziest race through space will not have a sense of slowness. Indeed, the representations of life will seem to him to be as rapid as those he has just seen in the places he raced past.' Film runs at the same speed as a roadster.<sup>10</sup> Here, the parallel between the experience of Modernity and the experience of cinema finds its fullest expression.

I want add that in the same text (which was one instalment of two series of correspondences from Paris, titled respectively 'Letters about Life' and 'Letters about Art') Canudo also offers a sort of 'negative' match. Filmic

experience is sacred in its essence: it implies not an attendance, but a ritual, and not spectators, but believers. In this sense, cinema is a new religion—the one that is requested by a new epoch, and that allows the latter to dismiss traditional cults.<sup>11</sup>

## Cinephobis Instances

We have seen to what extent these early writings equated cinema to Modernity—and to what extent film ‘theory’ functions as a ‘theory of modern experience’. This fact brings one more further aspect to the fore. Modern experience is exciting, but it is also dreadful. It implies a deep change in our habits and values, and any transformation is potentially threatening. Early film ‘theories’ thus also included a cinephobic component.

Let’s turn to Edipi’s ‘Cinematography’. As early as in 1896, he admitted that movies ‘might bring about strange moral and social upheavals’: in exposing on the screen the female body, often undressed, they challenge the safe borders between art and obscenity. Edipi tries to avoid any confusion—according to him, ‘obscenity is in the mind of the person who is watching and listening, rather than in the thing that is shown or said’—and yet his answer does not revoke the presence of a certain concern, which would rise in a few years to the point that movies were considered as a ‘school of vice’, as Section 5 will illustrate.

An even greater source of anxiety is the wholesaling of traditional artistic principles that cinema allegedly elicits. Does modern experience leave room for aesthetic experience? In ‘The Art of Celluloid’, Enrico Thovez, a critic who would later become director of the Civic Museum of Modern Art in Turin, characterizes cinema as the domain of the copy, and since a copy represents the denial of what a true art must be, he consequently expresses his scepticism about film. Thovez is extremely perceptive: he captures the deep complicity between film and its epoch, so devoted to duplicates and reproductions, and he recognizes that the twentieth century ‘will simply be the century of Cinema.’ Nevertheless, while pretending to praise film, Thovez blames it: film is made from celluloid, a material popular as the cheap imitations of ivory, amber, tortoiseshell, and coral; if, on the one hand, it realizes an artistic democracy, on the other it merges and confuses true and false, singularity and similarity, essence and appearance, as celluloid does.<sup>12</sup> Thovez adopts irony as his weapon, painting an enthralling portrait of the new medium. But behind irony, there is also a sense of suspicion that colours the whole essay.

We find a darker picture in Martini's 'The Death of the Word', published in 1912. Once again, cinema is partnered with modern sensibility. In this match, what emerges is the sense of a nightmare. On the screen,

everything—human beings and things—is stirred up by an infernal wind. Existence speeds to a start: a step is a race; a race, a flight; the gaze, a furtive glance; laughter, a grimace; crying, a sob; a thought, a delirium; the human heartbeat, a fever. Things are violently stirred up by the same fever as men. [...] It is a fantastic tumult: it is the mirror of the dreadful nervous disorder of our age.<sup>13</sup>

In such a devilish atmosphere, cinema misses its possible task: 'The flickering machine which seems destined above all to reproduce squares of truth, today serves to mangle and to spit back out—in fragments that are shapeless and deformed—masterpieces of imagination and of human thought.' The 'death of word' in this silent art is a symptom of a such mishap; only the great spectacle of nature, captured by short takes, may restore our spirit.

The most radical cinephobic stance is presented by Luigi Pirandello's *Si gira... (Shoot!)* We did not include any excerpts from it in our anthology: the novel is well known, and it was quickly translated into English. However, the philosophical assumption underpinning the book is worth recalling: cinema is a 'machine', and, like modern machines, it enslaves men, instead of helping them. The cinematographer is 'nothing more than a hand that turns a handle'; actors feel as though they are 'in exile' when they play, not having a real audience in front of them; and spectators, who enjoy the spectacle, are prey to a pure illusion that does not bring them closer to life, but, on the contrary, offers them a life engulfed, digested, and transformed into excrement. What Pirandello rejects is the filmic experience as such: at the movies, we do not really see, we do not really feel, we do not grasp what we are facing. It is not by chance that when the actress Varia Nestoroff looks at herself on the screen, she not only does not recognize herself, but she does not even understand who is shown and what she is doing.<sup>14</sup> Once again, in parallel with modern experience, which reckons with a frantic but empty existence, film experience is 'inexperience'—a situation in which we lose ourselves and our relationship to the surrounding reality. If it is true that early film 'theories' found their first, provisional shape as 'theories of modern experience,' it is then true that Pirandello provides a spectacular overturning: his theoretical novel offers an insight into the failure and collapse of modernity, and at the same time into the dark side of filmic experience. And yet, film remains a seductive object—something from



which we are not able to escape. At the beginning of Book 2, Pirandello describes a simple event—a motor-car that passes a one-horse carriage—as if it were seen through point of view shots and a shot/reverse-shot editing.

A slight swerve. There is a one-horse carriage in front. '*Peu, pepeeue, peeeu.*' What? The horn of the motor-car is pulling it back? Why, yes! It does really seem to be making it run backwards, with the most comic effect. The three ladies in the motor-car laugh, turn round, wave their arms in greeting with great vivacity, amid a gay, confused flutter of many-coloured veils; and the poor little carriage, hidden in an arid, sickening cloud of smoke and dust, however hard the cadaverous little horse may try to pull it along with his weary trot, continues to fall behind, far behind, with the houses, the trees, the occasional pedestrians, until it vanishes down the long straight vista of the suburban avenue. Vanishes? Not at all! The motor-car has vanished. The carriage, meanwhile, is still here, still slowly advancing, at the weary, level trot of its cadaverous horse. And the whole of the avenue seems to come forward again, slowly, with it.

A final sentence addresses directly—and ironically—the advent of machines, and the sensations they generate.

You have invented machines, have you? And now you enjoy these and similar sensations of stylish pace.<sup>15</sup>

We already belong to such a world—and cinema is at the forefront of it: movies provide the eyeglasses through which to look at it.

## Notes

1. Edipi, 'Cinematography', included in this anthology.
2. See Gaio, 'Summertime Spectacles', included in this anthology.
3. Canudo, 'Triumph of the Cinema', included in this anthology.
4. Papini, 'The Philosophy of Cinematograph', included in this anthology. Papini's essay is part of a series of philosophical contributions that the author published in these years, mostly in *Leonardo*, the journal which he co-founded and directed.
5. 'Compared to live theatre—which it partially intends replacing—motion pictures have the advantage of being a shorter event, less tiring and less expensive, and therefore it requires less time, less effort and less money.'
6. On the topic, Cray, *Techniques*.

7. Maffii, 'Why I Love the Cinema', included in this anthology. Of course, Maffii is not Münsterberg, and yet we may find some unintentional resonances. See Münsterberg, *The Photoplay*.
8. Fossi, 'Movie Theatre', included in this anthology.
9. On Modernity as vortex, also see Berman, *All That Is Solid*.
10. Canudo also highlights the 'deification' of speed: 'We have created a new goddess for our Olympus. This goddess is Speed: completely worthy of the adoration that the ancients had for strength, and above all worthy of our greatest, most complex, and most refined sensibilities.'
11. It is not by chance that Canudo's essay was published in the Christmas issue of a notorious anti-clerical and freemasonic journal, *Il Nuovo Giornale*.
12. 'In its 'seeming' without 'being', in its deceiving with lucid ease, in its docile fitting in with every requirement, [celluloid] is truly the symbol of the mentality of modern life.' Thovez, 'Art of Celluloid', included in this anthology.
13. Martini, 'Death of the Word', included in this anthology.
14. Pirandello, *Shoot!*, p. 61. 'She herself remains speechless and almost terror-stricken at her own image on the screen, so altered and disordered. She sees there someone who is herself but whom she does not know. She would like not to recognize herself in this person, but at least to know her.'
15. Pirandello, *Shoot!*, pp. 77–78. On this Pirandello passage, see Moses, *Nickel for the Movies*.

# Cinematography

*Edipi*

The most recent, most strange and wonderful application of electricity is the cine-phonograph ('*cinematofonografo*'), which, for now, however, is only in America. Rather, is only in the workshop of Mr. Edison. And I will speak about that further on.

But those of us in old Europe have stayed with the *cinematograph*, which, even though the science of it is two or three years old, is only just now beginning to be of interest to the *masses*.

Do you know what a *cinematograph* is? The photographic reproduction of the 'fleeting moment' through the succession of hundreds of thousands of operations.

You embrace a pretty young woman. Then, 800 instantaneous photographs gather the different gradations of your embrace in an orderly fashion. Then a machine sets the numerous photographs into vertiginous movement. A continuous series of sparks illuminate them. An electric reflector *slams* them up against a canvas. A magnifying lens brings the very small dimensions of the photograph to almost natural proportions. ...And you present a spectacle of the intensity of your affection to the cultured audience and to the illustrious garrison...

This is the cinematograph, that is to say, a perfected kinetoscope.

But, in the ecstasy of your amorous delirium, did you utter any phrases? 'I love you, I adore you...and you? And you?...Do you love me?...Tell me you love me?...'

Well, an indiscreet phonograph gathers the words and the sound of your voice, and then repeats them while the scene unfolds...

And this is the *cine-phonograph*.

If I explained well, and you have carefully followed what I've been saying, you must agree that the widespread diffusion of such a discovery might bring about strange moral and social upheavals.

Meanwhile, listen to what my friend *Yorickson* has written:<sup>1</sup>

Among the scenes presented by the *cinematograph*, there was one that was particularly interesting: a pretty young lady who was undressing to go to bed. She took off her dress, her petticoat, her corset...she started to loosen her elegant pantaloons...then suddenly the light goes out, and the rest of the action is taken away from the viewers' sight. I asked myself,

then, the reason for this premature darkness, which took away from us the spectacle of so many delightful details. And it came to me that morality was shutting off the light at that moment because there were ladies in the audience!

Indeed, a curious reason! I would have understood in a similar circumstance a certain concern for male modesty. I, for example, was beginning to be concerned for my innocence! But what could the ladies have seen that they didn't already know by heart?

Mysteries of photographic morality!...

The observation of this elegant and lively writer on morality is witty: but do you know how many other observations it could generate?

Listen. Without wanting to compete with Pierre Bayle, who has written an entire volume about obscenities in order to defend his *Dictionnaire historique* (*Historical Dictionary*), from which—the Walloon Church wanted to suppress all the obscenities and 'dirty' expressions, I hope to affirm and demonstrate in a few words that obscenity and modesty do not exist if not through a curious convention or through a natural separation from grace and gentility.<sup>2</sup>

I have argued that a woman is a more curious and careful admirer of her own graces than masculine ones. If women are dancing a cancan at the theatre—so long as they dance with refinement, of course—almost a majority of the audience will be women. What drives away the lovely female audience is, instead, men's excitement from this abundance of attractiveness: when a man gets carried away by the 'exhibitions' of the womanly semi-nudities of the stage and applauds with cries that seem like bellowing of wild beasts, then women get upset, blush and turn away.

In the first act of *Divorçons* (*Let's Get a Divorce*), Cyprienne says some things that are very bold.<sup>3</sup> But, she says them with a grace that is so exquisite, and with phrases and words that are so refined, and so eminently comical that the ladies go crazy for these scenes—scenes in which these audacious statements are so openly, and so gracefully, defended.

But, try to have Cyprienne De Prunelles's theories expressed by some farmer's wife, or by a 'manufacturer' of popular dramas, or—God save us all—by a legal reporter from some 'daily political-ARTISTIC(?)—administrative newspaper'?!!

In every church, there are baby Jesuses that are portrayed, let's say, *au naturel*, and no one even thinks of being scandalized.

Only the young ladies ‘who experience the embraces of the horsemen and the stabs of a dagger’ have fiery words...if there happens to be a handsome bronze *putto* (‘cherub’) who exposes a bit of his penis...

That is what Giosuè Carducci observed. And he put it into verse.

In this way, the childish perfection of the forms of Michelangelo’s *David*, and the exquisite beauty of those of Cellini’s *Perseus*, and the powerful drama that emanates from those two figures, save...the ‘situation’. And it will never be forgivable that the esteemed mayor of Florence—for I don’t know what strange reason—wanted their nudity defiled, and in this case truly obscenely, with a fig leaf.

Let’s go back to the cinematograph, which I have briefly described above. Barnum has offered Sarah Bernhardt \$100,000 to let herself be recorded in some of his creations with the *cine-phonograph*. The great tragic actress refused. And one can see why—with the cine-phonograph, she would have been competing with herself!

Then, in America they have thought of using the cinematograph for advertising.

In his most recent article in the *La Revue des deux mondes* (*Revue of Two Worlds*), Maurice Talmeyr spoke about the *poster*, the king of the walls, at the end of this century. The art of illustrated advertising is a new art to which famous painters are dedicating themselves; they are even inspired by sacred things.

Puvis de Chavannes painted a *St. Geneviève* for a sign in a laundry!...And if only you knew what the talented painters of *Fiametta* were preparing!

But, getting back to the subject, can you imagine what heights the art of *advertising* will reach now with the CINE-PHONOGRAPH?

Can you imagine having Tina di Lorenzo, who radiates beauty and who has a golden voice, recommending Giacosa, the baker’s *sandwiches*—which she goes crazy for?<sup>4</sup>

And the captivating Virginia Reiter encouraging people to buy Piedmontese truffles and the lavish Sauterne wine?

Zacconi, disguised as *Judas*, advertising nails, or rope, or rods, or to some other thing related to the Christ...of Bovio?<sup>5</sup>

[Ermete] Novelli dressed as Othello, and Tommaso Salvini as Iago, who recommend an excellent soap that can even wash away stains...of the conscience?

Cesare Rossi signed on by a maker of silk MUFFLERS?

And Giovanni Emanuel recommending the Jungfrau or some other mountain?

Or Eduardo Boutet demonstrating the need to buy dictionaries of the Italian language?

And so on and so on, up until Cammillo [*sic*] Antona Traversi, advertising all the... Rozeno of Italy?<sup>6</sup>

Oh, male readers, can you imagine? And you, female readers?

What do you say?

Immoral?...Ah, I understand. You're afraid that the use of the cine-phonograph will become so universal that it will do away with other forms of entertainment. But really, this is a victory for morality: what are your husbands doing right now?

They are going to a *Café-Chantant*—they get carried away by the half-concealed and half-revealed graces of the young singers, and then...they take the *chanteuse* to dinner.

When the cine-phonograph has done away with the singer, what would you like your little husband to take to dinner instead? The batteries, or the storage battery? Or the camera?

If he has followed the performance very eagerly, he will instead take his little wife to a *cabinet particulier* ...

An eminently conjugal solution, just like in *Let's Get a Divorce*.

So, in this case, the collodion and the silver nitrate will be powerful creators of marital bliss!

Going back to morality, I confirm and maintain that, on the whole, obscenity is in the mind of the person who is watching and listening, rather than in the thing that is shown or said.

Indeed, the same subject can be at one point a *galeotto* and at another be revolting.<sup>7</sup>

But because for the materialist school the state of the mind is always subject to that of the body, one must take into consideration whether the person listening and watching is fasting or is sated.

A beautiful woman, like a beautiful cut of beef, can awaken an irresistible appetite. But after a big meal!?

So, to conclude, whoever exhibits an ordinary cinematograph should always take care to ask the audience how long it has been since they have eaten!...

'Cinematografo', *Fiammetta*, 1/23 (4 October 1896), pp. 2–3. Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.

## Notes

1. [Editors' note. Pseudonym of the writer and journalist from Livorno, Umberto Ferrigni (1866–1932).]
2. [Editors' note. Pierre Bayle (1647–1706) was a French philosopher, writer, and encyclopaedia editor. Walloon refers to the Calvinist Church in the Netherlands. See Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique*.
3. [Editors' note. Sardou and Najac. *Divorçons!*]
4. [Editors' note. The author is referring to Caffè Giacosa, a famous café in Florence frequented by painters and writers, and known for its truffled sandwiches and as the bar where the negroni cocktail was invented.]
5. [Editors' note. Giovanni Bovio (1837–1903) was an Italian philosopher, writer of among other works, the drama *Cristo alla festa* who founded the *Partito Repubblicano Italiano* ('Italian Republican Party') in 1895.]
6. [Editors' note. Antona-Traversi, *Le Rozeno*.]
7. [Editors' note. Reference to Canto V of Dante's *Inferno* in which the reading of a tale of seduction pleases the readers and induces them become lovers. The 'galeotto' is a seductive prompt.]

# The Philosophy of Cinematograph

*Giovanni Papini*

In just a short period, in every large town in Italy, we have seen the almost miraculous multiplication of motion picture theatres.

In Florence alone, the city for which we have accurate figures, there are already twelve theatres—that is one for every 18,000 inhabitants.

These theatres with their invasive lighting, with their grandiose triple-colour posters replaced every day, the raucous arias ringing out from their phonographs, the tired calls of their small orchestras, the weary announcements by red-uniformed boys, are now invading the main streets, closing down the cafés, opening up to replace the halls of restaurants or billiard rooms, they join forces with bars. With a sweep of their arc lamps, they have the temerity to shine their lights into the mysterious old piazzas, and are even threatening to expel the live theatres, just as the tramways have replaced public carriages, newspapers have replaced books, and bars have taken the place of cafés.

Although the philosopher is by nature a person who lives a secluded life, generally opposed to noise and fuss, it would be a mistake on his part to ignore these new leisure establishments, leaving them for the curiosity of the kids, the ladies, and the common people.

Success such as this, in such a short period of time, must have some reason, and once he has discovered these reasons, it is possible that, in the motion picture, the philosopher could uncover new concepts for reflection, and who knows? He may even find new moral emotions and new metaphysical suggestions to explore. To the true philosopher—not the type who limits his contemplation to pouring over books, and whom we could define as a mere retailer of philosophy—there is no aspect anywhere, no matter how small, humble, unimportant, or ridiculous, that does not contain some serious matter for reflection, and those who philosophize only and exclusively when speaking of the external world or a synthetic *a priori* judgement bear a closer resemblance to an anatomist, who is incapable of discussing anything other than monstrous creatures and cases of teratology.

And therefore, movie theatres are just as worthy of some reflection, and I would strongly advise some of these sober and knowledgeable gentlemen to go a little more often. They could begin by asking themselves the reason why this luminous entertainment has become so popular with the public. Those who reflect a little on the characteristics of modern civilization will



not find it difficult to link certain facts related to motion pictures with other facts, which reveal the same tendencies. Compared to theatre—which it partially intends to replace—motion pictures have the advantage of being a shorter spectacle, less tiring and less expensive, and therefore it requires less time, less effort, and less money. We must remember that one of the characteristics that is gradually becoming increasingly important in modern life is the tendency to save money, not because of fatigue or cupidity—on the contrary, this generation produces more and is more wealthy—but precisely because, with the same amount of time, effort, and money, they can obtain more. Motion pictures satisfy all these thrifty tendencies simultaneously. It provides a short phantasmagorical spectacle that lasts twenty minutes, and anybody who wishes to do so can participate for twenty or thirty cents. It does not require a very high cultural level, a lot of concentration, a lot of effort in order to follow the plot. It also has another advantage, in that it occupies only *a single sense*—sight—since nobody pays much attention to the mediocre and monotonous music that acts as a background to the film. And this unique focus is ensured even further, in an artificial manner by the Wagnerian darkness of the theatre, which prevents any distraction, those greetings and furtive glances that can be seen frequently in sometimes too brightly lit live theatre.

But the popularity enjoyed by the motion picture theatre is not limited merely to petty economic reasons. It can also partially be explained by other aspects, which are more advantageous than live theatre, although it may be inferior in many other aspects. The greatest advantage consists in the *reproduction of vast and complicated events over long periods of time*, impossible to reproduce on stage, even by the most talented riggers. An expedition with all its vicissitudes, adventures with savages, the ship embarking, travel in Polar Regions, are representations that would involve endless scenery changes, and enormous space in order to give some semblance of realism. On the other hand, sitting before the white screen in a movie theatre we have the impression that we are watching *true events*, as if we were watching through a mirror, following the action hurtling through space. These are only images—small, luminous, two-dimensional images—but they give the impression of reality far better than the scenery and backdrop of any of the best live theatres.

Another advantage over theatre that motion pictures can offer is that they can show important, true events only a few days after they have actually occurred, and not only a written description or a fixed illustration, but a succession of movements taken from actual events and full of vitality. In these cases, the motion picture combines the properties of the

daily newspaper and the illustrated magazine: Newspapers describe events shortly after they occur but without the images; magazines provide the images, but they are motionless and fixed in space, while motion pictures show us the pictures captured on film while they are happening. This offers our curiosity something unique: scenes of actual transformation.

Thanks to the secrets and the tricks of photography, which have given us incredible images (a man holding his own head in his hand, etc.) and false ghostly photos (nebulous and transparent human beings), now it is possible to obtain celluloid films showing the most incredible and extraordinary actions: people who suddenly disappear into the floor; figures that exit from framed paintings and begin to dance a minuet in the room; miraculous dividing up of bodies; processions of heads without bodies or bodies without heads; statues that come to life and begin to play music; animals transformed into human beings; people that can pass through walls; anything that man could possibly imagine in his wildest dreams or strangest fiction. In this respect, motion pictures help develop the imagination, a little like opium without the negative effects; the visual realization of the most incredible illusions. Thanks to photographic subterfuge, we are able to enter a world with two dimensions that is far more imaginary than our own.

But if these observations explain the sudden notoriety of the Lumière Brothers' ingenious invention, even if only in part, they do not, however, justify my advice to philosophers. And yet, philosophers too, as well as moralists and metaphysicians, can gain inspiration in these darkened theatres instead of wandering about the marketplaces and piazzas, like Socrates, or among the tombstones like Hamlet, or on a mountaintop like Nietzsche. The world as it is presented to us in motion pictures is a great lesson in humility. It is made only of *little images of light*, small, two-dimensional images; and yet, in spite of that, they give us an impression movement and life. This is the spiritualized world reduced to a minimum, produced from the most ethereal and celestial of substances, with no depth, no solidity, dream-like, immediate, imaginary, unreal. This is how the existence of mankind can be reduced to a wisp without removing any of its reality!

As we watch those gossamer light images of ourselves, we almost feel like the gods contemplating their own creations, made in their own image and likeness. Spontaneously, the thought occurs to us that somewhere there is *somebody* watching us, in just the same way we are watching the figures in the motion picture and to whom we—who are flesh and blood, real, eternal—may simply seem to be coloured images speeding towards our death merely for his entertainment. Could the universe be simply a vast spectacular motion picture with a few changes in the programme now and

then, for the leisurely entertainment of a host of unknown supernatural powers? And thanks to photography, we discover how much our movements lack grace, how certain mechanical gestures seem ridiculous, the vanity in our absurd expressions, and how the divine spectators must smile as they observe us bustling about on this tiny planet, scurrying hurriedly in all directions, distressed, stupid, avaricious, absurd, until our role is finished and, one by one, we leave the screen for the silent darkness of death.

*'Filosofia del cinematografo'*, *La Stampa*, 41 (18 May 1907), pp. 1–2. Translated by National Cinema Museum of Turin.

# Summertime Spectacles: The Cinema

*Gaio*

The cinema is not a special summertime spectacle: the cinema is for all times and for all places: like the bicycle or the *bar automatico* (vending machine). When the dog days of summer rage on, and concert halls are shuttered, and theatres that are open are very few and barely survive—hanging on for dear life here and there—and even small variety show theatres languish while the stars and the divas, who temporarily come back down to earth, rest on their metaphorical laurels—both among the rocks of the seashore and non-metaphorical springs, only the cinema remains, undisturbed and surviving: the summertime spectacle *par excellence*. Films know no rest: their frenetic movement continues through the seasons with no respite: exactly as the voice of a singer, through the horn of a gramophone, becomes capable of the most sinister marvels of endurance. Let the dog days beat down: films demand no vacation, the—how can I put it—‘gramofonized’ voice of the singer never tires out—at most, maybe it tires out the neighbours. As it often happens in the middle of August, the most bitter enemies of mechanical art, first seen hesitating at the entryway that opens up new domains of theatrical illusion; now [they are] mixed amongst the regular clients who wait their turn in blissful calm, in front of the fans.

Let’s be honest: the esteemed association of theatre owners seems resolved of their goal to keep away from their doors all those who suffer from or who pride themselves on some refinement in taste. Rascally posters, ‘sensational’ ads, arc lamps that shake and sizzle in narrow halls; frenzied sounds from player pianos, the shouts of barkers, the trills and warbles of the gramophones, electric bells that launch non-existent alarms always announcing an end that never ends and a beginning that never begins. One must acknowledge that the waiting is rather tormenting. Every once in a while, I have seen some novice who was daunted by the new Babel, fleeing before the gates were even open to the public. Even I, as a novice, felt these moments of distressing uncertainty. You know that in the movie theatre smoking is prohibited: so great is the fury with which gusts of smoke billow out to the left and to the right in anticipation of this imminent temporary abstinence: nor is there lacking, alas, with such great clouds a little bit of rain.

Everything ends down here, even the wait at the cinema. God willing, let us enter: and we enter quietly, without the confused stampede that

characterizes the Latin crowd when it moves with anxiousness in the conquest of a better seat. In the small halls of the cinema, the seats are established with much greater discernment than in traditional theatres. Except from the respect owed to Richard Wagner, it seems that here people have made a treasure out of his rules: from each seat in the hall, one must be able not only to see well, but see the entire scene equally well. It would be too bad if a man's hat were so extravagant and monumental that it ruined one's enjoyment of the show. The audience knows it, and yet, they do not rush: they enter without eagerness, sure of being well situated no matter what happens.

The ringing of a bell, the final echo of disasters now forgotten: some opening joke and then silence, and then darkness. (Wagner all over again!).

What silence! That same audience that chats, coughs, and fidgets about in the theatres where people go to hear and to see—often more to see than to hear—here, where people go only to see, they don't even breathe. Hardly a stifled exclamation of wonder, hardly a weak whisper of commiseration underscore the moments of pathos: the bloodshed, the disaster, the end of the world. Rather brief comments are reserved for the very brief intermezzos between one 'number' and the next. Only towards the end, when the oddities of the farce follow one after the other with a frenetic crescendo, does some open laughter break the dignified silence. And when the lights come back on once and for all, the spectators, with the same calm composure, get up and leave very satisfied for one very good reason: they had a good time at a brief show, and for very little money. Three very rare requirements that make the cinema not only an excellent substitute for other theatres in the so-called dead season, but also a formidable competitor when the season is sprightly or alive with its greater vitality.

Indeed, look at how they are increasing in number. They're growing exponentially, they are spreading from the central neighbourhoods of the city into the periphery, they are invading old cafés, old *trattoria*, and even old theatres, which have thus been made obsolete. It seems that the future belongs to them. Nor should it be ruled out that by multiplying, they will not sooner or later have to improve themselves in those areas which seem in most need of improvement. For example, in the cinematic composition, in the so-called action, which cannot be confused with the reproduction of exotic countries and customs, of real life and real events. This second category of cinematic spectacles should get a unanimous vote. A voyage to Japan, a trip in the upper Nile, which costs a few cents, and which lasts a few minutes are, in a certain sense, measures of distributive justice. By virtue of machines, among the so greatly longed for possible equalities,

one is establishing itself that was completely unforeseen by sociology: the equality of man in travel. The same thing, using different words, could be said about 'the happenings of the day': the launch of battleships, the meeting of two sovereigns, car races, mine explosions, and so on.

With cinematic 'action', drama, comedy, or farce, we leave the state of necessity and enter into the state of possibility. One can do better, one can do worse. Here, criticism stakes its claim: like the filmmakers who want their own films protected by law (as I revealed in the most recent bulletin of the Society of Authors)...

Cinematic 'action' is essentially governed by the same norms that govern pantomime: a theatrical genre which, let it be said in parentheses, has been out of style for some time. The mime—the man who speaks with his eyes, reasons with his hands, and despairs with all four limbs—is pretty much considered a museum piece in our times. And yet, people who would fall asleep on their feet while watching a pantomime remain awake, even though they're seated, and take a rather lively interest in a cinematic action that is put together well. Why?

Because cinematic action has a very particular, invaluable advantage over common pantomime: it can be—we acknowledge—situated in the *real* world. A love story? No problem: we will meet the protagonist either in the crowd of the city streets or in solitary walks in a public garden or on a beach. And they will be real streets, real gardens, a real beach. A crime on a train? Even better: we will project onto the screen a real train that arrives, that departs, that empties out, and that fills up with passengers. Life will animate the scenic fiction in a thousand ways that art can not. To hell with backdrops, *papier maché* trees, snowfalls of shavings, fireworks, and an electric sun! Life, with its countless little dramas and with its countless little comedies will accompany the preordained and fictitious events with a broad, inimitable rhythm. With the very rapid succession of the frames, unknown to pantomime, this diffuse and almost impalpable life will manifest its essential character (a supreme illusion), as if it were reproduced in its moving forms.

This is what happens in cinematic 'actions', even in those most ingeniously put together, the discerning viewer is often led to lose sight of the frenetic gesticulations of the 'characters', and to follow with his gaze the unknown little figure that crosses the street, the small group of people who have stopped to watch from far away, or maybe even the dog with the wagging tail who runs all around the improvised set...Life! The cinema is and must be the triumph of life. If the cinematic 'actions' are suitable or even necessary for satisfying the tastes of the widest audience, let them at least

take place in an *real* setting. The rolling of the eyes, the convulsive shaking, the desperate gesticulations of 'characters' will be more easily accepted if life is circulating and pulsing around them. Until the day (alas, it does not seem close) in which the ingenuity of filmmakers succeeds in giving an adequate shape to an artistic dream and in mechanically translating on the screen the highest and most marvellous fantasies. For now, the fantastic spectacles and *fèeries* of the cinema are cold reproductions of modest choreographic actions: the wonderful device inevitably is less than pantomime. Movies, in their vertiginous tumult give us the exact image of those backdrops, those *papier maché* trees, those snowfalls of shavings, those fireworks, those electric suns, which are neither the envied, nor enviable patrimony of the true theatre. We thus have the faithful image of a more or less faithful imitation: something like an imitation raised to the second power. This is why, in what should be the sign of illusion, illusion is, as a rule, absent.

But no one can foresee where we will end up in the blessed dominions of this mechanical art. It's just that we must not be hasty. Think of it: the basic principal of optics on which the cinema of today has flourished (a French scientist has just recently reminded us of this), was not unknown to Lucretius and was fully illustrated by Ptolemy, twenty and seventeen centuries ago, respectively. But in those days, the cinema was at most a fiery ember which, rolling through the air, drew a luminous curve. You know what it is today.

Do we want to bet that in seventeen or twenty centuries the cinema will have succeeded in giving an adequate shape to an artistic dream and in translating on the screen the highest and most marvellous fantasies?

'*Spettacoli estivi. Il cinematografo*', *Corriere della Sera*, 32/228 (21 August 1907), p.3. Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.

# Why I Love the Cinema

*Maffio Maffii*

I do not like visual spectacles that are too perfect as they are like an insult to man's fantasy, imagination, and creative genius. When the stage offers you all of the most minute, moving, and delightful details that you can think of, how can you feel exalted, interested, entertained, moved? I am convinced that when ancient theatre presented the audience with a permanent and extensive set—one made up of four columns, three doors—the audience's enjoyment must have been extraordinary because the quickness of their imagination, excited by the drama, created the rest of the scene in a flash. So, when Shakespeare was staged in the seventeenth-century England with a rough apparatus of a few lights and a few canvases, the spectators could understand the idea of a fantastical setting like that of *King Lear* or *The Tempest* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Today, even with a thousand games of electrical lighting, a thousand combinations of coloured glass and a thousand complicated mechanisms, it would no longer be possible to achieve that enviable result.

From this point of view, the cinema is most delightful.

Your imagination, excited by the constant passing by of shots, scenes, landscapes, and the most far-away and unusual settings, must work tirelessly in order to allow you the illusion of reality. When the flickering of lights and shadows on a white screen show you a train robbery in the middle of a forest; and then the inside of a ransacked postal carriage after the commission of a murder; and then a chase over an uneven plain; and then the inside of the jail where they have thrown the culprits; and then a large square with a gallows in the middle of it—you can reconstruct the entire story of the plot and the crime from all of these separate, rushed, and imperfect images. In the end, it's you, it's your mind that—relying on those few shots and those few fleeting signs—creates this frightful vision and represents it to you as something real. You fill up the gaps with your imagination, you depict the spaces in between, and you carry out the role of spectator a bit like an actor and a bit like a spectator.

All of that individual activity contributes to sharpening for you the pleasure or the pain (which is also always a pleasure in the end) of the optical, scenic, and dramatic illusion.

For this reason, I love the cinema.

It leads the human soul to the unreal—a reality that is the goal of every form and every work of art. With the simplest tools, it takes our imagination



into the most varied and complicated worlds. With cinema, even the most extraordinary *féeries* seem possible to us. And the magical marvels, which are most surprisingly fantastical, appear before our senses with the same certainty with which we feel the handle of a stick in the palm of our hand. The cinema is Ariostan.<sup>1</sup>

And one cannot love *Orlando Furioso* (*The Frenzy of Orlando*) and the *Le mille e una notte* (*Arabian Nights*) without also loving that crazy magic lantern that, in the space of a half an hour, transports our imagination across a hundred of the most unusual lands, through a thousand of the most sharp sufferings, to regions never seen and dreams never dreamed. If cinema has crushed theatre, the real reason is that the cinema is just more fantastical, more agile, and more idealistic than the theatre.

'*Perché amo il cinematografo*', *La Lanterna*, 8 (29 February 1908), p. 1. Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.

## Note

1. [Editors' note. The adjective Ariostan refers to the poet Ludovico Ariosto (1474–1533).]

# The Movie Theatre Audience

*Giovanni Fossi*

Edmondo de Amicis published a voluminous book entitled *La carrozza di tutti* (*The Carriage for Everyone*) in which he describes with his usual incomparable naturalness, the typical and not so typical people who ride the tram.

I would advise the illustrious author to write a new book to examine the people who go to the movies. To do so would be to draw out a magnificent study of environment, behaviour, and also psychology.

At this point, every social class has been put under the microscope of that inexorable busybody called 'the psychological novel'. From Paul Bourget who, according to the happy expression of Celestina (the sensual maid invented by Mirbeau), examined the souls whose bodies have an income of at least 25,000 lira, to Mirbeau himself, who instead goes sniffing out the odours that emanate from the most nauseating mass of rotting human flesh. From the great Émile Zola, who inspected all the locales of the Paris of the Empire and of the Third Republic, to Alexandre Dumas, Jr., who descended into the heart of the prostitute, as all the greatest authors of our times have taken upon themselves the duty of writing thousands and thousands of pages in order to research in all places public and private, the subjects of their descriptions and their analyses: this is what is called 'a study from life'.

And why couldn't one write a book about movie theatres and therefore study not only the audience, but also the people who make it happen and who are put into motion by it?

New discoveries create new places and new customs—after having destroyed the old ones. In the same way, the destruction of certain neighbourhoods and the opening of new roads create new ways of living together and do away with old and traditional customs. The passengers and the staff of the stagecoaches of a hundred years ago were certainly typical: certain novels of Dumas and Paul de Kock give us some idea of this today. These are types which have now disappeared—and who were followed by the railway men and the people who travel on the railroads, who were described so skilfully in Zola's *La Bête Humaine* (*The Human Beast*).

I previously mentioned De Amicis' *La carrozza di tutti*, in which he describes a whole new world, one particular to this most recent mode of locomotion.

Who isn't familiar with the countless descriptions, the intrigues, the portraits of manners, the analyses of the people at the theatre—both the

people who perform on stage and those who work behind the curtains, and finally—most interesting of all, the people who fill the boxes, the orchestra seats and the balcony? All of this is old news.

But, again, couldn't the cinema—this invention which has created a whole set of new customs—be the object of very interesting social study? Actually, this could offer an even more abundant subject matter insofar as the theatregoing audience is much more monotonous and homogenous, while the moviegoers are varied and changeable beyond imagination. Therefore, it would offer a succession of portraits which would be a treasure trove for the writer.

Further, the movie audience—which is predominantly made up of workers, women, children, and young people—is such that it lends itself well to observations that are more curious on some counts and more important on others: because workers and women are two social classes that encounter one another today with new outlooks on life, while young people and children—the eternal and renewing spring of the world—are in themselves an inexhaustible source of grace and gaiety.

Upon entering a movie theatre, one is instantly struck by the aforementioned diversity of the audience—which is more mixed here than at any other kind of performance. Generally, there are few who sit in assigned seats: everyone pours into the seats for the general audience, where you'll find the factory worker elbow to elbow with an elegant young lady, the restless, middle-class child near some old, buttoned-up gentleman: members of one social class mixed with the other.

It is, therefore, a bit of democracy that spreads into their behaviour. Or rather, it is the new behaviour, the new invention, that invites the spreading of a democratic spirit. De Amicis observed the same thing, I believe, among the passengers on the tram.

Picture it—it is already night-time. A group of pretty, young seamstresses with a mischievous air about them invade the lobby with their noses in the air, among peals of laughter. Some passers-by notice them, and one, made eager by that manifestation of so much of God's grace, decides to throw away 20 cents in order to find himself in their midst in a dark room for a good half hour. Or, there's a group of kids who have just gotten out of school who wait for the exact minute that the theatre opens and then rush in, with their schoolbooks under their arms, leaving their mothers to worry about why they're late.

There is no lack of amorous adventures. Do you see that young woman accompanied by her maid? All of a sudden, she stops in front of the movie theatre, as if an idea has suddenly come into her head: she suggests to her maidservant that they go in for a moment—just to rest for a bit. With a sneaky air, a young man enters the lobby alongside her and starts to read a

newspaper. But, inside the theatre, this guy will find a way to sit down near the young woman. In the darkness, the two people—who appeared to not know each other—will give each other their hand to innocently hold, and perhaps long and passionate messages. With all that darkness, it's so easy!

One audience that is more than a little curious is that made up of soldiers. Those soldiers who have come from remote villages and who know nothing about the big city are an especially nice object of observation. Ill at ease, they almost don't dare to sit on the elegant seats. And then, as soon as the show starts, you see them with their eyes wide open: of course, the experience exceeds all of their expectations, and they find that some small change is certainly not too much to pay in order to enjoy such a marvellous thing.

There's also the audience that we will call 'the occasionals', who only go to the movies every once in a while, or by chance. Who hasn't gone into the cinema after a long trek through the city, or half-way through completing some task, in order to rest from one's weariness, or because of the impatience of waiting for the tram that seems like it will never arrive? While you're inside, three or four tram cars will pass by. But what does that matter? You're tired of being on your feet. The cinema there in front of you tempts you with its multi-coloured posters and the shouts of the barker; meanwhile, the chords of the piano and the orchestra—with their concertos reaching your ears—succeed in persuading you. And you enter.

There is the servant-girl who has come here to spend the money that she pocketed while doing the shopping for her masters that morning; and there's also the scoundrel who wants to try to see if he can scrape together a little something while he's inside: a handkerchief, a shawl, whatever.

To be honest, however, these suspicious people are found more rarely at the cinema than elsewhere. We know that it's not the people with fat wallets who want to go into the cinema. Besides, we have seen that we're dealing with an audience nearly always made up of people who, even though they may be of a moderate social condition, are not those best-suited to being robbed. It is the same thing for unscrupulous women: naturally one finds more of them at the theatre or in cabarets. Even though, every now and then, there will be some example of them, for someone looking for this kind of women.

To sum up, the audience at movie theatres is among those most worthy of being observed and studied. We are pointing this out to our authors so that they will know how to derive a pleasant subject matter from it for their prose.

*'Il pubblico del cinematografo', Il Secolo Illustrato, 20/13 (27 March 1908); then in Rivista Fono-Cinematografica, 2/11 (February 1908), p. 20. Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.*

# The Art of Celluloid

*Crainquebille*

Towards the close of the last century a serious issue stirred up controversy: who might be the man or what might be the fact or the idea that could assume the honour of conferring its name on the dying century. Chronology and history delight in such designations: centuries, like notaries' green box files, must have labels. It is generally accepted that the sixteenth century was that of Leo X, the seventeenth century was that of the Sun King, the eighteenth century that of Arcadia: arbitrary designations, irrational and false, but eminently memorable and, as such, powerfully educative. Might the nineteenth century be the century of steam or Herbert Spencer, electricity, or Richard Wagner? Italian patriots, ready as always, claimed there could be no doubt that this was the century of Giuseppe Verdi. The question remained unresolved and will have to be decided by posterity—who will have no such doubts, however, when it comes to naming the new century. If a period of time is to be called after a being or idea that had most influence on its spirit, which has most profoundly dominated human existence, then that designation can already be predicted: the current century cannot be given a name: it can no more be the century of Marconi than Santos Dumont; not the Suffragettes nor Alceste de Ambris; neither the century of the *refouleur* corset, nor yet Gabriele d'Annunzio: it will simply be the century of Cinema.

Since there is no work of art, scientific invention, economic tendency, speculation in ideals, or form of fashion that can compete in terms of vastness of influence, depth of penetration, or universality of consent with that humble wooden box, its handle turned by a poor wretch on a stool in the shadow of a backroom: the box in which the interminable reel of celluloid dotted with microscopic images unwinds, with the hum of a busy beehive.

Like a trail of gunpowder tossed to the four winds and then set alight at one end, cinema has spread through the world with breath-taking speed and invaded the most impervious recesses. Perhaps with great effort and stubborn tenacity you might manage to seek out some remote corner in which the parasite plant of the picture postcard does not flower, but you will find none in which the clock-ticking of the cinema's cogs cannot be heard. Incredible examples were once given of civilization's pacific penetration of wild thoroughfares: the name of the lucid *Nubian* written on the sacred rock of an Egyptian hypogeum at the height of the third cataract of the Nile,

or the Huntley and Palmer biscuit tin worshipped as a prestigious fetish by a Papua New Guinean tribe. Cinema has achieved far greater wonders: I am certain that, with a drop of walrus oil in the works, it lightens the long evening hours of the Eskimos in their ice huts on Baffin Bay and the Chukchi of New Siberia; or aids the laborious digestion of the anthropophagists of Tasmania or the Baghirmi. Differences, whether of skin or dress, whether ethnic, aesthetic, juridical, or social, all give way to that solidarity devoted to the sacred cult of the canvas screen and ray of light. It was possible in the past to convene representatives from all the religions to a congress in Chicago, and they say it was a spectacle which could bring tears to the driest of eyes and most immovable of unbelievers; but nothing will be more moving than the scene of brotherhood produced at the next congress of cinema enthusiasts.

So far, philosophers have denied the importance of the phenomenon: they have scorned it as a simple diffusion of vulgar entertainment; they have not observed that it is denser with social philosophy than an *enciclica rerum novarum*.

The history of the cinema has two clearly distinct stages, one almost the antithesis of the other. At first, there was the ingenious and faithful mechanical reproduction of reality in motion, that somewhat tremulous reality of tentative infancy, marred slightly by a strange skin disease like an eruption of shiny blisters, but nevertheless a sincere reality. As such, it appealed to those of cultured spirit and to artists, but was not much enjoyed by the masses. The passion of the masses was aroused when cinema abandoned reality and turned to artifice; when, with the aid of imagination, scenographic illusion, mimicry, and make-up, it imitated nature, creating farces and tragedies, idylls and comedies, visions and mysteries; when it placed itself on a par with art: when it became the facsimile of art, but at an affordable price.

The most striking feature of modern society is the creation of surrogates. Between diamonds of pure carbon and those of lead silicate there is no appreciable difference for the layman, as auctions and sales by court order sometimes demonstrate, to the pleasant surprise of creditors and heirs: between those buckles, pendants, and brooches chiselled by a Lalique, and those which display their seductive gleam for a pound or two from the rotating stands of the bazaars, behind glass casing starred with rather epileptic light bulbs, there is no aesthetic difference proportionate to the abyss between their prices. And it is the face of a dressmaker, rather than her cloth, when she has spent a few pence and a great deal of energetic bargaining breath at the open market stall, that distinguishes her from

the lady who ruminates anxiously over her three-figure bill (never mind the decimals) with its French names and Royal household crest. The trend towards equality, more than collectivism, in politics, tends to lead to aesthetic and hedonistic parity in enjoyment and vanity: this trend is, or at least appears to be, trying to provide everyone with the same quantity and the same form of pleasures; and since pleasures do not exist as such, but are the fruit of our illusion or the reflection of another's envy, they are indeed provided in this way. Art and elegance used to be part of the aristocratic dominion, available only to those with culture, high birth, or wealth: now they are within reach of every pocket or lady's purse, from those with gold or silver chains to those in yellow metal or nickel.

Among these many surrogates towards which the inexhaustible genius of modern industry is directed, there can be none so pliable, agile, and dextrous in bending itself in every way and transmuting itself in every nature as that humble product of wood paste treated with nitric acid and impregnated with camphor: celluloid! In its 'seeming' without 'being', in its deceiving with lucid ease, in its docile fitting in with every requirement, it is truly the symbol of the mentality of modern life. So much more than biblical modernism, which is turning its dogma inside out like an old dried glove to make it softer and more suited to today's needs; so much more than reformist socialism, which uses the peaceful contact of oral persuasion to settle conflicts magically for freedom of labour; celluloid is an apostle for conciliation between classes and faiths, a conspicuous creator of well-being and social pacification. It supplies a pure and remorseless joy to anyone, especially of the female sex, who is unable to provide herself with ivory and agate, enamel and amber, tortoiseshell and coral: it soothes the pain caused by losing a comb in some flustered moment behind the sofa in a place to which returning will be inconvenient; it helps to accept with moral tranquillity the snapped paddle of a fan, rapped impudently in a gesture of pique against the terrace railing; it takes away the awe from the gift of a necklace pendant, to be conserved religiously like pure Baltic amber at the bottom of a drawer among gloves and garters; it allows the most modest throat to be adorned with an antique cameo, which may not have been engraved by the same Pirgotele craftsman who carved Alexander's seal, but which can be dropped with impunity to shatter on the floor in fragments.

Besides the miracle induced in the material world of baubles, celluloid has achieved the equivalent in the ideal sphere of art and emotion. Just as the pliable paste has provided facsimiles of luxurious adornment, the transparent elastic strip, bearing the grotesque anatomy of movement dried onto it in infinite stills, has supplied the cheap substitute for the

laborious constructions of genius: from comedy to drama, from tragedy to poem; with the aid of its brother in democracy, the gramophone, it even substitutes opera in music.

It has substituted them, and dragged them down from their throne, because cinema viewing possesses undeniable superiority. To arouse emotion in the mass audience, even the most slapdash manipulator of drama on the stage had to exert a certain amount of effort in providing verbal passages as logical links to the events. Cinema has got rid of this burden for staging action: reduced to its essential dramatic scheme, it carries the spectator with race-car speed from the cause to the effect: he no longer needs to read the last page of the novel, or await the last scene of the drama with impatience to know the final outcome of the tale. What remains of the action is only the plot, which is like saying it is the only thing of interest to 95 per cent of those who open a book or enter a theatre. What used to employ three or four hours of painful sitting in the absence of cigars, the boredom of long intermissions, the tiresomeness of the out-of-tune accompaniment, can now be obtained in a few moments. The feats of the most imaginative delinquent can be rushed through in five minutes. In these five minutes, the burglar can break into the house, kill the maid, tie a towel round the neck of the lady of the house, empty the safe, escape by the window, be nabbed by the police, taken to prison, judged by the Magistrate, sent to New Caledonia; he can see through the prison bars, escape from the penitentiary, shoot the guards, wander through virgin forests, assassinate a wayfarer, flee from pursuing cowboys, get lassoed like a riotous horse, and be lynched on a tree.

But that is only the beginning: events in theatrical art used to take place with the natural rhythms of life: at most, the conclusion could be hurried along a little, omitting the odd month, or year, or five- to ten-year period between one act and another. Now, however, with the cinema reels set at a convenient rate, the events themselves unravel with lightning speed: people move, gesticulate, and act as if pervaded with the quintessence of life: an hour passes in a second, two or three months in a few minutes: the eye is only given the briefest possible chance to take in the action. With the minimal means for holding attention, the maximum of emotion is achieved. The cinema could legitimately adopt for its emblem that same symbol used by American meat extract producers: 'an ox in a pot'. The human deed has been stripped of anything not indispensable for intensive nutrition: bones, skin, muscles, nerves, horns, hooves, tendons; all that's left is a bit of salty sediment in a jar: the plot. You don't even have to dissolve it in hot water like you do with a spoonful of *Liebig*, you just drink it as it comes: the water will be added on the way out, a long brew of comments to be infused



at leisure on the way home. Thus, cinema viewing abolishes the vexing need for thinking, suppresses the effort of reasoning, inhibits the logical control of instinct. No amount of discerning ingenuity can compete with its persuasive photographic realism: it is real in its falsity, false in its reality; it conciliates these two antitheses in aesthetic representation: character and ideal. It is the supreme form of democratic and socializing art, purified of any feudal aristocracy of thought, of any decadent preciousness of expression, of any abstruse symbol; the easy-access art for every intelligence and purse, contingent and transcendent, universal and eternal.

Theatre critics, dramatists, and actors therefore do serious wrong by protesting against the invading nature of cinema and complaining that the dark and unadorned salons of this new cult fill up with crowds who have deserted the bright and sumptuous ones of the traditional rites of the stage. They must take warning, the lesson is clear: their reproach is expressed in the sincere and enthusiastic support that the magic machine has received from a great artist. The divine Gabriele could hardly remain detached from this supreme renewal of the art: he who 'goes towards life', he who has adopted as the emblem of his activity 'either renew oneself or die', he who has written about himself: 'everything was sought after and everything was attempted'; he who, in his soul of souls, has envied the gesture of those who yoke the ox or knead the dough, has also envied the far more remunerative gesture of turning the handle of the cinema projector. He who opened new heavens for painting, with the fabulous picture of the Parks painted for the *Salon* in Paris; he who supplied with his Acqua Nunzia perfume, an *ambrosia* for the refreshing morning ablutions of his exhausted female readers; he who at last provided a dignified seat for the tragic Muse, with the Albano theatre; he who, with the elastic wheel for motor cars, gave relief to *chauffeurs* from their troublesome *pannes* now announces the re-education of the soul of the masses through wonderworking compresses, the celluloid legends. In truth, the poet was already heading in the direction of this ideal of cinematographic art with his last work, *La nave* (*The Ship*). In this play the triumph of action over expression is clear. If, in its reading, the play's verbal vociferation is appreciated by refined literary minds, on the stage it has no value in its semantic abstruseness for the applauding audience, other than a sonorous roar which might readily be substituted by the din of a wooden wheel full of pebbles which is used backstage to give the effect of thunder.

This was only a transitory form: we will be seeing the real thing shortly. Tragic dignity and mythical mystery will be brought into that ray of light, that evoker of images, by the poet. No longer just the kitchen maid plucking a *capon* and hiding the soldier in the dirty clothes basket; nor the servant

that lets the canary escape from its cage and replaces it with a duckling; the priest who tries to seduce the maid and ends up in his underpants in the street: we will be seeing Numa in his dressing-gown talking to Egeria, the nymph, and St. Francis shaking the paw of the wolf. Thanks to the rapidity of this modern device, all the confusion of relationships in the Hellenic Olympus will be cleared up in five minutes. The abstruse concepts of Indian philosophy, the Brahman mystery of metempsychosis, and that of Buddhist nirvana will become plastically tangible and comprehensible even for the fireman on shift or the red-jacketed negro giving out the programme.

And already the precursory signs of this glorious dawn are appearing on the horizon. Cinema is already turning its attention to the supreme creations of human imagination: we have already seen Hamlet appear on the magical ribbon, purified of the verbal exorbitance of William Shakespeare; already every evening Don Giovanni takes advantage of his 1003 lovers without getting out of breath in the effort. Soon we shall no doubt be seeing Tristan and Isolde gulping down their *filtre* and tacitly showing its effects, with cinematographic rapidity. Richard Wagner died too early: he missed out on this superb instrument of evocation; with the aid of transparent tape and an acetylene lamp he would have got over the only stumbling block in his colossal work: length! In quarter of an hour, the gods and heroes would have come out of that formless fluctuation of vagrant cells and precipitated into the mysterious shadow of twilight. The music would be lacking, but the majority of the audience wouldn't miss it. How many Wagnerians might experience some authentic pleasure for the first time! The Leipzig maestro would almost become worthy of a seat next to Puccini, even in the eyes of music publishers...

*'L'arte di celluloid'*, *La Stampa*, 42/209 (29 July 1908), p.3. Translated by National Cinema Museum of Turin.

# The Triumph of the Cinema

*Ricciotto Canudo*

A mild, rainy Sunday in Florence gave me the joy of recognizing a truth. I was lonely and filled with that certain kind of sadness and physical discomfort that comes from spending the night on a train. This sadness and discomfort were oddly softened by the spiritual atmosphere in which Florence envelops the spirit of those who have stayed far away for some time. I followed some crowds of people who were dressed in their Sunday best and who were moved by the slow desire to prolong their weekly stroll. It was in this way that I followed some groups into the hall of a movie theatre. There, I was struck by the rhythms of Parisian songs. I noted right away that in places like this in Paris, they prefer playing the sensual music of New York, but here, I heard smooth French harmonies. The orchestra was a poor one, to be sure, but not terrible. And I liked to observe these exchanges of popular rhythms—that is, the *essence* of a people—in identical places in such different cities.

Along with me, many people were waiting—and waiting with great patience. And while they waited, they played. They seemed very eager for the spectacle—the film spectacle—that we were about to watch. We were in the lobby of a theatre, of course, of a new theatre. But I was struck by the feeling of waiting in the space just outside a *pronaos* ('sacred temple'). This made me look at the faces of those around me to discover the spirit of the crowd. And this spirit was not religious, but in the facial features of the rough, and sometimes even proud and fierce common people, and in those of the satisfied lower-middle class, it seemed similar to that of artists and music lovers awaiting the opening of Sunday concert in Paris. It is understood that they were all new men who no longer have a temple, because they no longer have the faith that moved men in the old times, and that they are looking for a new and prophetic form of a spirit suited for the temple, a spirit seen in modern times at the Theatre and at the Museum. The spiritual desire that moves the artists of symphonic concerts seemed to me identical to that of this group of people on a Sunday afternoon. Some generations ago, they had all abandoned the Temple, and they were abandoning the Museum and the Theatre. I'm not analysing here the joy of aesthetic oblivion lavished upon those who are eager for sweeping orchestral expressions. I want, instead, to talk about what the cinema gives to modern men.

Among the marvels of modern invention, the Cinema immediately appears to be the greatest. It takes up and uses all of those marvels—either

symbolically or in real terms. We have created a new goddess for our Olympus. This goddess is Speed: completely worthy of the adoration that the ancients had for strength, and above all worthy of our greatest, most complex, and most refined sensibilities.

The deep, widespread mysticism, which can be recognized by a thousand different signs, even if it isn't also focused on a desire for a Messiah or for messianic men, slowly creates the spiritual temple of the new goddess. We cannot foresee through any apocalyptic ecstasy what the future temple will be. We think that our Saints will be our Heroes of rhythm, our greatest creators of aesthetic harmony. We also think that the *essentia* ('essence') of a new religion will be music, which is the only art that is continuously and incessantly evolving (i.e. growing in complexity), and which is the art that has only developed in an extraordinarily recent time. Indeed, through music, man communicates with nature, with the Universal. In other words, through music, he communicates directly with the synthetic consciousness of the Universe, which is God. Music will determine the era of direct union with God, without the intervention of grace, the reign of the Holy Spirit. And the new religion will be essentially musical, just as pagan religion was sculptural and Christian religion was pictorial. This is what we think today and therefore know, and it is only what we can know and think. But what will be the new Temple? This new religious spirit—which will again reunite the Theatre and the Museum, the joy of the Spectacle and the joy of aesthetic contemplation, the mobile and the immobile representation of life—what form will it take? And what will be the forms of the new art which will rise up, as always, from a new myth?

In a hall in which movement is wondrously combined out of photographic images and light, life is represented at the height of action in a real, feverish convulsion of action: here is an indication of the new art. Indeed, it is peculiar that all the peoples of the earth—either because of universal fate or because of spiritual telepathy—have only conceived of identical modes of aesthetic expression. We can examine in every country—from the most ancient Orient to the populations most recently discovered by brave cartographers—the same 'genres' of art: from Music, with its complement, Poetry, to Architecture, with its two complements, Painting and Sculpture. Five expressions of art—no more—in which the aesthetic spirit of the world has always manifested itself and still manifests itself. A sixth expression of art would not only seem absurd but inconceivable. Indeed, for millennia, no people has ever conceived of one. But perhaps we are witnessing the rise of this sixth art—as much as every rational man will think it laughable to make such an affirmation in a twilight hour such as our own—the twilight

of the dawn!—in which every form is confused and barely recognizable, unless one's eyes are made sharper by the will and the possibility of discovery. And this expression of art will be the conciliation between the Rhythms of Space (the Plastic Arts) and the Rhythms of Time (Music and Poetry).

Up until now, the theatre has achieved this conciliation, but it was ephemeral because the shape that Theatre takes depends heavily on the actors, and thus is always very variable.

The new art form should instead be precisely a Painting and a Sculpture unfolding in time; like Music and Poetry, which have life, they rhythmically mark the air during the time of their execution.

The Cinema—it's useless to change its not pretty name—shows life. A genius—genius is always a miracle, just like beauty is always a surprise—could complete the work of conciliation which is only just conceivable today, to find the means of an art—which today is rather unlikely—that certainly seems fabulous and grotesque to most, and to create a new current of aesthetic emotion with a *Plastic art in motion*.

The Cinema is composed of significant elements that are 'representative' not in the theatrical sense, but in an Emersonian sense, which is necessary to now put in order.

I said that it [the Cinema] has two aspects: one that is symbolic and one that is real, both of which are very modern, which is to say that they are possible only in our times. The symbolic aspect is that of speed. Everything is offered to the speed that carries it out. The spectacle reaches the speed that brings it to fruition. The spectacle achieves itself only with an excess of movement of *film* in front of and inside light, and it lasts for a short time: the representation is quick. No theatre could ever carry out scene changes with such astonishing rapidity, no matter how many mechanical marvels it had.

But more than the movement of the images and this rapidity of representation, what is truly symbolic of modern speed are the gestures of the characters. The most tumultuous scenes, the ones that are eventful in a most unlikely way, unfold hastily with a rapidity that is impossible in real life, and with clock-like mathematical precision, which would satisfy the inborn eagerness of the most extreme long distance runner. Our entire age, through a thousand shortcomings of comprehensiveness, has destroyed the love for slowness that was symbolized by our patriarchal fathers with the familiar sign of the pipe next to the hearth. The Cinema satisfies all of the most relentless detesters of slowness. The driver who watches a cinematic spectacle after having just finished the craziest race through space will not have a sense of slowness. Indeed, the representations of life will seem to him to be as rapid as those he has just seen in the places he raced past.

And the Cinema will also let him see the most distant countries, the most unknown people, the most unfamiliar human expressions—moving, doing, throbbing before the eyes of the viewer who has been sucked in by the speed of the representation. And this is the second symbol of modern life—an instructive symbol—that the displays of ‘wonders’ at old fairs contained in a rather rough, embryonic form: the destruction of distances, now through the vibrant acquaintance of the most varied countries, just as man’s iron and steel creations have done more and more since the last century.

The *real aspect* of the cinema, then, is composed of elements that *wondrously involve the psychology of the audience and the realisation of the modern Spectacle*.

*Tired of the unceasing theatre of adultery* (the base and *essence* of bourgeois theatre) and waiting for a new theatre of Poets (the tragic rebirth towards which the establishment of open air spectacles tends—though still in an obscure and disorganized way), humanity is searching for its own spectacle—the representation of itself—through other means. Unexpectedly, and taking on all the values of *an era that is still eminently scientific, that is open to calculations and not to Dreams*, a new theatre that is scientific and made up of precise calculations and of mechanical expression has arisen and has spread. Humanity has welcomed it with joy. It has provided the new Feast, the one that was obscurely covertly awaited. It has done so, *scientifically and not aesthetically*; and the Cinema triumphs.

And there, humanity becomes a young maiden again, as at every feast. The spectacles unfold between two extremes: the deeply moving and the very comical.

The pathetic and the comic engage and excite the spirits simultaneously, just as life does. And the young maiden, Humanity, lifts herself up, forgets herself in the hot pursuit of these very rapid representations.

And the quick gesture, which establishes itself with the precision of a monstrous clock with moving figures, exalts the spirits of the modern spectators, who are already used to living with rapidity. ‘Real’ life is represented in the highest way and is, indeed, ‘stylized’ in rapidity. Art has always essentially been the stylization of life in immobility: an artist has always been as great as he was able to ‘express’ typical states of mind and of forms. The Cinema achieves instead the maximum of mobility in life, and therefore makes us dream of a new art, one that is different from every manifestation that already exists. Perhaps the unknown people who drew in prehistoric caves, who reproduced the convulsions of a galloping horse on reindeer bones, or the artists who sculpted the severe races of the friezes of the Parthenon had the desire to stylize some aspect of life in an extreme

movement. Let not the Cinema reproduce just one aspect, but rather all of life in action; and in one action—which even if it is slow in the chain of its typical aspects, it unfolds very quickly.

This agitates to an extreme level the fundamental nature of the life of the Western psyche, which manifests itself in action, just as the eastern psyche has manifested itself in contemplation. All the centuries of western life open up in the *action* which is characteristic of our times. And Humanity, which has become a young girl at a feast once again, is cheerful about it.

One could not conceive a more complex and more sure action. All the strength of her scientific thought—making good use of discoveries and inventions—has composed for her this supreme spectacle of herself. And the cinematographic phantasms pass before her with all the electric vibrations of the light and with all the exterior manifestations of her inner life.

The Cinema is, therefore, a theatre of new Pantomime. It is dedicated to painting in motion and contains the full expression of a rather unique creation that is achieved by men who are in themselves truly new: a new Pantomime, a new *dance of expression*.

Now we must ask ourselves if Cinema is art. I say that it isn't art *yet*, because it lacks the elements of a typical choice—of three-dimensional *interpretation* and not copying a subject—which also makes it so that photography will never be an art. Composing the form of a tree on a canvas, a painter truly composes (unconsciously to be sure), in a form that is evident and definite, his entire interpretation of the soul of a plant and all the spiritual elements suggested to him by the sight of all the trees that he has been able to see, as Poe would say, 'with the eyes of a Dream.' In one form he creates a synthesis of analogous souls. And his art, as I've already said, will be all the more profound to the degree that the artist will know how to capture thoughts of deep meaning in a form that is definite and evident.

A bad painter copies lines and imitates colours. The great artist carefully lays down a cosmic soul in a plastic form. And it is so for all of the arts, which are all greater to the degree that they are less imitative and more synthetically evocative. While the photographer does not have the faculty of choice and of composition (which form the basis of Aesthetics), except with regards to the forms that you want to have reproduced, which not even he himself reproduces, trusting it to the light mechanics of a lens and a chemical composition. Cinema, therefore, is not art today. But it is the first element of the new Art: of the one which will be and which we can barely imagine.

A desire for aesthetic organization, meanwhile, moves the makers of spectacles. In a time of exteriority and of documentation taken to extreme

limits, rather than of creation, the Cinema offers a feverish spectacle of exterior life, completely seen from outside in quick gestures, and through documentation. Here, the tales of the past are taken up again, mimed by actors *ad hoc*. And the realities of contemporary life are represented widely—from fishing for sardines in the Mediterranean to the supreme modern celebrations of steel and of indomitable human courage at the races at the course in Dieppe...

But the makers of spectacles are already striving towards something else: they are striving purely and simply towards the ever more potent affirmation of the new Gestures which are representative of 'complete life'. The dream of a great artist—one who has the quality of being old-fashioned in his own Country and who has the ability to continually renew himself (in the sense of the aesthetic life of the world) while nevertheless always being younger than the throngs of young people who were born old—will soon be realized: Gabriele d'Annunzio has dreamed up a heroic and Italian tragic pantomime for the Cinema. And in Paris, two companies, which are led by two very noted playwrights, at least one of whom is an academic, have already sprung up and are organizing among the writers a trust of compositions for the Cinema. The group *Le Film d'Art* (*The Art Film*) is already spreading its products out into the world. Up until now, the Theatre, more than any other genre, offered immediate wealth. But the Cinema pays a good bit more, and hundreds of burning brows are already bending over the pallor of the pages dedicated to the creations that the new poets destine to the films and to their own very immediate success. *Charmed by mystical gold, hundreds of great minds concentrate their efforts on the creation of a modern Pantomime. And this will be given to the world, and it will be a new Art.*

On the other hand, the *Cinema*, beyond being the perfect product of the richness of modern science—which has been magnificently summed up—absolutely represents the most recent product of contemporary Theatre: not the exaggeration of a beginning but its most logical and extreme development. Middle-class dramaturges of plays dealing with daily life, *all of our dramaturges*, should have necessarily recognized in the Cinema their most direct representative and they should have, therefore, helped it along by using it themselves. *Because the drama of social psychology (etc.) is nothing else if not the degeneration of original comic theatre of Aristophanes and Plautus.* Vitruvius, who as an architect describes for us the divine sets that surrounded the actions of ancient plays, talks about the solemnity of the columns and the temples used for Tragedies, about the forests used in satires, about the Satyrs, and the houses used for comedies. The last of



these, the comedies, were a representation of daily life in its individual and collective aspects: today we would say psychological and social aspects of character and customs. Shakespeare, who employed a will and an effort like those of the greatest geniuses of English dramaturgy who had gone before him, was the precursor to our 'psychological' theatre and above all provided the *greatest affirmation for theatre with no music*. Theatre of this kind is absurd if it is tragic (and in that, the important and even ingenious art of Racine and that of Corneille, which is certainly more truly tragic in a collective, religious sense, are an art of degeneration); but theatre without music is no longer absurd if it reproduces the ephemeral life and pinpoints some aspects of it, without wanting to, or in any case not being able to pinpoint the 'eternity' or the profound soul of it. That is why comedy, from that of Aristophanes to the most recent French plays, to that of Becque, lives and gives pleasure, and gives pleasure also in its degenerate form of comedy with serious endings and aims and of ordinary drama. Now with the basis of such plays being the representation of contemporary life, *this theatre is essentially realist, or as they say in Italy, verist. It is necessary to represent life as accurately as possible, [effectively] copying it*. All of the playwrights who write for indoor theatre (*as opposed to those new writers who put together brief bundles of pages for the open-air theatre*) do this. *The Cinema does nothing if not exalt their principle, represent life in its full, completely exterior 'truth.'* It is the glory of that artistic eye which one of the greatest forerunners of the aesthetics of tomorrow—the painter Cézanne—called with holy disdain the photographic eye.

But the Cinema adds the element of absolutely precise speed and reveals, however, a *new joy* which comes from the certainty that the spectator has about the extreme precision of the spectacle. Indeed, none of the actors who move about the illusory set will fail to play his part, or will even be absent for even a single moment of the playing of his part. Everything is regulated with clock-like precision.

All of life shows itself to be ruled by a clock-like rhythm: it is the triumph of modern scientific principles—of the dominion of Ahriman, who in Manichean thinking is the ruler *of the world's mechanics*.

Moreover, the rapid coming together of life between the two basic extremes of the *deeply moving* and the *very comical* gives rest to the spectators' spirits. Everything that is an obstacle in real life—the unavoidable slowness of events in time and of gestures in space—is done away with at the Cinema. And furthermore, the *very comical* gives rest to the spirit, taking from its shoulders the weight of its mantle of solemnity, which bears the marks of all social hierarchies, and shows it cloaked in easiness. Here, life is

*simplified* from the grotesque—which consists precisely of the deformation of established forms *per excessum o per defectum* ('through either excess or defect'). The grotesque, at least when understood in this sense, destroys the horridness of existence and opens it up to laughter. And the caricature, beyond giving rest to the spirit, by basing itself on the exhibition and on the wise combination of the less important sides of the human soul—the weak sides from which stems all irony in life (which is itself entirely deeply ironic and crazy) and quickly turns into laughter—it develops in man a sense of irony, which is the beginning of all wisdom. The ancients recognized this truth, and, in Farce, they crowned the tragic spectacle with laughter. Modern people, instead, who have lost the sense of the necessities discovered by the ancients, now make the *lever de rideau* come first, but the desire remains the same. And Aeschylus' farce of the Tetralogy of Orestes, which is now lost, must have been immensely rich with potential laughter intended to lift the spirits of the elegant Athenians who has been overtaken by Cassandraian terror. Today, I don't know of anything more superbly grotesque than the *very comical* spectacles of the Cinema. Because [in the cinema] there are extravagant apparitions, the likes of which no magician could ever create, and sudden transformations of movement and figurations, which would be impossible to be achieved by men right before the eyes of other men without the incredibly clever help of mechanics and chemistry. Therefore, the complexity of this new spectacle seems marvellous. All the centuries of human activity have contributed to its complexity. At the point, when clever artists develop it into vast rhythms and into true rhythms of art, then the new Aesthetic will be affirmed. The movie theatre is the first new theatre. And when, as it is already happening in some way, it is enriched by Aesthetics and completed by music that is highly understood and that is excellently performed—even if it's just the absolute representation of *real life* with the help of a phonograph—one will be able to feel in it the Templar throbbing, the religious shiver of the religion that is to come. And the Movie Theatre of today will evoke for future historians the vision of the early, crude wooden theatres in which they would slit the goat's throat and dance '*L'Ode del becco*' ('The Goat Song'): the ancient tragedy.

The modern audience is an admirable abstractor because it takes joy in the most absolute abstractions of life. At the Olympia, in Paris, I saw the spectators frenziedly applauding a phonograph that in the scene was covered in flowers and whose horn issued forth a duet from *La Favorita* ('*The Favourite*').<sup>1</sup> The machine was triumphant. The audience was applauding the phantom sounds of distant or dead actors. And with a similar spirit, the crowds rush to the Movie Theatres, which are all the rage everywhere,

and they bring with them a desire for new Feasts. Every now and then, one can see plaques on walls that commemorate the men and the dates that mark the most recent stages of this colossal invention, from about 1830 to our present time. Among the most recent are Regnault, Edison, Lumière, and the Pathé Brothers. But what is more impressive, more distinctive, and more significant than the spectacle is the desire of the audience, which, we know, is made up of every social and intellectual rank, and, I will say absolutely: of every rank.

It is the desire for a new feast, of a new, joyous unanimity in a spectacle, a celebration in a meeting place where the oblivion of one's own isolated individuality is given out in smallest or largest doses. One day this oblivion will be aesthetic; it will one day be religious. And the Theatre that has the hope creating that which men of no other time have ever created—the sixth art (a plastic art in motion) and that is already creating modern Pantomime (though still crude and rudimentary)—I'm talking about the Cinematographic theatre—which also gives us, and strongly, the vision (though still only crepuscular) of a Temple.

*'Il trionfo del cinematografo', Il Nuovo Giornale, 3/330 (25 December 1908), p. 3. Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.*

## Note

1. [Editors' note. An opera by Italian composer Gaetano Donizetti.]

# The Death of the Word

*Fausto Maria Martini*

Who knows if one day we won't find in some new volume of Maurice Maeterlinck's prose some interpretative article about the cinema! Don't laugh: the theme would be perfectly in tune with the keen philosopher and nostalgic poet.

Once again, the small ivory ball rolling in the roulette wheel, or the sputtering of an automobile in front of which the rocky backs of the mountains submissively bow down like hired courtiers (this is an image of the poet's from *Oiseau bleu* (*Blue Bird*)), inspired in him certain pages in which vivid descriptions and suggestive and fantastic inductions follow one after the other—ranging from the field of reality to the hyperbolic frame of his mystical conception of life. The roulette wheel, through mazes of aphorisms and paradoxes, was becoming the tangible expression of the Supreme Will that guides human works and that marks the events of the day. The automobile was just an exterior means through which the occult powers of the demons of speed could be revealed to man: these same demons who hang around droning infernal stories in your ear when a 40-horsepower engine drags you, amazed by the superhuman force, in between two lines of trees. The simple and common things of everyday life were suggested to the commentator [Maeterlinck], thoughts just as deep as those suggested to him by the contemplation and investigation of the most exhausted place of intimacy in the spirit. The essays '*Au pays du hasard*' ('In the Land of Chance') and '*En automobile*' ('By Car'), which are collected in *Le double jardin* (*The Double Garden*) were and still are worth as much—in terms of poetic density—as the unforgettable pages on silence and on the soul which are collected in *Le trésor des humbles* (*The Treasure of the Humbles*).<sup>1</sup>

Now, the cinema also enters the chronicles of modern life as a widespread and essential element: the audience responds to the spectacle offered by this miraculous machine as other audiences in other epochs responded enthusiastically to spectacles that were more serene and dignified. A few days ago, Abel Bonnard observed that a single spectacle at the cinema brings together as many people in one room as perhaps the most successful of the comedies. And it does this without offering its guests the special kind of entertainment that comedy offers: the entertainment of the *entr'actes* ('the intermission between acts'). The audience resigns itself to the darkness of the room, renounces one of its most pressing instincts: the need to look

each other in the face and recognise each other. That instinct and that need lead to hearing the comedy of ideas, the problem play, the concert of the Ostrogoth *maestro*, and lead to attending, in short, all those meetings, which are like the exaltation of a feeling that a genius once defined as being most noble: boredom.

It must be, then, that some reason—even if it is hidden—justifies this new passion of the anonymous mass.

Let's investigate.

The life of cinematic figures is the life of men hounded by a nightmare. Maeterlinck would say that is like the life of characters in a play by Swedemborg, if Swedemborg had written a play. Everything—human beings and things—is stirred up by an infernal wind. Existence speeds to a start: a step is a race; a race, a flight; the gaze, a furtive glance; laughter, a grimace; crying, a sob; a thought, a delirium; the human heartbeat, a fever. Things are violently stirred up by the same fever that men are: even the earth's lowest forms, which seem destined to teach man the supreme laws of peace and serenity, are crazed by the Uhlan evil.<sup>2</sup> The countryside tremble. The mountains—divine examples of immobility—move, they waver, they fade away, they disappear.

It is a fantastic tumult: it is the mirror of the dreadful nervous disorder of our age.

This secret has been known for some time to the speculators of this new business. From active psychologists who study crowds, they have intuited which spectacles will better suit the tastes of the audience, and slowly testing the ground, they have arrived at attracting streams of people into the rooms where the great dramas, the traditional epic poems of humanity are schematized into their essential lines on top of a white canvas.

The flickering machine which seems destined above all to reproduce fragments of truth, today serves to mangle and to spit back out—in fragments that are shapeless and deformed—masterpieces of imagination and human thought. Some time ago, the thing that took the best place on the schedule at a cinema, and which sustained it, consisted of elaborate scenes in which the heroes of old serial novels or, in the best case, the principle characters from a historic novel (usually Maria de' Medici, Enrico IV, or Napoleon) reappeared.

Today, even more is attempted. Today, the speculator has become more daring. He has taken the book of Homer, has taken the book of Shakespeare, has called up some random bookworm and has enjoined him to draw from these works a scene for the cinema. On that bright canvas we have seen: Ulysses and Nausicaa passing by, Othello getting upset, Desdemona dying,

Shylock shouting before the Venetian tribunal, the figures of *Notre Dame de Paris* chasing each other, and Hamlet meditating on the skull which has been disinterred by the cemetery's gravediggers.

The audience got a taste of the scene, applauded, and left the theatre again feeling completely satisfied.

Isn't this joy, then, rather significant? What does this new sympathy and new passion mean for the crowd? Why hasn't the crowd rebelled against this undignified profanation? Ah! Is Carlyle's aphorism that works of genius touch the hearts of the people and the mind of the critic equally then not true? Ah! Are the people then satisfied with the essential outlines of prototypes of mankind's great dramas? Don't the people want to hear words? Are they content with gestures and action? Are they only interested in the story?

The word is dead thing. The word is wasted time. The word is an indulgence that the hurried inhabitants of sprawling cities cannot allow themselves to admire. Once upon a time, people used to read. People used to enjoy epic poems. Today, people read short occasional poems. Once upon a time, people used to savour novels page by page. Today, people skim through a novella—only if the title suggests the plot will have the feeling of a bit of the Grand Guignol in it.

Why, then, allow the renowned actor who puts on Othello's clothing, to recite those memorable lines which have been fed on the most aching humanity, before killing Desdemona as she sleeps in her bed? Why allow Hamlet to repeat for the thousandth time his monologue on death and doubt? Why make him tarry on the threshold of the great beyond? Why allow the poet to enclose in immortal verse the anxiety of the supreme passage?...What about the tragedies of Othello or Hamlet truly interest the audience? In the case of the former, it is the handkerchief of Desdemona that Iago had stolen, the strangulation of the innocent blonde carried out by the jealous Moor, and his death. For the latter, it is only the external signs of Ophelia's madness. The rest? Oh! The rest is literature and is not useful in the modern age. The rest—to use a phrase from Shakespeare himself—the rest is words: 'words, words, words.'<sup>3</sup>

And the word is dead.

Is this a warning to dramatists and writers of comedies? I don't know. What is certain is that the crowd wants, for its pleasure, a lightning fast comedy, a lightning fast drama, which unveils itself all of a sudden, and terrifies them in a moment, to then be immediately forgotten. Since the day in which the indifference and the swiftness of the machine have substituted the love and the patience of the authors, the slow decay of the word and of the value of art has begun. Today, we are at the *dégringolade*.<sup>4</sup>

Over the poet, the public prefers the machine which, through a stream of flickering light creates comedies and dramas, which are irreproachable and less demanding than the comedy or drama of a young person, that ask to live for at least the space of an evening.

Art (Oh! Not art, but the depraved shadow of the art) is granted the lifespan of an instant: it is enough—for the consolation of the children of this century—to extract just the basic miming and the inevitable gesture from mankind's masterpieces.

The actors and actresses linger on old, dusty stages against their will. They prefer the small set where a drama for the cinematograph takes place: they have lost their traditional line, they disdain the attention to and the religion of the word, they are made into mimes and nothing else. The effigy of Sarah Bernhardt is visible above the screen in the new theatres that are enriching their impresarios, and her tragic mask mask is very useful especially for the lens of a camera serves.

Is this truly the state of things? Who knows. It could be that this is the sad surprise that tomorrow brings.

Except that now that, through a natural venting, the alarm has been sounded, let's see if the new, great joy of the anonymous masses, the new passion of the People are hiding some element of genuine poetry in themselves.

If you go into a cinema, before watching the adaptation of a Shakespearian drama, you may happen to see the unfolding of nature scenes, surprises in the most far-off regions: forests, mountains, lakes, seas, a ship, a desert, a glacier, a small village in a very distant, unfamiliar land, a city that you love only for the loveliness of its name, a centre of life that awakened in you a tremendous curiosity when you were young, and a place to which you proposed to go, but to which you never will go...Correct?

So, in all of this there is poetry. In this way, the cinema finds its lyricism, satisfies a certain sentimental feeling which sleeps in all of our hearts—the nostalgia for those places that we have never seen, that we may never see, but where we almost seem to have lived in some previous life.

Do you remember that Dante Gabriele Rossetti poem in which the soul of the poet flies off towards some fantastical districts where he says to have stayed prior to his life? So, if you happen to admire the splendour of certain lands and of certain unknown places in an exact, cinematographic reproduction, that is why those sorrowful verses come to your memory: you were already in those places yourself. When? Who knows. In which roaming period of your spirit, which wanders all over the place?

For, in the end, thus is the psychology of modern man: fever assails him, life constrains him. But the more his daily routine binds to his chains, the more he remains the serene vagabond of the primitive age. And he enjoys it if some spectacle gathers two neglected borders of his land close to him; if it makes him think that at the same time those mountains, or those valleys, or those seas that he sees reproduced on film, reciprocally give their beauty to a rosy-fingered dawn, or to a romantic *claire de lune* ('moonlight').

In the end, it is the old '*amor de tierra loindana...*' ('love of faraway lands') for which Rudel's whole heart grieved.<sup>5</sup>

'*La morte della parola*', *La Tribuna*, (16 February 1912), p. 3. Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.

## Notes

1. [Editors' note. Maeterlinck, *Double jardin* and *Trésor des humbles*.]
2. [Editors' note. In several European armies from the fourteenth-century until the First World War, the term *Ulano* referred to a soldier in the cavalry armed with a lance and saber.]
3. [Editors' note. From Act II, Scene 2 of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.]
4. [Translator's note. In English 'collapse'.]
5. [Translator's note. This sentence makes a playful reference to troubadour Jaufré Rudel's notion of *amor de lonh* or 'love from faraway', a trope of Medieval love poetry coming out of the troubadour tradition in which the lover admires his beloved from afar. The joke here is that *amor de tierra loindana* could either be love 'of', 'for', or 'from' farway lands.]





## Section 2



# Film in Transition

*Francesco Casetti*

During the 1910s, attention for cinema did not shrink: if anything, it became more focused and more widespread. Newspapers still had an interest in film. During the Italo-Turkish War, fought between September 1911 and October 1912, newspapers dedicated their front pages to images taken from newsreels, which depicted soldiers' families and were intended to be shown to the combatants in order to keep their contact with the homeland alive. Newspapers also made room for public debates, like the discussion about the role of movies in national culture, hosted by Florentine *Il Nuovo Giornale* (*The New Daily*) between 20 November and 8 December 1913. Other disputes regarded the alleged conflict between cinema and theatre—a topic raised, among others, by *Il Giornale d'Italia* (*The Newspaper of Italy*) in February and March 1914—and the question of cinema's effects on morality, hosted by *Il Giornale d'Italia* in 1917.<sup>1</sup> Finally, newspapers opened new sections specifically devoted to cinema, such as the weekly column 'Al cinematografo' ('At the Cinema') in Turin's *La Gazzetta del popolo* (*The Peoples' Gazette*) from 11 November 1913 to 7 April 1914.

The interest of the weeklies was likewise increasing: examples include *La Tribuna illustrata* (*The Illustrated Tribune*) (a spin-off of the daily *La Tribuna*) and *Il Fanfulla della Domenica* (*The Sunday Fanfulla*), from which we have extracted two texts included in this section, written by Lucio d'Ambra and Edoardo Coli.

Eventually, an even stronger role was played by periodicals. It is worth noting that the second half of the decade saw the creation of publications of a new kind, addressed to a more highbrow audience, and characterized by a more sophisticated layout and more complex content. This trend affected cultural journals, like *Cronache d'attualità* (*Chronicle of Current Events*), founded by Anton Giulio Bragaglia, which was always attentive to cinema, but the tendency was particularly evident with film journals, like *Apollon*, *L'Arte Muta* (*The Silent Art*), and *Penombra* (*Shadow*) (which in 1918 changed its title and became *In Penombra*). The texts by Emanuele Toddi and Emilio Scaglione included in this section were hosted in this new kind of publication (as were texts by Sebastiano Arturo Luciani, Goffredo Bellonci, Anton Giulio Bragaglia, Lucio d'Ambra, and again, Emanuele Toddi in Section 6, and the short story by Federigo Tozzi in Section 7).

## Film Journals

New film journals deserve particular attention. Indeed, they bear witness to the role that cinema played in the Italian society around 1915 and to the changes that characterized the social and cultural context. In the middle of the decade, Italian cinema was at its peak: having gained a widespread reputation, especially for its mega-productions set in Ancient Rome, it enjoyed in Italy and abroad a large audience and high revenues. In particular, it increasingly earned the support and the favour of the Italian petty bourgeoisie, a middle class with some cultural ambitions that did not want to be confused with the popular public, and that found a sign of distinction in elegant representations recalling Jean-Léon Gérôme's or Lawrence Alma Tadema's paintings, and in chic props evoking Mariano Fortuny's dresses. This class brought to the fore a sort of sophisticated modernity, in which the sense of tradition was not lost, and the new was not necessarily troublesome. This was a social group that loved d'Annunzio and his rhetoric, and laughed at Futurism and its excess; that did not abandon the cult of Verdi's opera, but followed Puccini, and the *operetta* even more; that was nurtured by a liberal education and engaged in a large number of new professions; that wanted to pursue legitimate curiosity without falling prey to dangerous appeals by some radical trends of the time; that, even if not affluent, had money to spend on entertainment and small pleasures. While still an object of consumption for the popular classes, cinema became a perfect product for the petty bourgeoisie, with its desire for elevation and escape, elegance and scandal.<sup>2</sup> Film was no longer a novelty which had to be interpreted; it was a commodity for a new audience that expressed a new kind of cultural taste.

The aforementioned journals played a huge role in this process. When speaking of cinema, they reinforced the values that their cultivated readers wanted to find in the movies. By discussing screens, they expanded what screens were offering in a way that provided what the middle class was looking for. They played a role that went beyond merely being complicit in the middle class' movie-going, speaking to a need for recognition (and self-recognition) of a new social group, of new goods, and of new markets. Their action was inscribed in the framework that we have briefly described: the promotion of a more ambitious cinema for a more sophisticated audience and the promotion of a modernization that was at once smooth and effective. We will not find in the following pages the sense of an impending conflict, or even of the danger that is pervasive in other essays, especially the ones dealing with the psychological or sociological effects of the movies.

And yet, the change in sensibility that these journals recorded and promoted is significant on other levels.

Take, for example, the overwhelming number of pages aimed at publicizing forthcoming movies. Announcements insisted on the artistic quality of films: grandiosity, intensity, psychological depth, and accuracy were regularly mentioned as key features. At the same time, such a pronounced presence challenged the established idea that a journal had to be, primarily, an unbiased organ that oriented its readers: what advertising in this quantity revealed is that art had become a cultural commodity, to be consumed as such.

At the same time, advertising developed very innovative changes in the layout of journals. *L'Arte muta*, for example, offered folded pages that the reader could open out in order to have six full sheets displayed at the same moment (as in the advertising for the film adaptation of d'Ambra's novel *Il re, le torri e gli alferi* (*The King, the Towers, and the Standard-bearers*), in Issue 4/5 in 1916); we also find special kinds of paper, like tissue paper or rice paper, often tied to the elegant or exotic undertones of the advertised movie as well as photographs mounted on thin cardboard. These experiments tended to migrate to the entire publication, whose visual tone became not only more distinctive, but also recalled the feverish exploration of new territories undertaken by the arts of the time. It is not by chance that *In Penombra*, though less graphically advanced than *L'Arte Muta*, nevertheless regularly employed famous painters and illustrators like Fortunato Depero, Cipriano Efisio Oppo, and Sto [Sergio Tofano] for its covers and internal pages.

The journals' written contributions are equally revealing. First, we must underline the quality of the contributors. *L'Arte Muta* hosted well-known writers and journalists, like Roberto Bracco, Matilde Serao, Eduardo Scarpetta, Emilio Scaglione, Eduardo Boutet, Floriano del Secolo, and Saverio Procida; there was also often a section in French. *In Penombra*, founded and directed by Tomaso Monicelli—an interesting intellectual figure, and father of the future film director Mario Monicelli—went even further: every issue hosted an article or an interview with a major Diva, signed by an important writer (like Fausto Maria Martini on Lyda Borelli in Issue 1, published in November/December 1917). We find contributions by actors, filmmakers, professionals, and more than one essay devoted to urgent topics, such as the role of censorship or the state of film industry. There were critical and theoretical texts, columns, scripts, short stories, poems, and eventually articles on architecture, interior design, and fashion, which established a living connection between cinema and other aspects of modernity.

These journals opened a totally new context for reflection on film—especially compared with earlier publications, like *La Vita cinematografica* (*The Cinematic Life*), *La cinematografia italiana ed estera* (*Cinematography in Italy and Abroad*), and *Il Maggese Cinematografico*, which, despite being influential, were less elegant and less attentive to a wider scope of developments.<sup>3</sup> With their graphic innovations, their sophisticated pages, and their more cultivated readers, they reflected and led a transition towards a new ground in which cinema would be rooted.

### **Toward a Phase of Discussion**

There is also a second transition that is attested to—or even embodied—by the essays included in this section. It is a transition from an early phase of debate to an integral ‘theory’ of more defined and weighty topics. Since cinema was no longer a novelty, it was worthwhile exploring it in depth, focusing on the particular characteristics that connected it to modernity. Three major points of attention were thus central: how cinema related to the social processes of its times, either aligning with them, or making them more complicated thanks to the creation of new aspirations and habits; how cinema interacted with the spectator’s psychology, either improving his or her skills and competencies, or raising new obstacles and challenges; and how cinema improved our comprehension of the surrounding world, thanks to a depiction of reality with often unexpected results. During the second decade of the century, these questions raised the interest of experts who answered them in medical, psychiatric, pedagogical, religious or political publications. Sections 4 and 5, respectively centred on educational and cognitive issues, bear witness to the presence of this kind of approach. This section includes texts that are not directly linked to a particular discipline, but rooted in a phenomenological approach, a broad curiosity, and a sense of dialogue with the readers. The aforementioned film journals hosted contributions by intellectuals, writers, journalists, but not ‘experts’ in a strict sense: we find in them essays, not reports. And yet, these essays revealed the need for a more specific and detailed approach: due its relevance, cinema deserved multiple forms of attention. Indeed, we are here in a sort of transitional stage: on the one hand, these essays want to avoid any specialization and keep a direct focus on film; on the other hand, they are aware that it is time for a multi-layered and a multifaceted approach. They move between a previous stage, in which what mattered was the sense of surprise in response to a new and successful invention, and a later

one in which cinema was to become the object of a more dedicated and methodological investigation.

The essay by Lucio d'Ambra is exemplary of this transitional phase. D'Ambra maintains a motif that was central to the early debate: 'For less than a century, the creative genius of a few men has given us the railroad and the electric tram, electric lights and the telephone, the transatlantic telegraph and the wireless telephone, the automobile and the airplane, the gramophone and the cinematograph.'<sup>4</sup> These discoveries imply a deep transformation in our modes of experience. We no longer enjoy a direct contact with reality, but increasingly, we need the mediation of images that capture the surrounding world in its fleeting and ephemeral aspects: 'Every day, in every corner of the world [...] the cinematographic lens collects precise, living, and eternal documents of the life that is passing.' Film unfolds and preserves contingency. The topic is deeply philosophical, and it would find further development in an extraordinary text by Ricciotto Canudo, penned in the mid-1920s in France, which locates the essence of cinema precisely in its capacity to capture the ephemeral, as writing does, not with letters, but with light itself.<sup>5</sup> D'Ambra discusses the topic in a text full of lightness and irony, written for a reader that appreciates elegance more than scholarly specialization. And, as a twist, he advances a proposal: why not build a museum of fleeting moments with films that have captured them? 'Now we must found, among so many museums of dead things, a museum of things that live eternally: the museum of the Fleeting Moment, the museum of the Cinema.' Thereby, the totally modern experience of contingency will be fully satisfied.

Other essays included in this section are also representative of a transition between an early phase and one more marked by specific disciplines; sometimes, they capture emerging topics even more successfully. Such is the case with Emilio Scaglione: once again with a great deal of irony, he describes the effects of cinema on what we can call, after Simmel, the 'mental life' of provincial towns—an issue that his readers, mostly belonging to the urban bourgeoisie, can enjoy while keeping themselves at a distance. Film, he argues, leads to acceleration of the usual ways of living because it ignites an imagination without borders. 'The motion picture theatre has filled provincial life with new sensations. It has created worlds of fictitious experience. Indian pagodas, and Parisian salons, splendid desert oases and obscure Russian drama, tales of love and hate, gambling and money.'<sup>6</sup> These novelties might seem to threaten traditional habits, and yet Scaglione is confident that they have a positive effect. Even the possibility of a mixed audience sharing the same space in the dark—a true revolution in respect



to the past—can offer a great lesson. ‘By showing the women that they could sit in the dark only a few centimetres away from a man who was not closely related without having to faint with fear, the motion picture theatre made its contribution towards moral education in provincial towns, strengthening the awareness of respectful behaviour, moderating personal character and conduct.’ Despite his ironical tone, Scaglione touches on an issue that disciplinary discourses would later extensively discuss.

Edoardo Coli, in a more serious way, treats a parallel issue. Film changes body language: women especially have lost their spontaneous innocence, and have adopted a behaviour aimed at a valorization of their persona. ‘In new acting, the comedy of life has found new weightlessness, subtle elusiveness, acute suggestions, perverted undertones.’<sup>7</sup> Coli did not provide a more focused analysis of the impact of cinema on the behaviour and the mentality of Italians, but others would. Let us recall Ferruccio Valerio, who penned, among others, two interesting texts not included in this anthology. The first is dedicated to a detailed description of some segments of the film audience: in particular, Valerio analyses children, young women, ladies, and the elderly.<sup>8</sup> The second has a more psychological orientation, and argues that film’s capacity to offer true, vivid and often amusing representations of life can bring some relief, and even a cure, to neurasthenics; through movies, they can heal from their depression, and train themselves to cope again with everyday difficulties.<sup>9</sup>

Emanuele Toddi, Alberto Orsi and Ernesto Quadrone discuss topics more closely related to film style and film language. Toddi criticizes the fact that movies tend to consider their spectators as mentally feeble, overloading them with useless details and captions. What a movie must do, on the contrary, is give the spectator the possibility to complete and to anticipate an action, as if he or she were part of the creation of the work. ‘An intelligent film is one that equitably leaves a nice bit of work to the public, which is not excessive, and which thus generates interest.’<sup>10</sup> Alberto Orsi, meanwhile, focuses on close-ups. Movies generally use close-ups to celebrate a diva’s countenance or to underline the intrinsic beauty of a prop. And yet, the close-up goes far beyond these functions: it is a powerful resource for film narrative, and the best way of telling a story on the screen is to adhere to the spectator’s point of view. Indeed, in film there is a sort of basic law: ‘In the presentation of the frames, or rather in the framing, the director must follow the same rule that would guide an invisible spectator as he watches the scene.’<sup>11</sup> Close-ups define the amount and the intensity of attention that this invisible spectator must invest in what is depicted. Finally, Ernesto Quadrone analyses an often-ignored component, film titles, and tries to

understand what makes them most captivating. Once again, these three texts are positioned in a middle-ground between the early contributions, where the sense of wonder was evident, and future explorations in which the analytical component will be dominant. For example, the need to include spectators in the work of film has already surfaced in a text authored by Maffio Maffii included in Section 1, which will resurface later in more disciplinary accounts; Toddi, in his essay, preserves the immediacy of an early approach. At the same time, he prepares the way for the more detailed explorations that will follow.<sup>12</sup>

The idea of transition does not only imply the evolution towards a more sophisticated audience or to a more structured theoretical approach. There is another sense, plainly reflected in the essay by Giovanni Bertinetti. Bertinetti was a polymath, who penned several novels in different genres, some signed with pseudonyms, and few manuals, one of them about physical education. But he was also a screenwriter and a film producer, and a frequent collaborator with Luciano Albertini, a former circus acrobat and a popular movie actor, whose specialty was agile and muscular heroes. From this point of view, Bertinetti is a perfect representative of an earlier stage in cinema's life, in which professional roles were not yet well established. On the other hand, Bertinetti deals with a topic that would take on great importance in the major debates of the twentieth-century, namely the prevalence of action over reflection. He does so with the help of scientists and philosophers of his time, like Angelo Mosso, a famous physiologist, or William James and Henri Bergson, also quoted in his text. Bertinetti's portraits of the 'man of action' who tries to keep the situation under control, the 'lack of will' that spoils noble ambitions, or the 'desire of conquest' that moves peoples toward new horizons, are vivid and enjoyable, although it is impossible not to hear in them controversial political undertones. Within few years, Mussolini would seize power in Italy, offering an image of himself precisely as a man of action. Bertinetti was not an activist, yet his analysis (which brings to the fore important questions that future film theory would explore in depth, like the presence of a canonical plot in movies) enables us to hear not only the voice of film, but also the sounds that were circulating in the social and political arena.

## Notes

1. With contributions by Angeli, '*Teatro contro*'; Bellonci, '*Eroi del cinematografo*'; La Valle, '*Teatro e cinematografo*' and '*Censura dei cinematografi*'; Ricci, '*Etica ed estetica: del cinematografo*'.

2. For a detailed description of popular classes and their interest in cinema, see Orano, *Come vive*.
3. Pistoia, *Maggese cinematografico* and Grifo, *Maggese cinematografico*.
4. D'Ambra, 'Museum of the Fleeting Moment', included in this anthology.
5. Canudo, 'Reflections', included in this anthology.
6. Scaglione, 'Motion Pictures', included in this anthology.
7. Coli, 'Cinematic Psychology', included in this anthology.
8. Valerio, '*Cinematografo e il suo pubblico*'. Also see from that same year, '*Bambini?*', '*Signorine*', '*Signore*', and '*Vecchi?*'.
9. Valerio, '*Cinematografo in terapia*'.
10. Toddi, 'Darkness and Intelligence', included in this anthology.
11. Orsi, 'The Close-up', included in this anthology.
12. Maffii, 'Why I Love the Cinema', included in this anthology.

# The Museum of the Fleeting Moment

*Lucio d'Ambra*

The financial measures that the new Minister Salandra has presented to the *Camera dei deputati* ('Parliament'), which allegedly come from the policies of Minister Giolitti... (Don't be afraid. This is not about politics, never mind financial politics. Keep reading in peace.)...also contain a plan which, by taxing movie theatres, guarantees to the State an additional income of I don't know how many millions. These are millions that must counterbalance war spending. And you can see, in this case, the living sign of modernity: the costs of the old war are being covered by the modern things that we have: movie theatres, cars, motorcycles. It is true that there is also something that it no longer essentially modern. But if it is not modern, it is external—the bill.

This proposed law, therefore, hits the movie theatres with a new tax. But I think that a truly modern, truly 'up to date' ministerial cabinet should not have concerned itself only with the sale of films, but also about their creation, and more than their creation, their conservation.<sup>1</sup>

Now we must found, among so many museums of dead things, a museum of things that live eternally: the museum of the Fleeting Moment, the museum of the Cinema. The time to seriously think about this has now arrived. Each day that passes into further delay represents so much marvellous life, which is ripped away from death by an ingenious invention, and which, nonetheless is left to perish just the same. It is incredible that no minister has thought of this. The government occupies itself with preserving for posterity—through legally mandated storage in national libraries—even the most stupid, worthless book of painstaking poetic studies by the most illiterate poet. No one gives a thought to preserving for those who come after us the living documents of the life that we are living today, of the men and the things that surround us today: to preserve by law, in a specially designated museum, the cinematic films that capture for eternity the fleeting moment of our present time.

We are *enfants gâtes*, and like all spoiled children, who are too generously furnished with celestial benefits and terrestrial advantages, we are thoughtless, indifferent, distracted, tired of everything as a result of having everything within reach of our imagination and our fancy. For less than a century, the creative genius of a few men has given us the railroad and the electric tram, electric lights and the telephone, the transatlantic and

the wireless telegraph, telephone, the automobile and the airplane, the gramophone and the cinema. All of this God-given grace, which has fallen on us with such simplicity in so few years, has radically transformed our lives with such immediacy that we haven't even had the time to wonder at it. Take, for instance, the time in which horses seemed to man to be the best convenience that he could possibly offer to his laziness; the time in which things were lit up with oil lamps and people spoke only seeing one another from a few metres distance; the time in which our impatience was entrusted to the somnolent speed of a worn-out nag; the time in which the letter and the stagecoach were the fastest means of communication among men; that time appears so far away to us that it also seems foreign and fabled to such a degree that it doesn't even seem possible that men who lived before us could have not had what we have. We almost seem to picture Napoleon giving orders to his generals on the day of Austerlitz by telephone, and to imagine Caesar climbing into a 60-horsepower limousine to depart for Gaul...

So, we do not worry about those new obligations that the new conditions of life impose on us. What would we say today about men who, having had the means to capture for eternity on a few metres of film the people and the events of the great Napoleonic era, failed to do so? We are preparing ourselves for this responsibility with respect to those who come after us. Every day, in every corner of the world—but, because we are in Italy, let's only talk about us—every day in every corner of Italy, the cinematographic lens collects precise, living, and eternal documents of the life that is passing. Every evening in our movie theatres we can see, in its motion, in its life, that which happened yesterday in Milan, in Palermo, in Turin, or in Naples. The living chronicle of real gestures replaces the cold chronicle of approximating words. The luminous and living pages of current events in all the various 'newspapers' unfold on the screens of all the movie theatres.

Then the plan changes: yesterday's show is forgotten and we let all that we could have miraculously snatched away from destruction be lost [in accordance with] the inexorable human and divine law, expressed by the Latin poet as '*ruit hora*', or 'Where do all those flying leaves of the life gathered by the miraculous invention go?'<sup>22</sup> Where do they get lost, all those little strips of miniscule photographs which, with a stream of light projected on a white canvas, bring back to life that which was, give life back to death, make present again the past, stop miraculously, allowing us to us to recall 'the fleeting moment' whenever we want? Films have the same fate that newspapers do: a feverish and phenomenal birth, a splendid and brief life, an obscure death, and a deep fall into oblivion. But even old newspapers can bring back to life some of their dusty collections, give new sparks of spirit,

truth, humanity out from under the ashes of faded letters on yellowed pages. All it takes is for you to look for once curiosity at them, all it takes is one hand to leaf through them in the libraries, in the newspaper libraries, where they collect year after year, month after month, day after day. But how can we find old films? In the excessive annual production output, and in the even bigger production output that we will have tomorrow, how can we save those films that are worthy of sticking around? How can we later exhume from the under mountains of film the ones that have all but lost their commercial value, but to which the passage of time has given even greater value, those films that will have replaced the curious value of current events with the striking and precious value of historical documentation? How can we find among so many silly fantasies the living images of reality? How can we realize the wonder that man's clever conquest has permitted us, and has compelled us to preserve: not to be informed, not to reanimate the history of the world in the pages of books with the imagination, but to give it a soul and a body, light and heat, movement and life, just as its contemporaries saw it, just as that elusive moment shaped it—the moment that man captured it—to then give back to it a freedom that makes no sense, a liberty that means renouncing the gains already made, giving life back to time, which [otherwise] destroys and erases everything that shaped it.

Something that resembles a 'museum of the fleeting moment', a museum of cinematographic documents of our times, of our customs, of our events, was created, if I'm not mistaken, in Vienna. An institute created specifically for this purpose preserves those films that will one day have documentary value, sets about collecting them from the production houses, takes care to refurbish those whose conservation could be threatened by time. Italy should also be inclined to create a similar institute, I don't know through what channels, I don't know through what means. I also don't know if the cost of the so-called positive would allow us to demand that only one copy from the producers—at least only of the film that are a living reproduction of contemporary reality—be deposited in an office of the State. The details are up to the legislators. The public cannot not suggest an idea, acknowledge a need, remember an obligation, the obligation of preserving the life snatched away from death, the minute torn off from time, the 'fleeting moment' closed in its museum of eternity.

I ask one of the 508 members of the Italian parliament to make this idea his own.

*'Il museo dell'attimo fuggente', La Tribuna Illustrata, 22/20 (17 May 1914), p. 309. Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.*

## Notes

1. [*Translator's note.* The phrase 'up to date' was in English in the original text.]
2. [*Translator's note.* 'Ruit hora' ('time flies') is a phrase that cannot actually be attributed to Latin poetry. It is possible that d'Ambra was indirectly referencing a celebrated verse with a similar meaning from Book 3 of Virgil's *Georgics*, '*Sed fugit interea fugit irreparabile tempus*' ('But it flees meanwhile, irretrievable time flies').]

# The Woman and the Cinema

*Haydée*

While the war burned fiercely across the world, and epic fights flared in the sky and sea, underground and underwater, we saw forewarned in the newspapers the explosion of another battle, equally epic, albeit not so bloody; the struggle deserved to be sung by Homer, an ironic Homer who, after he had etched his verses into bronze and cast figures of Hector and Achilles, had fun carving in low relief the wars of gnawing mice. The battle is between the two big studios; and the object of the battle is the beautiful Francesca Bertini, the film star, the film goddess, the beautiful Elena of the camera lens, which the filmic Trojans and Achaeans contend for bitterly before the courts, not for favours, but for the poses.

A few years ago, she was—according to the legends that naturally form around famous men and women—a poor seamstress. Beautiful, very beautiful, in fact; someone tall, upright, lissom like a palm, with long, thick braids of ebony, a perfect profile, stunning eyes, from the long, arched eyelashes to the look full of tenderness and scorn. And then? And then, nothing. Everything could not but lead to a single point, the crossroads which are the same for all the pseudo-careers open to beautiful women from poverty; a cabaret singer or *mannequin*, a lady-in-waiting or the manager of a hotel; it's not a point at which all of the beautiful penniless women want to reach after all. So the divine Francesca continued to sew; when one lucky day, a studio agent saw her, shrewdly felt her *coup de foudre*, and predicted, with a Napoleonic vision, that thousands of *lire* were hidden in the sweetness of that pure, crimson smile, in the sparkle of those magnificent, dreamy eyes; he kidnapped the beauty from her Singer sewing machine; put her in front of the camera, and in blink of an eye transformed her as if it were a fairy tale or a film drama, the insignificant garment worker becomes a global celebrity, fought over by businessmen, celebrated by *réclame*, covered in pearls, lace, and bank notes.

Legend? Probably; but the crowd—the female part of the crowd above all—believes in legends, they feed off them, they love them: and this legend has a common course in the feminine public which crowds around the various *Cine*, from the most sumptuous, resplendent in luxury of gold-plated ornamentation and *Liberty* furniture, to the most modern installation—the word fits perfectly—in some silo on the outskirts of town. The film spectator, especially if she is young and beautiful, dreams while images unfold on



screen of the jealous husband frantically following the adulterous couple in a car, or the young tightrope walker, or the *detective*. How many things has the cinema taught them, in the middle of its absurd dramas or farcical comedies! Above all, elegance, true elegance, rich, wise; elegance in clothing, in homes, in furniture. She has already surmised from afar, seeking to observe from the gallery or in the arcade the beautiful *signore* dressed or undress on the stage, observing the scenery in some Bernstein comedies, peaking through the door left ajar into the apartments where you can't go beyond the waiting area; now she knows; at the *Cine*, she learned about the beautifully decorated rooms, the hair salons for *pompadours*, and the dining rooms made of the rich, dark Florentine furniture that is in fashion, the corners of the verandas decorated with climbing vines and Danish porcelain, the tapestries, the damasks, the antique silverware; she knows how to value the cost of a *toilette*; she studies the most modern hairstyles, her eyes thirst with the need for wealth and taste. 'Oleographs? Oh, for goodness sakes!'— exclaimed the little check-out girl the other day, who had the same look of disdain of an offended lady, as she got married and got her house together.<sup>1</sup>

But not all of them can get married or be modestly content their own artistic aspirations with the engravings copied from [Bernadino] Luini or Walter Chrane.<sup>2</sup> And there are still other images that pass by the eyes of a young female spectator, intent on devouring the 'masterpiece of film art' where you see suffer or make suffer—it's irrelevant which one—Lyda Borelli or Francesca Bertini or Leda Gys, or any one of the other super-actresses of *film*. That the female spectator is an insignificant worker at a garment factory, or the self-important know-it-all who looks disapprovingly from the keys of the Remington typewriter, or a lower middle class women who married too modestly because of the whims of her little butterfly brain, desperate for sparks of romance, the thought beneath those big unmoving eyelashes is only one: 'Why her and not me?' This is the phenomenon that can possibly be considered the most noteworthy among all those provoked by the immense popularity of cinema. Until now, female beauty had two qualities: one, the quality of love, the joy of being able to give something rare and precious to a man deemed worth of it; the other is the commercial quality, the possibility to sell this precious novelty, in one way or another, to the highest bidder. The first route needed luck; the second needed a strong stomach, a rosy disposition, and no scruples. And here, in the steady pounding of the projector's light, a new dazzling way opens up spontaneously in front of Eve, who is hungry for her beautiful golden fruits that poverty denies her.

There is no snake, no loss of paradise; there is the rich suppleness of her person, the beautiful, graceful neck, the delicate profile of the cheek, the smile, and the warmth of the look, the fluttering of bejewelled hair that can be sold without anyone having anything to find fault with. Tickets by the hundreds and the thousands, certainly; and lace and furs and jewels, of course; what's wrong with that? They can remain very honest, as long as they want to.

Rumour has it—you need talent. Certainly; but much less talent than what one needs to become a great actress or a great singer. 'To know how to walk and how to dress; a beautiful smile and arms' said a rather sceptical businessman; and he exaggerated. A floozy is always a floozy, even in front of the camera, even if she is beautiful and well dressed, and has that free and alluring self-possessed stride, which perhaps the tango helped give the women of our time; a floozy cannot ever end up becoming, even in the cinema, one of the ladies that fill up the dance hall on the screen, or one of the *garces* that live in *apache* tipi. Even on film, the '*prima donna*' must always have a certain talent, a certain intelligence, in order to succeed; not very many happen to have it.

That is why every evening—even in the tragic times that we are currently experiencing—hundreds of workers and petty bourgeois upon exiting the cinema—writes *il Carlino*<sup>3</sup>—close the door to their rooms, and lost in thought in front of the mirror, they try different looks, a smile; and from deep in the plate glass rises up and magically sparkles in front of their eyes, the charming New Mirage.

'*La donna e il cinematografo*', *Cinematograf. Rivista bisettimanale del cinematografo*, 1/4 (25 March 1916), p. 3. Translated by Courtney Ritter.

## Notes

1. [Translator's note. An oleography is a lithograph made to resemble an oil painting.]
2. [Editors' note. Bernadino Luini was a Northern Italian Renaissance painter strongly influenced by Leonardo. Walter Chrane was a nineteenth-century British illustrator associated with the Arts and Crafts Movement.]
3. [Editors' note. *Il Resto del Carlino*, popular newspaper based in Bologna]

# Darkness and Intelligence

*Emanuele Toddi*

I have sometimes left a cinema deeply offended. Not offended personally, certainly, but rather offended by that share of general insult that was my due, as a small part of the public.

During the film, there is within the cinema a large pyramid of light, the screen is its base and its apex the little window up above, from which a hum and figures in motion come forth. The rest of the theatre is dark. The individuals immersed in this darkness, however, are just thrown into an intellectual semi-darkness.

The cinema spectator is still able to think and, in fact, to reflect and meditate, far more than it might seem to be the case; much more than in the theatre. The proof of this is that there is no place in which the presence of a talkative neighbour is more agonizing. In the semi-darkness of this environment, lucid minds can still work, and they do. An intelligent film is one that magnanimously leaves a nice bit of work to the public, which is not excessive, and which thus generates interest.

Sixty per cent of films, meanwhile, go to enormous lengths to come to the rescue of the spectator, who is presumed to be semi-imbecilic. I have no idea what physio-psychic phenomenon dictates that the spectator, no sooner than he has entered into the semi-darkness of the cinema, must have lost a good percentage of his faculties of discernment.

Anyone who has spent an hour on the streets of Rome has clearly realized that a given group of two, three, four, or more young men following a given group of two, three, four, or more girls or women have intentions of a decidedly romantic nature. He can understand this in the blink of an eye, through all of those minute cues that reveal, who is following and who is being followed within a crowd. This individual, who is intelligent enough that it suffices for him to see this, enters into the first cinema he finds while looking around on the street. On the 60 or 80 square metres of screen appears a man and a woman, no longer in a crowd, but isolated in very particular conditions, suitable for revealing to the dumbest among novice filmgoers that he is in love with her. And yet, the author, actor, and orchestra are concerned with displaying for this viewer a series of...signs, in order to explain to him what anyone with the slightest intelligence has understood since the beginning.

Let us leave aside considerations of an aesthetic nature: we are dealing with intelligence. This is, however, a form of aesthetics in the cinema.

The cinema is, in d'Annunzio's definition, 'mute theatre', and we agree on this. But mutes have a very limited set of gestures determined by simple necessity, and the poor things are already quite comical. The cinema is mute, but it does not use the gestures of a mute.

There is a grandiose film (of which, for the sake of my well-being I recall neither the title, nor the production company) whose entire five sections hinge on the same document, which reveals a hidden treasure. Half of the document is missing, so that that the precious revelation is illegible. There is certainly nothing to object to in the 'discovery' of the document, since we are used to finding it in the hands of every policeman in the weekly serial. But the fragment of the document appears on the screen at least once in every three scenes, accompanied by gestures that might be defined as 'quadrangular'. This happens for the following reason: when, in the world of human beings, one wishes to indicate, even without words, that a document (even one showing the way to a hidden treasure) is missing its right side, one makes a simple, sober gesture with the index finger or an upturned palm. But, in the world of cinema, the film says to the public, 'You are such bunch of fools that if I show half of a document on the screen, with the lines of text broken off in the middle as a result of a clearly visible tear, you will not be capable of understanding that the other half is missing.' The actor thus makes—every three scenes—a complicated gestural description in which the point of the index finger traces in the air, alongside the existing fragment, the entire outline of the missing fragment.

This example, which tormented me for an entire evening, is hardly isolated; rather, it is the sign of a general tendency. The cinema, being very young, has tendencies that are sometimes infantile: we very often find, in the majority of cinematic 'undertakings', situations and devices that have already been commonplaces for quite some time, and which make us think of the 'son of poor but honest parents' from elementary school.

For a new art—and, moreover, an electric one—the already-established existence of conventions that it uses with a Teutonic regularity and rigidity (and is not moving away from), is anguishing.

In life, things don't happen this way; just as, despite what the texts in elementary school tell us, Pierino's parents are not always both honest and poor.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the cinema often ignominiously reduces itself to this, in a morass of commonplaces that seem to say to the spectator, with a benevolent smile, 'this is so you will understand better.'

This, frankly, is offensive.

There is no axiom that says, 'the cinema's public is stupid.'

On the contrary: the public has at times read, for example, the adjective 'mysterious' on the program posted at the entrance, and gone in to take a seat.

Isn't it making fools out of the public to take away, once they have entered the darkness, the very adjective that drew them in, moving them from the stalls loge into the wings?

Indeed, it is.

All, or almost all, of the films that promise to contain an enigma or mystery at their core unravel it for the spectator in the very first scenes. The mystery or enigma persists, but not for him: he knows perfectly well what is going on, but finds himself before the film's characters, who still do not. He thus knows everything that is going on behind the scenes: he is in the wings, which in theatre or in literature would not be allowed.

All of this, of course, makes for a clear plot, and the...mental relaxation of the spectator. The author and the actor have taken the public by the hand and told them, 'Look, I have thought of doing such and such a thing, in such a way, and with such a trick: the secondary character doesn't know, and we'll see what effect it will have on him'—almost a blink of the eye, and the public is made to witness a scene that unfolds just as expected.

In the theatre, the public understands many things that are not said; it sits through scene after scene, fascinated by a mystery whose causes it is unaware of, and guided towards a solution it does not foresee. When it is over, the public rightly exclaims 'Wonderful!'

In the cinema, the public is certainly more varied. All of the tenants of a five-story building attend the same cinema, but never the same theatre, and ballet (now ritually included in every production) has different admirers than the tango.

It is certainly difficult to gauge the average intelligence of this public; to calculate it as zero, however, is mistaken and offensive.

It is even more difficult to create 'returns' or 'flashbacks' in time in a production from which the spoken word is excluded, to clarify and explain when an event has already occurred, or to reveal its cause only in the final denouement. Difficult, to be sure, but cinematic art is, in every sense, difficult. Alongside this art, there is a vast swamp in which everything is quite easy: this is not art, but only industry, and when unsuccessful, it is made not by cinematic artists, but by people who simply film.

The public knows it. So, it is not true that the 'public' is the sum of the individuals that comprise it. It is that intelligent minority of individuals who know themselves to be a public; the etymology of the word is irrelevant. Should we perhaps not call 'common sense' precisely that which the majority of men do not have?

'*Buio e intelligenza*', *Apollon*, 1/4 (May 1916), pp. 9–10. Translated by Michael Cramer.

## Note

1. [*Translator's note.* In Italian, Pierino serves as a placeholder name, like John Doe, to indicate a generic identity or someone whose identity is unknown or withheld.]

# A Spectatrix is Speaking to You

*Matilde Serao*

Before the war, novelist, poets, and playwrights could not avoid noticing the impetuous and incessant agitation of the curious, even anxious crowds created by the cinema. Some of these writers became fiercely indignant, showing deep contempt for such inferior spectacles; others, more numerous, shrugged their shoulders, whispering, *que faire?*—unfortunately, the usual outcome of common delusions in art; finally, others, more eclectic, gradually come to exercise their talent in this popular, or, to put it more pointedly, this universal form of expression. Then came the war: novels and poems fell into neglect, and those who wrote them became discouraged and confused. To compose old dramatic works for an audience so capricious was useless and dangerous; but movie theatres were close to bursting more than ever...

‘So, let’s make these movies’—novelists, poets, and playwrights mused, and then decided—‘let’s make them, but let’s also uplift the cinematographic art by lofty, poetic, and sublime stories; let’s elevate *l’arte muta* (‘the silent art’) to the illustrious skies of poetry, grant an uncommon nobility and crystalline purity to these dark and trivial exhibitions, and those all of those *scriptwriters*—paid (and worth) no more than a few lire per story—to mediocrity, ineptitude, and inconsistency. Let us show who *we* are, poets, playwrights, and novelists, and show what happens when all those low and cheap things of the cinema meet the magic touch of our pen.’

My friends, brothers, and colleagues, you cannot deny you have said all this, you who do the same job as I, who have talked to me about this a hundred times in the past; and I listened to you, without answering; or I happened to agree, by nodding carelessly, with complacency... But now your long research, initially quite serene, has become increasingly anxious and concerned: ‘What *newer, different, and more impressive* could be done? What could one find in the old stories, in the great poems, which could turn out unprecedented, wonderful, and appealing? What other *novelty, beauty, or long forgotten antiquity* could be shown for the first time? Dante’s *La Vita Nova*? The second part of Goethe’s *Faust*? Heine’s *Almansor*? Moore’s *The Loves of the Angels*, or Milton’s *Paradise Lost*? *The Romance of the Rose*? One of Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*? Alexander Dumas (père) *Le Corricolo*? *La Spedizione di Sapri* (*The Expedition to Sapri*) with Pisacane and Nicotera? Lamartine’s *Graziella*? What, what, what?’

And I don't deny that the novelist and writer named above—myself—has, with her companions in the very same toil, often vigorously discussed potentially remarkable and beautiful but utterly forgotten stories from the name that live on in literary history; stories which for the most part flash across the reality of the cinema like an immense rocket on a summer night, momentarily lighting the firmament only to leave behind a denser darkness and the stink of burned gun power...

Then, for months and months, and with a feeling of sincere humility, I did only one thing: I went to the movies to take up my role of *spettatrice* ('spectatrix'). With my mortal eyes, I went to see, for a few cents, or even less, whatever might please, amuse, or move me in a film show. I sat in a corner, in the dark, silent and still, like all my neighbours; and my anonymous and unknown persona because like many others, anonymous and unknown, who were sitting in front of, behind, or beside me. I was like them, an ordinary spectator, without preconceptions, without prejudices, without any sort of bond to anything or anybody. I did not have any ideas or opinions, nothing of anything crammed my mind, which because pure and childlike, spending so little money, staying in that darkness, in that silent and stationary anticipation. And do you know what happened? I experienced the very same impressions felt by my neighbour on my right, who was, I suppose, a shop assistant; the same ones felt by my neighbour on my left, who, now urbanized, has formerly been, I think, a little provincial. And when the lady sitting in front of me laughed, I laughed too because in the dark everybody was laughing; and if the lady behind me cried, I started crying like her and like all the others who were doing the same.

And so, I became a perfect spectatrix, by going from show to show, watching all those stories on the white screen, startling at a sudden appearance or threatening danger, a-throb with the anguish for the heroes of an unknown drama, or with the mortal risk run by a sweet character, destined to die. This spectatrix became convinced of a truth—let us say, an eternal truth—that the audience of the cinematograph is made of thousands of simple souls, who were either like that in the first place or made simple by the movies themselves. For one of the most bizarre miracles occurring inside a movie theatre is that everybody becomes part of one single spirit. This common spirit gets bored with, or angry at the characters' entanglements, the intricate episodes, the written and often fleeting intertitles, which force it into extremely rapid mental effort. In addition, it is impressionable and tender, sensitive to the real and sincere affections; honourable and right—perversity and meanness astonish, yet outrage it. Attracted, but not deceived by the exterior beauty of actors and actresses, it is disappointed



if their acts and faces reveal no interior life. Plain but highly sentimental forces like love and pain can deeply affect such an innocent thing.

Oh, poets, novelists, playwrights, and brothers of mine, we should not strive so anxiously and painfully for rare and precious scenarios for our films! Let's just go to the truth of things and to people's naturalness. Let's just tell plain good stories, enriching our craft from life itself and take on that elusive but passionate aura of poetry, which springs from our overflowing heart. Stories in which every man and woman would be human, in the widest or humblest meaning of the word; stories in which tragic, dramatic, ironic, and grotesque performances would merge in that unlikely harmony of human events. Dearest friends, it is a spectatrix speaking to you, a spectatrix who now asks herself, *in retrospect*, the reasons for her tears, her smiles, her boredom. This woman who is speaking to you is a creature of the crowd, it is she whom you should move, who you should please...

*'Parla una spettatrice'*, *L'Arte Muta*, 1/1 (15 June 1916), pp. 31–32. Translated by Giorgio Bertellini.

# Motion Pictures in Provincial Towns

*Emilio Scaglione*

From the moment motion pictures replaced bingo almost every evening, life in provincial towns has disappeared.

It took on the intense work habits of the engraver on precious metals: it separated them from waste and from tradition, it has made them sharper, refined, it has made them shine.

The light of the spectroscope has finally put the old *mazurka* to the [box] step of the waltz without anyone in the town taking note. The straight faces, the closed hearts, the sober desires, the grounded aspirations, the faded romances, they are all going away, to be replaced by the bursts of excitement that flash across the cinema screen.

The motion picture theatre has filled provincial life with new sensations. It has created worlds of fictitious experience. Indian pagodas and Parisian salons, splendid desert oases and obscure Russian dramas, tales of love and hate, gambling and money. People in provincial towns would have never believed that so many exciting and vibrant things could have even existed outside the limits of their town. All this has entered their lives for the very first time and it has made their eyes wide with amazement.

They come out from the theatre dazzled and a little stunned, returning home to find the bundles of dried corn still set in the corners, bunches of raisins hanging from the beams, winter pears yellowing on the shelves, in the warmth of the fireplace! No: it's too much. Who can resign themselves any longer? Provincial life is lost. It can smell its own stench.

Film always signalled the end of the quince.<sup>1</sup> The motion picture theatre in provincial towns has resolved one of its worst problems: the problem of personal contact.

I would ask you to consider this aspect seriously because it is a genuine fact. In a provincial town, how often do two people of different sex who are not father and daughter, brother and sister, aunt and nephew, cousins, or at least brother and sister-in-law, get to meet? In provincial towns, there is no half-way mark: blood relations, husband, or official fiancé, or nothing. In any other situation, to be able to admire another person at ease is almost impossible. And as for actually talking to one another—absurd!... Touching hands? A fairy tale...Or a kiss? Out of the question. This explains the thwarted, decorous, intense, and silent love stories that last for seven, eight, ten years before they can reach their legitimate conclusion: marriage.

And this is because in reality, those seven, eight, or ten years were reduced to the seven, eight, or ten days when it was possible for the couple to meet, exchange a promise to be faithful, a furtive squeeze of the hand in the evening light at the corner of a lane or through the bars of a gate where the dense leaves of the climbing roses did not hide the closely woven protective wiring. How many love poems never progressed past the initial copy in the imagination of so many young people, simply because they had no way of meeting one another! How many fresh and rosy faces languished behind the carnations on the windowsill, and withered away because there were few passers-by on the road below!

How many batteries were unable to light up the life of those twenty-year olds, simply because there was no friction that could have lit up the spark.

The motion picture theatre has permitted all these things and more. It has drawn the population of provincial towns out of their homes and their isolation, has gathered them together in a theatre in seats that adjoin one another; finally, men and women who have seen each other for the first time, or know each other only by sight and, in any case, hardly ever speak to one another, are now permitted to sit together. A *bouleversement* (drastic change) indeed! A couple who would never have been able to approach closer than the ten metres between the balcony and the road below to exchange a word, to express their feelings, can now sit only a few millimetres apart, so close that now, at least for an hour, they can feel the warmth of an elbow or a knee... And this is able to continue, evening after evening, because the low price of the ticket does not break the budget, as does the cost of theatre tickets. Ignoring curfew, *le petit* gets closer, more persistent, more permissive; *la petite* quivers, cringes, confused: the confusion that takes our young country girls, when they pull some prank, taking a peach from the fruit vendor or robbing two *lire* from mom's change purse for a piece of ribbon, her first orgasm as a woman from contact with a man, the virgin blush of her intimate parts, the fear that her parents, seated on the other side, will catch her off guard; this madness of different feelings she mistakes for love, for an everlasting love, [it's] heartbreaking that she will lose herself for the man that is at her side. And this trust, deep in the soul, finds words [of endearment] for him, and in the depths of bright eyes, so sincere and so vibrant, even he softens inside and melts from the joy of feeling so loved. And therefore, no love on earth can resemble theirs, it is decided. They will marry. Within a week they ask for the priest. If the priest hesitates, one evening he will take her from the cinema in a carriage, [and] it will be done. The 'consensual abduction', in the countryside, is still an institution. Of 100 marriages, at least 40 were preceded by an elopement.

So, while the immortal Cretinetti blows his overdue patrimony on the foolishness of a pure white carpet, the fate of two lives is decided.<sup>2</sup>

I swear, therefore, that if the Great War had not interrupted, or better yet, if before 1914, a precise statistical analysis on civic life had been completed, it would have been confirmed a notable increase in marriages in the countryside. Let's give the cinema the credit it deserves. Today, the carnage from the war augments to irrevocable proportions the numerical difference of the two sexes and the earth is about to become an inconsolable *tebaide* where a few Trappist survivors are already condemned to a few form of asceticism, polygamy, and the purpose of the cinema beings to appear truly defeated.<sup>3</sup>

And this is how the motion picture theatre completed the evolution in provincial towns which had already begun with the introduction of electric trams. As soon as each small town saw the arrival of its own trams, every carriage was overflowing with the local population, rushing to get a glimpse of metropolitan life.

The shiny tracks gave a touch of modern sophistication to the previously melancholy roads. The dismal silence of the piazzas is now broken by noisy tram bells. Even the distances seemed to have grown enormously, because they are now measured by the price of a ticket. But as in all things, advantages come with problems as well. The tram travels. It is too fast. It is too noisy. There is no limelight to attract the eyes and distract the others around them. If it provides the opportunity for a chance meeting, it is hardly ever convenient to talk. Quite frankly, the motion picture theatre is worth more. And in addition to everything else, it has one indisputable advantage: it is dark.

By showing the women that they could sit in the dark only a few centimetres away from a man who was not closely related without having to faint with fear, the motion picture theatre made its contribution towards moral education in provincial towns, strengthening the awareness of respectful behaviour, moderating personal character and conduct.

The darkness of the motion picture theatre put a stop to the problem of jealousy.

In provincial towns, motion picture theatres needed a little darkness to tell the truth. It was needed more than drainage systems, aqueducts, reforestation, standard gauge railways, millions of lira for southern Italian schools, the struggle against rodents and mildew, political education, ethics reforms for city councils, dividing up large land estates. All these struggles are aimed at combating well-known enemies, and hopefully justice will triumph in the end: the lack of motivation, drought, typhoid, malaria, lack

of public transport, illiteracy, hunger, rising prices, electoral fraud, misuse of public funds, feudalism. But darkened theatres must overcome the hundred-armed monster that is possibly the combination of all these aspects, that lies dozing deep in the heart of provincial life: tradition. Motion pictures could be considered as a form of triumph for feminism.

It seems to me that the movie theatre has liberated our women from their gilded cages, where they are habitually locked up in air that is stuffy from being shut in, and it gives them, if only for an hour, *en pleine air*. It gives them suddenly the feeling that they too can be secretive or faithful by free choice, or by mood, when instead they usually are obliged to be. Very often, it is when watching a film that they discover that their brother, father, and even husband, is perhaps not the worst man in existence. In any case, provincial motion picture theatres permit women a certain element of choice. And the faculty to choose develops her sense of initiative. This, in my opinion, could be defined as moral education.

How long will it take before it will be acceptable in provincial towns for an Italian woman to look a man in the eye without having to blush, quiver, or be accused of having thoughts of infidelity?

In provincial towns motion pictures are a complete form of entertainment. Something is available for every member of a good middle class family. The father, instead of yawning with boredom over his work at the office, has the pleasure of taking his whole family out for only two lire, and can relax, without his wife along with some local gossip, accusing him of being incapable of feeling domestic happiness. The elderly wife, thrown into depression after watching some heartbreaking episode on the screen, was reduced to tears, unseen, and sighed, unheard, out of melancholy over memories of her lost youth. For a couple of hours, the grandmother, mesmerized by the trials and tribulations on the screen, stops her grumbling about lack of good manners and decent behaviour. The children follow the action on the screen in part, and breathe in the darkness like the aroma of incense. The toddler is sound asleep, thoroughly amazed that he is finally left to sleep in peace, without having stale sweets pushed at him or being shaken awake, nearly dislocating a shoulder.

The children's nanny permits a little nudge from a stranger she cannot recognise in the dark. And everybody has a good time.

But is the motion picture theatre really sufficient to establish a regime of extra-marital affairs?

I doubt it. Provincial life is positive, practical. They are not people given to loosing their heads except on rare occasions. And even if it were so? A little scandal over a love affair, crackling in the hearth of whispered

gossip, is a necessary evil in provincial towns. It provides entertainment in the salons during the winter months. It keeps the conversations alive in the afternoons. It creates a stronger bond between the friends who are discussing the culprit, who is then marginalized. And during all this time the fashion for motion pictures grows.

And furthermore, if it is true that where virtue is never forced to struggle a little with vice, it becomes permissive, losing its power, its energy, then you must concede that an affair in a provincial town is sometimes a necessary element, if only to put normal standards back in their rightful place. Since all women in provincial towns are tremendously honest and faithful, then there is only one single danger: the sense of beauty, reciprocal fidelity, may be lost, as it was always considered a universally accepted fact. An affair, originating in the movie theatre, creates a hint of doubt, a sense of risk that can rekindle the flame of trust.

The affair is like a novel: even when it appals, it excites the town, which devotes itself to the temperamental relationship.

The affair creates around us such inexplicable flow of concentrated hate, and such feelings of disgust, that its results in the end are truly moral: and more than ever after a minor scandal, there are many displays of affection all around that pacify like a marital balm.

In the end the motion picture theatre reintroduces a taste for something unknown that has been missing for a long time in provincial towns: the desire for leisure.

In provincial towns, men work hard and everybody works too much. There is no time to waste and no time for a break. And even when people are not working, every action has a practical objective. Just as a penny will not be spent unless there is something to be gained, nobody does anything without good reason. Leisure time is spent for useful purposes. In Naples, in Rome, in Milan, a stroll, a pause for a chat, gazing at something for a while with nothing particular in mind, wasting time in thought, happily lingering, tapping the pavement for a half an hour with the tip of your cane: all this has a purpose. However, nobody in a provincial town with half a brain would ever tell you he is going out for a walk to stretch his legs: he will say he is off to see somebody, or has to go out for personal reasons, or he must take someone who is not well to get some fresh air, or he is anxiously waiting for the newspaper boy.

Most of the time, we go there for the children: 'What is there to do? These children are bored: you must take them for a walk.' Here is the catch. The children—as you know—are very often dragged into this, and it is in their name that many atrocious acts are committed today!

You go to the theatre to see the *play* for heaven's sake! However, this does not fool even the most ingenuous. When you are sitting in your box in the second row at the theatre, you show your social position. Or you make your friends green with envy over your new perfume. Or, in the most common case, you organise a chance encounter—Oh! completely by accident—which would be otherwise impossible and which will later lead to a marriage proposal. Nothing is wasted in a provincial town. Everything must be put to good purpose. Above all, time: No gold without dross, as they say in England.

Motion pictures have revolutionised this positive attitude. You go to a motion picture exclusively to see the film.

Prices are reasonable. You do not have to dress up. You do not go to show off the latest fashion: it is dark. The friends you may want to impress will not see you. Instead of playing, children fall asleep. There is no practical objective.

Half an hour spent in a motion picture theatre is almost always a half hour spent in complete leisure. People lounge languidly in their seats without social restraint. Tense elbows begin to relax. Hands lie idle in laps. Jaws drop imperceptibly, and faces take on a slightly vacuous expression behind the lingering swirl of cigar smoke. This is true relaxation! True leisure! It is like the moment just before drifting off to sleep. Everyday tension is postponed until tomorrow. Any worries about spending a couple of lire are left until tomorrow, the irritations of a life made miserable by trivial disagreements between neighbours: the petty advantages, the petty grudges, the petty problems, the petty ostentations...

*'Il cinematografo in provincia', L'Arte Muta, 6/7 (15 December 1916), pp. 14–16.*  
Translated by National Cinema Museum of Turin.

## Notes

1. [Translator's note. Quince is meant to invoke provincial customs disappearing as a result of modernization.]
2. [Editors' note. Scaglione is referring to the 1909 André Deed comedy, *Cre-tinetti, che bello.*]
3. [Translator's note. Scaglione is referring to the Egyptian town with a long-standing monastic tradition.]

# Cinematic Psychology

*Edoardo Coli*

Whoever has observed the mannerism, the gait, the gestures, and the faces of many sorts of women in recent years will find much that is new. One will see this a little bit in high society, substantially more across all levels of the middle class, and somewhat as well among women of lower status—shop girls, seamstresses, workers, students. In general, many of the women are not factory workers or wretched salaried workers—but even with the exception of those women—one can note something different and new in their expression: something complex and deliberate.

For the most part, the natural simplicity that borders on clumsiness has disappeared: the composed attitude, the quiet gaze, the measured gesture steer clear of this, seeing it as crudeness.

She tends to make her entire body speak. This was always the art of very few actresses, of some high-society women, of some fine women who live off their graces, or of some second-rate girls who continue to anxiously await a husband. Today, it is something studied by many women—sometimes spontaneously, sometimes voluntarily—carried out in various ways, and directed at various aims.

With the help of recent clothing styles, they exhibit their bodies as they never have before. The careful or relaxed movement, the attitude, or the step, the nod, or the turning of her body, the reining in of the gaze, like the mask of the face, very often have a purpose.

Where does all of this come from, if not from that spectacle that has bit by bit supplanted the theatre and the little theatre, the café and the circle, and even the evening stroll and social visits? When they write the history of present customs, how much will be devoted to the Cinematograph! It is tied to all of art and to all of life. For better or for worse, it has invaded all content and every form. Among the many orders of its effects—all of which are worthy of being studied—one of the first effects that attracts and interests the eyes is the influence that the cinema exerts on the feminine exterior.

Cinematic acting is all gesticulation—an intensified, plastic rendering. This acting is increasingly modern, tied to the present time and to its most refined customs. Or, more often, it is made up of gestures and of poses taken from fashion drawings, assimilated by eccentric foreign ladies, or studied in the exhibitions of the most current paintings. More often the gestures and the movements are taught by the high-society women.



A bit of Botticelli and of [Dante Gabriele] Rossetti, a bit of the ‘flirts’ of the grand ‘seasons’ at the seaside, a bit of the affectations of the famous ‘chanteuses’, have often sufficed for composing the plastic repertoire of some renowned heroine: whether it was Mila di Codro, or the protagonist of *Come le foglie* (*As leaves*), *La Gorgona* (*The Gorgon*), or *Zazà*.<sup>1</sup> Time and place do not matter.

On the example of the greatest arbiters of the scene, whose genius can meld elements of inferior origin even into a lofty end product, an entire legion of actresses who were generic yesterday, today are the leading ladies. They fashion for themselves the so-called tragic mask, the ‘sensitive hands’, the bending of the waist, the rhythmic cadence of the breast, the jutting out of the chin, the displaying of the throat, the half-closed eyes, the tilting of the neck, and all of the other unique ways of crystalizing the expression, of making immobile and dead that which should always be changeable and a new flash of life.

The word—diction, verbal expression—is disconnected, off to the side like an art all to itself, like a kind of inferior technique. The power of the reciters of verses has passed. They now use their voice to waken the owls and the crows in the ancient ruins. And it has become a strange and monotonous dirge in its soporific rhythm: the ‘art of recitation’ competes today with the ponderous articles of sociology.

Actresses—I mean the mass of the so-called ‘tragic mutes’—persuaded themselves all the more that their bodies were a physiognomy unto themselves and they studied how to make it speak. It would be a good study if it had been translated into a continuity of language and muscles and nerves, art and faces, the step and the pose, the stopping and going, that all came together in such a way that the apparent functions of the organs—as precise symbols—would give way to the formation of a thought, the phases of a feeling.

But too often the forms of some pretty little thing speak for themselves and by themselves alone, intending to show them as sensuous contours, to move themselves as promises, to make themselves accepted as offerings. (This is true, even when it is done with little guile—for mere self-satisfaction.) And often the movements show either no connection to the meaning of the plot or to the feeling of the dramatic tale, or the connection is completely misunderstood.

We see [actresses] praying with flashes of sensual pleasure, giving orders with desirous flattery, dreaming while having some spastic fit. For the women doing this, one thing always dominates everything: the preoccupation with who is watching, who is observing, who is analysing. In

other words, the male audience—to whose spirit they are not trying to communicate very much, but whose caressing eyes they are careful to not send away disappointed.

All of this psychology performed for the external world passed from the theatre of the '*pochades*' or 'vaudeville' to the cinema, which seems invented for it. And everything: the panoramic backgrounds as serpentine effusions, the low-cut outfits like chinoiserie, the fluttering of light like the reclining in the fashion of an odalisque. Everything has been put into the service of this new Circean enchantment. The hen and her flock rule the roost in many everyday reveries.

All of this leaves aside the sincere and vibrant actresses who go the way of naturalness—truth be told there are very few. How many actresses are just Duse-ing, Borelli-ing, or Bertini-ing it up!<sup>2</sup> And, since imitators don't pick up anything from the best role models but their flaws, we have seen better things...

The abandon rising up her languid sides and hips is a painful expectancy. The lowering of the neckline with careful knowing is despondent. Turning the face supinely, which lengthens the neck beyond all belief, is an aspiration toward the ideal. A tangle of tightly outstretched fingers is a spasm. A quarter-turn [of the face] with pursed lips reveals a secret anxiety. And so on—with similar such movements of these evolved marionettes.

It is incredible how the great mass of the audience is pleased by all of that. If there were no intertitles (which grow longer every day) to quickly read with tormented eyes, one would understand very little of the action. The action breaks up into groups, each group is disconnected, without any expression that is not generic or adaptable to the most varied and opposite situations.

It is the byplay alone that is of interest, and every gesture takes on a life of its own.<sup>3</sup> Through it alone new dreams have radiated from that crowd of semi-hysterical women, lost among the fallen nobility and the bourgeoisie, eager to mask their social climbing, their Casanov-ism, which entails their snobbism in riding boots, passing half the day tucked away in darkened cinema halls, more focused and alert than they've ever been in any church.

By studying all of those standard movements, they repeat them in every day life. We see them again in sitting rooms and carriages, on the sidewalk and on the stage. In touching their hair or raising the *lornette* to their eyes, in wrapping a fur stole around them, or in opening a letter, how many gestures do we see that amuse us because they are the same as the ones we see in advertising posters for the cinema!

In this way, the game of the little eyeglasses and of false near-sightedness takes on the quality of an acute, critical inquiry. The opening of a cloak is

done with an air of a great revelation. The gaze becomes accustomed to 'looking faraway into the distance with anguished fixity'. The cup of tea is raised with a solemn gesture, as if it were a grail. She turns her head a bit as if she is regretting the past, and hoping for the future. The click-clacking of high heels is a rhythm. She never places her hand on the balustrades or even on the handles of the trams without the expectation of a kiss on the hand.

Today's society sees a new, very interesting doll. This season's Eve is preoccupied with a target that follows her everywhere: with a crowd of men that, from the dark, spies her *chiffons*, her thin stockings.<sup>4</sup> The new theatre, when it picks up the strength to do battle with the blank screen, will have to investigate this feminine psychology—new in its actions, ancient in its romanticism—that photography of the moment has gifted to us. Enjoyable things will be born of it.

If vain sentiments have often informed gestures on their own, the latter have often created the former. External stylizing gives its methods to matters of the spirit. In new acting, the comedy of life has found new weightlessness, subtle elusiveness, acute suggestions, perverted undertones, and all such devilry put into their (in many cases half-intellectual) heads by the desire to seem mixed and hybrid—enigmatic, in other words.

Because when a woman—of any variety—convinces herself that in order to be innovative, she needs the tools of this art, which has had the most recent success, she turns all of her efforts to one goal above all: seeming a mystery—a great mystery that always attracts and which never reveals itself.

What else could be suggested to minds that are, generally speaking, quite shallow? What can be suggested to spirits that have had very little training (before the War, at least) in the hard practice of life? (One recalls the observations by Giacomelli.)<sup>5</sup> What could be taught by the settings, the figures, or by the actions that the cinema presents?

There, men only go out in a coat and tails and a top-hat, whether its day or night—even just to buy a stamp. There, the construction worker lives in a series of rooms of enormous size, which are filled to brim with the finest objects from ten antique stores. The most modest actress only goes to work in an automobile. The student is always decked out in a well-pressed suit. The female activist wears [dresses with] trains and enormous sleeves. There are no romantic conversations but those that take place in lush hothouses or before the most beautiful panoramas in the world. And everyone plays English games, smokes cigarettes continuously, and plays the piano. It is constantly a phantasmagoric world, which, the more it is made up of real elements, the more false and dangerous it is. It's much more than Montepin and Invernizio!<sup>6</sup>

Mediocre spirits think that the fine manners, the elegance, and the luxury at which one arrives either through the spirit, or through love (more than through goodness), or through the intellect, consists of that. They take those settings, those clothes, those feelings as a unit of measure. And since the gesture points to those things, recalls them, suggests them, concludes them, they reproduce the gesture like it is a key that can open up that enchanted world to them.

The old, vague, undefined, and nebulous aspiration towards an unattainable good, outside of the mediocrity of the everyday: there is the secret. The quest for a love of love, for a happiness that is the recognition of one's own unnoticed refinement: there is the torment. The awareness of being little unappreciated queens in exile, held back by tyranny: there is the mystery. The cinema opens its backdrops and curtains to these grandiose yearnings, which in variety and in veracity, are superior to those of the theatre. And they appear to be scenarios that do indeed exist in real life, with those men, with those passions, with those connections, with those dazzling destinies.

Who knows if knowing how to bend one's elbow, or tap one's nervous little foot, or wrap one's veil with a regal gesture, or partly close the corner of one's painted eye with great skill aren't marks of distinction—that they will not always fall into emptiness? Who knows if some elect person or connoisseur won't understand and get something out of it? Who knows.... The intricate work of fantasy is deployed on Circe's canvas: and the soul that considers itself lofty, that feels alone, not called by man to participate in his feverish race between ambition and business, awaits the unknown.

It's feminism revenge.

'*Psicologia cinematografica*', *Fanfulla della Domenica*, 24 (August 1917), p. 3.  
Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.

## Notes

1. [Editors' note. Mila di Codro is a character in Gabriele D'Annunzio's play, *La figlia di Iorio*; *Come le foglie* by Giovanni Giacosa and *La Gorgona* by Sem Benelli are a theatrical drama performed for the first time in 1900 and 1913, respectively. *Zazà* is a comedy written by Pierre Berton e Charles Simon and first performed in 1898.
2. [Translator's note. Eleonora Duse, Lyda Borelli, and Francesca Bertini were famous actresses of this period. The author turns their names into verbs (*duseggiare*, *borelleggiare*, *bertineggiare*) to comment on how many women are acting as if they were these famous actresses.]

3. [*Editors' note.* The byplay is the secondary action on stage that is not the main plot.]
4. [*Translator's note.* The original text used '*dernier cri*', a term used to describe the latest fashions or trends.]
5. [*Editors' note.* The author is likely referring to Antonietta Giacomelli, who was a Red Cross worker who later wrote about her experience.]
6. [*Editors' note.* The author is referring to Carolina Invernizio and Xavier de Montepin, authors known for their serial novels.].

# The Cinematograph Doesn't Exist

*Silvio d'Amico*

But how!—said my friend—more than 100 cinematographs exist in Rome alone. They exist in the Film Censorship Office at the Minister of the Interior, companies exist that spend millions and bring in billions, and compete amongst themselves with posters as big as bed sheets, in accordance with the Legislative Decree on the sale of paper, film studios exist, and the salaries of Ghione, Maciste, and Bertini [exist], Febo Mari who writes *films* in an d'Annunzian style exists, and so does Lucio d'Ambra, who scares the critic at *Nuova Antologia* (*The New Digest*); and you yourself say that the cinematograph is an art in and of itself, an original medium of expression, how is it then that something that is one thing and not another, doesn't exist!

I sought to reorganize my ideas on the subject with a certain method: starting from the beginning.

When I was a kid, one day I said to myself:—'Let's go see the cinematograph.' It was a bit expensive because it cost six cents. But it was an intriguing thing. I found an uncle willing to give me six cents, and I went with him to see this intriguing thing: in a darkened little establishment, by Lelieure [*sic*], on Mortaro Street.<sup>1</sup> The show was in its entirety, or as you would say now, from reality. King Umberto, all moustache and eyes, inspected a military formation, and then people walked on the boulevard at noon, and then bathers jumped into the ocean from a diving board, creating big, white splashes all around them.

But, perhaps because the projection shook a lot and bothered the eyes, the film was short. But not so short as to exclude a kind of comic finale: which consisted of projecting the *films* backwards, in front of the eyes of the viewer. And then everyone started to laugh seeing the people and the carriages on the boulevard calmly walking backwards; and the bathers leaping out of the ocean preceded by spray, before they jumped back on the springboard. I also laughed a lot; and mentally catalogued this kind of game among the others I already knew: the magic lantern, the stereoscope, the *lamposcope*, the puppet shows, etc. Then I forgot them. Without a doubt, the Cinema, with a big C, did not exist yet at that time.

I returned much later, in adolescence, when I had already developed a passion for the theatre, and knew inside out the various genres of dramatic literature, which had not yet been obliterated by Benedetto Croce. This time it wasn't an uncle, but a mischievous friend who led me to a much bigger

spot, to see a silent film for only four cents, with people made-up and dressed in costumes, who loved each other, hated each other, and battled each other on the screen to the sound of the piano, through fairly complicated plotlines. My friend argued that this was a new form of art. Instead, at the end of show, I was certain of being right and got up in indignation. But what new form!—I said. This is a very old thing. It is the form of representation that humanity has known for the most time; certainly for many thousands of years. It is silent representation, done with gestures: it is called *pantomime!*

And my friend, being rebellious, believed in mechanical science and tended toward positivism, laughed knowingly.

—What does pantomime have to do with it? Don't you see that here you find in front of you the implementation of a method of reproduction that has *revolutionized* pantomime? Don't you realize that this mechanical medium confers unlimited possibilities, that it multiplies its effects one-hundred times over, as it misrepresents and modernizes?

I pontificated:

—The mechanical means of reproduction and distribution can influence art up until a certain point. Even the printing press undoubtedly influenced new forms of literature; but how much does it renew it *ab imis fundamentis* ('from its very core'), it takes more! What is the essential novelty produced in theatrical scenery by this new medium? The possibility to change scenes 50 times in the course of a single work? But Shakespeare already changed scenes 30 or 40 times without needing a cinematograph! I tell you that this is none other than the old pantomime: the cinematograph doesn't have its own true essence.

Truth be told, I have to confess that I made quite an impression on my rebellious friend, who had become silent.

It was worse going back to one of those dark theatres every once in a while, which although they are always bigger, are nevertheless more suffocating from all the hot breaths. I only have to take a look at the enormous posters of these studios to see reappear, little by little, the titles of all the old and forgotten great works of drama, those which cannot even draw in the gasps of the petty bourgeois to the provincial, amateur productions anymore; or otherwise, jumbled adaptations of the worst novels, with subtitles full of exclamation points: *Sentence of Death!*—*A Mother's Tears!*—*Miser [sic] who Performs Poorly Confesses! He's My Son!!!*

I would never say that all of the advertisements for films are of this type; nor that with the passing of time, the adaptations of dramatic works for the silent scene were all of the most disastrous kind. On the contrary, I am always reminded of the generous invite that I received from a renowned

theatre company to attend the performance of a *Cavalleria rusticana* (*Rustic Chivalry*) in which *Santuzza* was [played by] a famous singer.

Oh, blessed *Cavalleria*, the only true masterpiece of our tragic theatre. I am excited to this day to have heard it again on stage, in a memorable evening, in which Giovanni Grasso controlled himself in an unusually sober performance, and Tina Di Lorenzo and Febo Mari, both of them Sicilians, under his direction and in their native manner of speaking, were arranged with miraculous spontaneity that I had never known before in them, and the company around them trembled, united in its simple truth, including the young, thirteen-year-old girl who in the final scene entered screaming: *they killed my partner Turidda* [*sic*]!—That scream, which to bring it up again now makes us, at the very least, smile, was shamelessly parodied for more than thirty years. There, the final scene was greeted by the uncivilized rumbling of a public fully engrossed in the action of the drama as if it were something new, agonizing and twisting in a tragic horror, which took their breath away, and unleashed a burst of applause which celebrated the fall of the curtain with rejoicing that no one *before* had ever known.

And here is what I found now in front of me on the screen: the drama as performed concluded in a half an hour, here at the cinema it last more than an hour and a half: everything there had been drawn out, diluted, corrected, expounded upon, contaminated: the landscape, the sun between the leaves, the real cottages of the real towns, the actress that waited to have her image captured head on, in profile, in three-quarters profile, in full light, in partial light; it started with *Turidda* [*sic*] going off to serve in the military, it went forward with the suffering of *Santuzza* and Lola's spiteful actions, and through scenes and byplays and tears and glances and counter-provocations... And that scream, where was that scream? And without that scream, where did the tragedy take off to?

I was the one who took off; depressed: and I thought to myself:—if by chance the cinematograph were this, it would not be a clumsy forgery of the theatre.

But someone who was very intelligent and very *up-to-date*, took up the pen to demonstrate that I was wrong. He had me read articles that rained down from every side against the failings of filmmakers who wanted to adapt works for the screen that were created for the stage; he explained to me the difference between true artists of the *Cinema* and the poor ones who migrate over from dramatic theatre or from music with the goal only to make a buck; he spoke to me about technique and innovation; he described to me the coming of the cinematographic pantomime as the modern art *par excellence*. Fundamentally, he conceived of art using the criteria of absolute



realism, and therefore, considered the absolute faithful representation of reality the *non plus ultra* ('the pinnacle', literally 'beyond which nothing') of modernity, that the theatre, with its actors in make-up, scenes made with paper and artificial lights, could never attain. To select and regroup actors, old or young, ugly or beautiful, big or small, each time according to the circumstances, without *ever* going back to the make-up and the adaptations; to bring to life a scene from *reality*, whether it is at the top of a mountain, at the bottom of a desert, or in the heart of a city; to capture the tumult of modern existence as it is with a simple photograph: to portray not extras, but masses of real people, crews of real sailors, armies of real soldiers; that's how, said my intelligent friend, we will be able to reproduce, frame, and celebrate the life that reigns today.

And one of my other teachers went further than that. This was the period of the futurist rumblings; and this person complained that Marinetti did not demonstrate an understanding of how he had come to expect the biggest outcomes for a programme of true renewal from only the cinematograph. For him, nothing was better suited to that quick and intense art that the futurists preached, to the bewildering synthesis of our frenzied anxieties, than the cinematograph: nothing was more logical, after the words-in-freedom, than the suppression of words: there was no better music than the futurist kind to narrate the abstract gestures of silent actors, and create in union with them a new kind of spectacle to replace the very old melodrama.

Still others, beyond futurism, flip it around into dreams and poetry! The cinematograph, with all the richness of the methods it commands, will be the art of the dream *par excellence*! No vision will come to be as heavenly, imaginary, impalpable, ethereal, lyrical as that of the cinematograph! Only on the screen will poetic theatre have the possibility of being, because it will not be undone by reality of flesh and bone creatures and painted scenery! Oh, cinematograph, liberator of our souls, quencher of desires we most yearn for, we raise a glass to you!

It is for this reason that I wanted to know the why and the how of this curious phenomenon of social life, which is the basis of the cinematographic industry's success. Once in a while, after carefully entering, I'll spend no more than four or six cents on what costs two or three dollars, and in the theatres comes the *groom* with the red jacket, yelling at me: 'Let's get going!'—but still I continue to return but with my head lowered.

I find very little of futurism: it seems that its most audacious innovation remains what I first admired from Lelieure [*sic*] 25 years ago, in the films that were turned until they went backwards, with the people who walked backwards and the bathers who leapt out of the water.

Of the lyrical, idealized, dreamed of, etc. cinematography, I found even less, as long as I didn't fall for that *silhouette* of the leading lady taken against the light, or the glints of light that the moon makes on the surface of the water, or the scene coloured in a faint turquoise around the stake of a bush; in other words, the kind of methods adopted by the creator of a famous *film*, who in order to introduce a fantastic element of its story, acted as if a character suffering a nightmare in his sleep, sees parading in his dreams, in front of his eyes, tigers, lions, elephants, and camels, in other words all of the animals available at the Zoo in Rome.

In terms of realism and the reproduction of our lives that is (the secret, they say, of the success of the cinematograph)... I see a number of sitting rooms with displays of crystal-cut glass and elegant furniture, which give them much more the impression of a Ducrot show room than the environments in which we live.<sup>2</sup> I still seek in the visions of these environments, which are as fake as in those of the musical play, some explanation of this glorified modern life. I do not meet anyone but gentlemen in *smoking* jackets or in pyjamas, who speak on the telephone and light cigarettes, or read the paper, only getting up when there happens to be some big announcement under their eyes that will then come to be explored up close; and the ladies in *décolleté* or in nightgowns, all of them—in contrast to many of our actresses—voluptuous, or above all, exposed, who knows why? They pull on the edges of their necklines, which are too wide, and oftentimes they show themselves to be very, and I mean very, unfaithful.

Now, when you think, I am not saying that we have always deplored in our mannered comedy writers, that which would be amusing compared to the creators of our most respected *films* what we supposedly deplore each day in out not so good actors:

Now, when you think about it, I am not talking about what we have always deplored in our mannered comedy writers, which would be amusing to compare with the creators of the most respected *films*, but what we supposedly deplore each day in our not so good actors: the lack of natural spontaneity, the conventional formulas of expression and gesture, the overindulgence in the stereotypical byplay, etc., etc.; additionally, you see the stars on the screen move in that way, and make those endless affectations at every step of those unending byplays, which distance us from reality as much as today's Russia [is distanced] from good social order; there comes time to ask with astonishment if this is really destined to become true, simple, and rapid art *par excellence*, the faithful expression of that tumultuous daily existence that we all know, etc., etc.

And among these thoughts, all these tiny, little companies, offices, businesses, newspapers, studios, and similar things, which were spoken about

earlier, they cannot be looked at with sympathy after all: sympathy requires stubborn acts of faith in something that one resolutely hopes must come, since it does not exist yet. This thing—to receive what such an enormous organization already prepared, is only enriched by doing these experiments in the meantime—will, presumably, someday be the Cinematograph.

*'Il Cinematografo non esiste', In Penombra, (April 1918), pp. 135–137. Translated by Courtney Ritter.*

## Notes

1. Henri Le Lieure was a French photographer who opened the first Cinématographe Lumière in Rome in 1896. See Abel, *Encyclopedia*, p. 334.
2. [*Editors' note.* Ducrot was an important furniture manufacturer that made furniture used in modernist Italian films, including those by director Lucio d'Ambra.]

# The Cinema: School of the Will and of Energy

*Giovanni Bertinetti*

I do not presume to be making an outlandish discovery by saying that the gravest of modern illnesses is the lack of will. The immediate consequence of this lack of will is the inability to adapt to life and the failure of every youthful hope of conquest. People are not capable of mustering the strength that the struggle requires. And, when it begins, people don't know how to sustain this effort until they achieve the goal that our ambition put forth. We see the most lively intellects, which seemed destined for brilliant conquests, dissipate into nothing.

There have been numerous methods recommended for educating the will, always with something truly effective and not without good results for those who knew how to apply them. To have them applied, however, required an effort of the will—the very same effort that the methods sought to create. As a result, the suspicion arises that when good results are obtained, they are a little bit like those obtained with mnemo-technical systems, which intend to improve memory by requiring...a great effort of memory itself.

Now, if we were to find a means of educating the will without requiring an effort that the weak-willed are not in a position to sustain, we would have found the ideal pedagogical method.

We now have this method in the cinematograph, which, thanks to the principle of least effort, can achieve results as an educator of the will that are truly unforeseen in the field of psychology.

This frivolous pastime, which crowds of women, men, and children rush to, finds itself by chance as the most effective teacher of energy. No oral or written system has a greater hope of successfully curing the malaise suffered as a result of the anguished modern life and preparing young people, with minimal effort, to become 'men of action'—the men who make up the hard-working element of society and without whom society tends to break apart.

## **Who is the Man of Action**

In the meantime, let's see what we mean by 'man of action'.

When a man knows how to free himself from the obsessive tendency of overthinking every action that he must carry out, or when a man carries

out than action without the hesitations that are born from excessive self-analysis, one can recognize in him the Man of Action.

Do not think, however, that in talking about suppressing self-analysis we mean to say that the Man of Action acts blindly under the impulse of some unconscious force. 'Man of Action' does not mean an impulsive man. He is an individual who clearly has a goal to reach in mind, but who does not create harmful impediments by losing himself in a detailed analysis that destroys all energy for action.

This is not about destroying reflection. Rather, as Dr. Toulouse rightly observes

after a certain time of reflection, any useful effort is done. One gains nothing by prolonging it, because then the spirit runs the risk of automatically ruminating on the same facts with little hope of changing their apparent value. This is like what happens when reading a book and the text seems confusing. One goes back to it, re-reads it carefully, but without any profit. The obscurity remains.<sup>1</sup>

The Man of Action does not *waste* the strength of his will with theoretical and pointless lines of reasoning, but rather employs it directly in acting.

What, on the other hand, does the Man of Action's opposite—the so-called Indecisive Man—do?

The Indecisive Man loses himself in a laborious examination of the pros and cons. He contents himself by analysing every action that he must carry out, deploying so much energy in this purely platonic and sterile exercise that, at the moment it is time to act, he realizes he has vainly used it all up.

To better represent the two social types which find themselves at opposite poles, let us recall two men: Napoleon and Hamlet.

Napoleon acts, employing in his action a tenacious will, which is tenacious precisely because no energy is taken away from it by dissipating itself in analysis.

Focused on the goal to be achieved, Napoleon does not create fantastical impediments for himself, but proceeds without tribulation—never stopped by the thought of a possible failure. When such a doubt appears before him, he drives it away like an insidious danger... And Napoleon was lost the day when he let himself be overcome by a thousand shadows of uncertainty.

Hamlet never acts. He thinks and reflects. Not only that, but he pushes reflection to the point where what first seemed evident to him, now appears confused. Excessive analysis impedes him.

Now, wanting to express these two types with a classification that can seem rather paradoxical, one could say that Hamlet belongs to literature and Napoleon belongs to the cinema. In the former, we see the manifestation of a static psychology. In the latter, the manifestation of a dynamic psychology.

## Why the Cinema Can be a School of Action

Let us briefly examine what the essence of the cinematographic sensation is, by starting to ask ourselves about the pleasure that viewing a film gives us. This pleasure seems more intense to us to the extent that the action of the film unfolds dynamically—to the degree to which the unfolding of the frames represents to us a real action and not a succession of variably successful photographs.

We love the movement and the dramatic progression in the film, and we hope that the unfolding drama will be produced not by chance, but by the free will of the characters that are present on the screen. This game of wills, battling amongst themselves for the triumph of their respective goals, is the source of our pleasure, which reaches its greatest tonality when we see the *good* character destroy the *criminal* goal of the bad guy by employing those means that are the result of a strong will.

We so admire the extrinsication of the power of will in a filmic action that we are drawn to a certain indefinable pleasure even when we see this will acting in an animal.

This is one of the reasons for the success of *Il circo della morte* (*The Circus of Death*).<sup>2</sup> In this work, we watch the action of a chimpanzee who grows fond of the child of an unfortunate, seduced woman who is—let's put it this way—an employee at the circus. After a series of events, the chimpanzee steals the child of the seduced woman's rival, and brings it up to a very tall chimney, as if it wanted to avenge the dead child of the seduced woman... all of which is contrary to what is known about the psychology of animals. But the feeling that the spectator gets from this humanization of the simian will is pleasing and interesting because it fulfils our desire for watching the free game of 'the will', even in an animal.

## The Training of the Faculty of Attention

Psychology has demonstrated the need of the faculty of attention in the struggle of life. As we have already observed in our previous works, the most

important element of intelligence is attention. The measure of intelligence is given by the power of attention: the more a man is able to put into action such a power, the more he will be able to acquire that intellectual capability which is indispensable if he is to become a Man of Action.

The lack of the power of attention is a very serious lacuna in the psychic constitution of an individual. As a result, all pedagogy tends towards nothing but educating the power of attention.

Now we have in the cinematograph the instrument best suited to achieving this goal. The attention of the spectator is excited in a natural way: no effort of will is required in order to pay attention. The effort of will that, on the other hand, is needed in other pedagogical methods and that often constitutes a grave danger.

Angelo Mosso has done some most interesting studies on attention.<sup>3</sup> It is necessary to quote some passage of the dearly departed physiologist in order to understand what the dangers are that we are referring to.

Haller denied the freedom of attention and we know we are not all and not always equally disposed to being attentive. Sometimes we can't do it, despite all of our efforts of will. In weak and nervous people, the effort of attention, when it is prolonged, especially in women, gives way to grave discomforts. It sometimes happens that when a person gets their eyes checked at a vision clinic, or stands in front of the camera in the studio of a photographer, they remain completely hypnotized and immobile for a little bit of time afterwards. The game of mind readers is well-known, where they have their eyes covered and through a concentration of the will, they are able to predict the intentions of the person whose hand they are holding, made aware by the slightest involuntary movements of the hand that these people make. There are women who, after being forced into this game have a great tension of spirit, vertigo and fainting spells for some time.<sup>4</sup>

One must avoid the effort that can lead to this hypnotic act, which is harmful to the individual. A weak person who forced himself to be attentive and who fell into a such an ecstatic state would find himself in the worst conditions for understanding how much is happening around him. His fortune would be comparable to that of animals awaiting their prey. Animals await their prey in a state of concentration, their attention deadens their other senses so much that often hunters take advantage of this psychic state of unawareness to approach them.

Knowing up to what point it is useful to artificially induce ourselves into a state of attention: here is the problem to solve. Here, in the final analysis,

lies the whole problem of the rational education of the attention and the will. It is about finding the right point at which attention ends up being a means of defence, ends up becoming a condition of inferiority.

The cinematograph solves the problem. It achieves the concentration of attention with minimal effort. It does not create that dangerous state of hypnosis that Mosso pointed out. It instead creates that state of light hypnosis which is very useful for receiving and storing up sensations. The attention is reawakened without effort. The cinematographic sensation can and must constitute the basis of the education of the faculty of attention. Educators are already starting to accept this rather simple truth.

The cinematographic sensation inspires in man the need for action, and it is an exercise for the will because it teaches us to quickly choose the action to carry out and the decision to make.

The spectator almost inadvertently experiences the suggestion of the act that he sees projected on the screen. We would say that he is practically inspired to copy its energetic expressions and its plastic and dynamic attitudes.

But having reached this point, a caveat appears before us that can seem formidable from the outset.

If moving pictures truly possesses such a power of suggestion on the crowd, those who define it as a school of criminality are correct, and the government is right to establish rigorous censorship of films destined for public audiences.

In fact, we must recognize that many crimes have been committed by reproducing events from films which—as the guilty parties even say—suggested the idea for the crime.

First, we do know that this confession isn't some kind of instinctive defence that the guilty put up in order to minimize their responsibility—making themselves victims of a suggestion. But let's accept the truthfulness of what the guilty are asserting. In this case, it is certain that the film that instigates delinquency does not belong to the output of the legitimately-organized production houses, but to the illegitimate output of a profligate editor. Let us repeat that, a production company that continuously produces new films could not support itself with an anti-social production because the audience would reject it.

So then, in reality, the number of crimes committed under the influence of a cinematographic work is rather small. And the bad are fully compensated for by the good so that the screen can and must inspire the field of energetic education.

On the other hand, the same arguments brought forth by enemies of the cinema in order to obtain more rigorous censorship demonstrate that one



must take into account the enormously suggestive power of the screen, and that we possess a miraculous means to educate the wider audience and direct them towards moral and intellectual improvement.

The consequences of this suggestive power, which has acted upon the public for about ten years, appear rather visible to us even though the cinematograph has not yet reached the level of development of which it is capable.

What are these consequences? A careful psychological examination of the new generations would stray from our task, because it would require an entire volume of its own.

We will limit ourselves to some notes on the undeniable inclination towards action that one sees in young people.

The sense of the heroic, which in the Great War had asserted itself with such splendour, has been fed—we don't want to say created—by the cinematograph. The young people of today demonstrate better inclinations towards action than young people of the past. Certainly, the wide range of literature abandoning the equally nit-picky and vacuous psychological dissertation has for some time been calling for energetic renewal, [and] has contributed to this new fervour of action. And without a doubt, the pragmatic philosophy for which action is the cornerstone has not had a small influence. But the cinema, by translating these philosophical and literary tendencies in its silent photographic language, has popularized a way of thinking that would otherwise not have been comprehensible to the masses.

That is not to say that the production companies have put the philosophy of William James and Bergson into film. But, seeing as the cinema is pure action, one can consider it as the exponent of an entirely new way of considering life and the universe.

One could apply Goethe's motto 'In the beginning was the action' to the advent of the cinematograph, since the essence of this important organ of today's civilization is, as Nordau says, action and energy.<sup>5</sup>

One mustn't forget that darkness and music are important elements in the evocativeness of the projection. As a result, we think that projections made for being seen in full light are useless and sterile ventures. The darkness of the room, added to the music, makes the suggestion more effective. We have all felt a sense of slight anguish when for some reason the orchestra stopped playing during a projection. That slight sense of anguish impedes the full enjoyment of the play of the characters. It is necessary to add that darkness and music to provoke the spectator to enter into that psychic state that is a real basis of hypnosis, during which the suggestions more

easily make their way into the spectator's spirit, as studies of hypnotism and suggestion demonstrate. For this reason, it is easy to foresee that in the future, the musical element will be an integral component of the film, and that from the combination of sound with vision, they will know how to draw out results from suggestion, which at this point is barely in an embryonic stage.

It seems to us that an important element for educating the will to action is the plastic-dynamic suggestion that the cinematograph makes. The statue-like and energetic poses that the artists strike in front of the camera, unfolding themselves in a series of aesthetic movements that are simultaneously suited for attaining a given goal and for expressing a given dramatic moment, constitute a useful invitation to subordinate every move we make to a precise and utilitarian goal. The Man of Action does not make useless or disordered movements, but he possesses the ability to conform his action, in the least time possible, to his thinking. The Indecisive Man lacks this ability. And that is because for the Indecisive Man, the action is preceded by a disordered jumble of contradictory thoughts, such that the action, when completed after countless hesitations, finds itself unsuited to the circumstances for which it was executed.

Watching good films in which actors carry out purposeful gestures in a perfect harmonious rhythm and in conformity with the goal to be reached presents to the spectators, who are immersed in that state of light hypnosis that we referred to, the need to model these gestures themselves.

In his early years, man's ability to imitate gestures and movements is strong, absorbing the portrayal that he sees reproduced. The cinematograph must take advantage of precisely this mimetic tendency in order to induce the outward appearance of the Energetic man in young people.

But, we hear people say, what good does it do to achieve this outward appearance if the psyche does not match it?

Psychologists hold the answer.

The movement suggests the thinking, just as the thinking suggests the movement. An action that one has thought of is an action that is beginning. This is a truth that forms the basis of the new psychology and that is a principle of rational pedagogy.

The cinema, as a school of action, will soon be appreciated for its proper value and will be able to give rise to a whole vast production directed to this sole purpose.

The rise of the cinematograph in the conquest of men has just begun. Using this new art to forge the new man will be the great miracle of the future.

## What Genre of Film is Best Suited to Incite to Action?

It is evident that not all films will be suitable for incitement and that from this point of view, a great part of what is produced should be cast aside. The production companies that intend to collaborate with the good propaganda of the intense life—as Roosevelt defined it—must make judicious choices about the plotlines.<sup>6</sup>

The protagonist must be a man capable of battling against adversity, equipped, therefore, with a strong will. He must be led, through a series of eventful ups-and-downs, to triumph over the numerous obstacles that other antagonistic wills always place before him. Every inclination of this protagonist must be the affirmation of a will that does not hesitate before danger. Let him have a good and heroic spirit, perhaps a bit like Don Quixote, always ready to defend the weak and to punish the guilty. Let him be the avenger whose condemnation the scheming bad guy never escapes.

From this dry outline, one could conceive of loads of films.

As the reader knows, in the film that incites [us] to action, we are the absolute creators of the happy ending which, for however conventional it is, is more humanely true than a verist catastrophe in which the protagonist dies. And indeed, we must judge the moral content of a film by its pragmatic value, that is, by the usefulness that can be derived by following it with action. The sense of justice that is one of the most marked characteristics of the theatre audience, and especially the cinematograph audience, must not be sacrificed nor undermined. A film where the good and courageous protagonist, the defender of the weak, was a victim of a catastrophe brought on by wicked elements of the action, would have an unjust ending. All the noble and generous efforts carried out by the protagonist would be in vain. His will must lead to a final act of justice. And it is just that the generous man triumphs.

Evidently it is necessary that film criticism—today scarcely in its early dawning—cooperate with the spread of films which we call *dinamogeno* ('something that generates dynamism'). The production worthy of being distributed throughout the world must not consist of a simple entertainment for idlers, but must provide healthy incitement to action.

In saying this, our disapproval for that genre of films which certainly does not encourage the energies of the spectator is understood: the so-called psychological cine-dramas which are often a boring sequence of frames in which the only thing of interest is provided by the bare shoulder of an actress and frequent immodest exhibitions... It cannot be that this

kind of film is directed at the renewal of men! Thank goodness that film defined as 'cinepornographic' will never attain the straightforward and widespread success of the good, healthy film that incites to action. For that reason, the production companies are often punished in their rash attempt to put a film on the market that goes against—we don't want to say to good manners—but against the proper industrial and artistic criteria.

### Physical Strength and the Cinema

As we have tried to demonstrate in our preceding volumes *Il mondo è tuo* (*The World is Yours*) and *La conquista dell'energia fisica* (*The Conquest of Energy*), 'the possession of physical strength is very useful for the Man of Action.'<sup>7</sup> Consequently, reasonable physical education is part of the training of the person who wants to conquer for himself a good seat at the banquet of life. And it is not difficult for the reader to be convinced of this. But the assertion that the cinema facilitates this branch of education in an unexpected way might seem instead unusual or paradoxical.

And yet, the attentive scholars of the cinematographic effects on the audience, especially the young people in the audience, will recognize that this assertion corresponds to a truth destined to make its way triumphantly.

Indeed, it is easy to say that the spectators of a film have the tendency to repeat in life the actions and the behaviours that have been suggested to them on the screen.

An act of muscular strength is the most directly suggestive thing there is in the cinema, and it is rare that you would find kids resistant to this suggestion: almost all of them try to repeat the muscular movements that impressed them on the screen, thus obtaining—without a doubt—rapid effects in the strengthening of their own muscles.

One can say the same thing about movements of agility: running, jumping, etc. The need for trying to reproduce the movement is practically irresistible in young bodies.

Assuming this tendency—and denying it would be the equivalent of denying the universal phenomenon of imitation brought about by suggestion—one must consider the photodynamic projection an effective school of physical education. Through these projections, movements are suggested which are very useful to acquire of physical strength.

## The Tendency to Repeat the Actions Seen in a Projection and the Gymnastic Film

The results of physical training that are procured today from films of action are rather evident, but they cannot yet generate very widespread effects because people have not yet thought to produce a film specially dedicated to this kind of physical suggestion.

It is not improbable that the 'gymnastic film', knowingly integrated with the honest adventurous film, will constitute one of the most interesting branches of cinematography in the future.

So far, it seems to us a very real possibility to create films to be projected in schools, in which various gymnastic exercises best-suited to the development of young bodies are carefully demonstrated. The screening of the *gymnastic film* would be followed by practising the projected movements on the part of the students. In this way, the system would constitute a very valid exercise, as much for the body as for the memory. Then, if appropriate music was added to the screening and the practice of the demonstrated gymnastic movements, we could have a new application of the 'rhythmic gymnastics' propagated by Delacroze [*sic*], which is most useful for the acquisition of grace and harmonious rhythm in movement.<sup>8</sup>

We will certainly arrive at this application of the cinematograph when people are widely convinced of the enormous suggestive power—not just morally speaking, but also physically speaking—of the screen. In the meantime, we see that Edison's idea of transforming oral pedagogy into photo-mechanical pedagogy is making its way. The research and the experiments carried out in the last few years demonstrate how effective the screen is in training the attention, which is the earliest faculty of learning. But we will talk about that later: now, we will limit ourselves to considering the influence of cinema with regard to physical training.

## The Unconscious Assimilation of the Spectator

The simple projected vision of grandiose natural spectacles, foaming waterfalls, immense prairies in which the film heroes battle against men, beasts, and the forces of nature, inspires in the spectator a need to relive those actions—even in a lesser form. He generates in his muscles the beginning of those movements. Some time ago, a system of gymnastics was started that is based on the influence of thought on the muscles. Thinking hard about a muscular movement increased the benefit of the exercise when it

is being done. In our book, *The Conquest of Energy*, we mentioned a system of gymnastics that consisted of doing exercises in front of a mirror so that the eye could follow the play of the muscles. The effects of this system have been deemed most excellent.

So, the cinema realizes in an ideal way these two related systems: it incites thought to act on the muscular system and at the same time facilitates the learning of right and rational movement.

The true treatise of gymnastics in the future will not be contained in a printed book, but in a series of films where the most rational system will unfold.

Every gym will have its projection room where students will learn gymnastic exercises by sight, [and] which they will then carry out by putting their trust in their memory.

Certainly, so that our facile prophecy will come true, it is necessary that the current misoneism [fear of new things] that looms over the ruling circles of every people be vanquished: but we think that the cinematograph is such an instrument of social renewal that those same people who today consider it a frivolous pastime or a pernicious school of corruption for young people, will be the first to undergo its influence. The signs are not discouraging. Every day sees new converts. The principle of least effort applies to man and to society, and as we have seen, the principle of least effort explains the enormous prevalence and popularity of the cinematograph.

Today, the 'gymnastic' film is on the path to creation.

*'Il cinematografo scuola di volontà e di energie'*, *La Vita Cinematografica*, 9 (December 1918), pp. 145–150. Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.

## Notes

1. [Editors' note. Edouard Toulouse (1865–1947) was one of the leading figures in experimental psychology and French psychiatry, as well as being one of the first to use scientific methods to conduct experiments on the psychophysical responses of moviegoers.]
2. [Editors' note. *Il circo della morte* is an alternate title for the film *L'ultima rappresentazione di gala del circo Wolfson*, directed by Alfred Lind, Vay Film, Milano, 1916.]
3. [Editors' note. Angelo Mosso (1846–1910) was considered the preeminent Italian expert in physiology.]

4. [Editors' note. Albrecht von Haller (1708–1777) was a Swiss doctor and one of the most respected founders of modern physiology; Also see Mosso, *La fatica*, p.195.]
5. [Editors' note. Max Nordau was the pseudonym of Max Simon Südfeld (1849–1923), a journalist, writer, essayist, and author who critiqued the pseudo-science of the philosophical and sociological traditions. Südfeld was frequently cited and well-respected within the positivist climate of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe.]
6. [Editors' note. The author is referring to Teddy Roosevelt's inaugural address on 4 March 1905 in which he argued that given the intensity of modern life, America's success in the twentieth-century hinged on 'vigor and effort without which the manlier and hardier virtues wither away'.]
7. [Editors' note. See Bertinetti, *Mondo è tuo* and *Conquista dell'energia*.]
8. [Editors' note. Bertinetti is referring to Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, the pseudonym of Emile Henri Jaques (1865–1950), the Swiss teacher who created a celebrated method to teach and perceive music through movement.]

# The Close-up

*Alberto Orsi*

The cinematographic terminology is so widespread that it's now on everyone's lips. Among its numerous brethren, the term 'close-up' has, more than the others, the honour of being known by the laymen in the field of cinema. Except that, none of those laymen—who feel their senses pleasurably delighted by the sight of the beautiful relief of a figure trembling with life, palpitating with emotion (a figure which, even though it appears larger than life on the screen, even though it seems to pull itself away in order to come closer to us and to welcome us into the circle of its quivering, even though it widens the contours of reality, still remains within the limits of artistic reality).<sup>1</sup> As I was saying, not one of those inexpert people knows or can imagine to what well-established norms in cinematic art the so-called close-up corresponds.

The terrible thing is that many, if not most of the directors do not know this either.

It is commonly believed that the 'close-up', as well as a series of its derivations—the 'detail shot', the 'big detail', the 'head shot', the 'big head shot'—has no other purpose than to highlight to a greater degree the aesthetic or artistic qualities of an actor or an actress, the elegance and richness of a detail in the scenery, or the enchanting strength of a natural decoration. It is generally thought that the 'cut' of a scene, the artistic part of the photograph in scenic terms, has the subjective judgement of the director as its only guideline.

This is a serious and fundamental error.

This is an error that has repercussions not only for the *mise-en-scène*, but also for the critics. Based on this error, many critics speak simultaneously of the parsimony or the abusive over-use of close-ups, without basing their judgements on any determined law. This happens in such an arbitrary way that criticism cannot be refuted precisely because it lacks a basis—even an erroneous one.

This happens because one does not think or ignores that the 'close-up' and its derivations only have to obey one essential and exclusive, objective law.

And what is this law?

In the presentation of the shots, or rather in the film staging, the director must follow the same rule that would guide an invisible spectator as he watches the scene.



Let us suppose that the scene, rather than taking place in a film studio, was taking place in a real setting, and that, from a helpful hole in one of the walls, a curious and indiscreet person could watch the events unfolding. He would always direct his own attention and his own gaze towards that point or those people that attracted him the most. Sometimes, in the most climactic moments, he would concentrate even on one tiny spot in the location or on the specific face of one of the actors, or even on a specific hand, or one particular object. The director must 'intuit' the state of mind of the spectator and present to him the frame to which he, in that given moment, would point his attention and his gaze.

As you can see, the whim of the director does not enter into any of this at all. This is only about that insightfulness about psychology which allows him to perfectly put himself in the place of the invisible spectator and completely adhere to [the spectator's] psychological being.

This is perhaps the most important part of the difficult art of motion pictures. Indeed, the intrinsic goodness of a subject is infinitely less important than the way in which it is 'staged' In fact, it is from the *mise-en-scène* that the artistic truth of a subject is measured. That is why one could say that the true author of a subject is not the one who writes it, but the one who 'staged' it. That is why the subject should be 'staged' by the author of a subject, which is to say that the author should stage it because the staging and the *mise-en-scène* melt into one thing.

To illuminate anything that might remain unclear in spite of my intention of making myself obvious, here is an example.

Let's imagine a living room bustling with certain characters.

Behind the camera, a curious and indiscreet invisible person is watching, who will later, in front of the screen, be the audience.

What does invisible curious and indiscreet person do?

He studies the entire scene with a rapid, but analytical gaze. In this instant, the invisible spectator is moved by a multitude of curiosities. His gaze stops on the objects [in the room]—examining the size of the place, the quality and the nature of the furnishings, the doors, the windows, etc.—and on the people—observing their clothing, their comportment, and their gestures. He is aware of all of this in a brief instant.

For this reason, the director must present [the spectator] the entirety of the frame with the so-called 'master shot' and leave before his eyes everything that corresponds to the spectator's needs, not a moment more, not a moment less, keeping in mind the average speed of the perception of the audience. If the action is not essential or especially significant, the duration of the entire scene should only be the equivalent of a few

metres of film: between three and four metres. No more, because the curious invisible and indiscreet person is in a hurry. He is in a hurry to know what all of it is for and he already has sufficient means to recognize the various corners or spots in the room where subsequent scenes will take place.

Let us suppose that at this point a new character enters—a man. The invisible curious man, like all the actors in the scene will turn towards the door through which the newcomer has just entered. Since it is more than certain that the curious man will concentrate all of his own attention on the new character and will not see anything else in the place aside from him, the director would be committing a grave error if he were to insist on continuing to show him things that he is not looking at and does not want to see, or rather, the full scene. He will instead present him the famous ‘close-up’, or rather a frame in which only the threshold of the door and the new character making his entrance come into play.

Naturally, the figure’s dimensions will be much greater than they would be in the ‘master shot’ and would be enlarged in accordance with how enlarged he would have been if the indiscreet and curious invisible man, urged on by curiosity, had come down from his hiding place, and certain of his own invisibility, had moved closer to the new character in order to leisurely observe him better.

But the newcomer is not standing still: he walks and he resolutely steers himself to the crowd of those present, his gaze seeks out a specific person: a woman.

The curious and indiscreet invisible man, who finds himself in the path of the visitor, will take a few steps back to let him pass by freely, without, however, taking his eyes off him.

The director will do the same. That is, he will move the camera back a bit in order to frame a wider part of the scene, which allows him to show the curious man the new character on his way toward the designated person. But, since the field would be too restricted for a ‘close-up’, the director will use a pan shot, making the camera carry out the same movements as the gaze of the indiscreet and curious invisible man.

The newcomer (it seems that his intentions are hardly good, and the invisible man is already starting to be suspicious of him) found the person he was looking for and stops threateningly right in front of her. Among all of these people, who is that person?

The curious invisible man asks himself the same question and follows the glances of the new arrival, resting his gaze on the woman, who is the object of his search. In that moment, he doesn’t see anything else.

The director, must, therefore, show the woman and nothing else so that the indiscreet invisible man can observe her terrified expression. It is not enough: the curious man is not satisfied with observing her entire person, but stops with singular emotion on her face, taking in the slightest nuances in her feelings. And so, the director must go from the 'close-up', from the so-called detail to the 'big detail' or to the 'head' or to the 'big head'.

Then, the curious man retraces his steps, moves away, and re-embraces the preceding action in its fullness, which, although it is not the entire scene, is a part of the entire scene. That is, it is the part in which the drama is unfolding. The camera must do the same. To pull back and to frame the group of characters in their individual gestures of surprise, worry, fear. If among those present there is someone who shows his emotion in a way that particularly attracts the curious man's attention such that he comes closer to observe it, the director, too, will bring the camera closer and will frame the emotion in a close-up or in a 'big detail'. The size of the shot depends on just how much closer the curious man gets and if he sees a larger or smaller part of that character. Then the curious man returns to the preceding scene and will re-embrace all of the actors in the drama with his gaze.

The camera does the same. It goes back and repeats the preceding frame.

Suddenly, the invisible man, astonished, turns his head. What's happening? The camera follows the same movement of the invisible man. It also turns in the same direction and sees—no more and nor less than the curious man—one of the onlookers (perhaps the one that he had just drawn closer to a moment before) place himself between the aggressor and his victim.

Then, the curious man and the camera draw closer. They no longer see the onlookers. They each concentrate their attention on this threesome, and naturally, see them in 'close-up.'

While they follow the scene, their hearts pounding, the invisible man and the camera get the impression of a movement. To better observe, they move in even closer. They see nothing more than a part of the aggressor's body: a hand that thrusts into a pants pocket and pulls out a gun. Here is a 'big detail'. In the swiftness of the gesture, the particulars of the weapon—which is small in size—have equally escaped the attention of the curious man and of the camera. They get even closer and strain their eyes to see: they see a revolver. This 'big detail' is even more 'big detail' than the previous one. The only thing in the shot is the weapon in all its detail at the end of an outstretched arm.

Who is it pointed at?

The curious man and the camera back up a little, following the direction of the weapon and see, in close-up, only her: the woman is the target. They

no longer even see the aggressor, until they turn to him and then, they only see him ferociously and cruelly level the gun and fire it.

Instinctively, they turn to the victim, and in another close-up, they see her fall backwards. At this point the camera would make be making a serious error if it were to frame other people or other things: it would separate itself from the invisible and indiscreet curious man, who is the only arbiter of the 'frame'.

Only now does the curious man jump backwards and instinctively move away while everyone rushes to the victim. And it is precisely now that the camera will follow him and will pause for a moment, framing the entire opening scene, ending just as it began.

All of this must happen quickly, in shots of at most two, three, four, or five metres each, even in 'details' of fifty centimetres, all according to how long the curious and indiscreet invisible man will stop to watch them. The complete scene will not include more than forty or fifty metres of film.

Who is it, then, that should determine *'mise-en-scène'*?

The curious and invisible indiscreet person who [is sitting] in front of the screen will take the grave and anonymous name of 'the audience'.

The director—that is, the camera—only has to follow him in all of his movements.

The formula could not be any easier.

It all rests on knowing how to see the 'invisible man'. How many people know how to see him?<sup>2</sup>

*'Il primo piano', Le maschere*, 2/2 (11 January 1920), p. 7. Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.

## Notes

1. [Translator's note. The fragmentary nature of the translation reflects the author's own style.]
2. [Translator's note. The translation cannot convey that *'l'invisibile'* in these last two sentences refers simultaneously to 'the invisible' as well as to 'the invisible [curious and indiscreet] person'. Throughout the article, the reference has been to different variations of *'l'invisibile'*, *'curioso'*, and *'indiscreto'*.]

# The Soul of Titles

*Ernesto Quadrone*

To be a successful film, the title is everything. A film, no matter how good it is, needs a fly a flag that gives a concise and tense presentation of its wonders and intrinsic value; that flag is its title!

Without a title, a film is like a stem with no flower, a man with no money, a city with no strikes.

The title must embrace the subject like a tight-fitting, precise and luminous girdle; under it, the mystery of action must ring out and be gathered, hide and reveal itself at one and the same time.

The title must be the theme of the action, the recurring motif, the rhythm of the passions that make up the action, the spring and estuary, the dawn and dusk of the cinematographic fable.

As well as being persuasive it must possess a harmony of its own that outlines and synthesizes the main characters' movements. And so, we will have titles as light and rhythmic as minuets, bouncy and agile like the *Furlana*, the Friulan folk dance of ancient times, like the held breath of declarations of love made to the stars, cool and rose-scented like very slow wafts of May air, twisted and sinister like a delinquent's sick mask, honest like a child's laugh, undecipherable like a sphinx's silence, mad and phosphorescent like happy garlands of flares, closed and packed with mystery like the deep darkness of the jungle, sun-drenched and clear like country afternoons at harvest time, thin as winter branches, opulent as autumn fruit.

As well as harmony, the title must have its colour: blue and calm against a sky of fluffy white clouds accompanied by the simple and kindly outline of a church tower is not bad; vivid and vibrant red can have its place in the anger of a gang of bandits; deep black can appear to sure effect beyond the tips of the cypress trees in a cemetery; almost by necessity, yellow must intrude with mimosa and chrysanthemums against the glass wall of a Japanese room; a shadow in the half-light, dark green is pleasant in a marriage chamber; white, dotted with snowy butterflies, blends well with the silent presence of a Siberian panorama; deep purple sprouts up with a tasty opulent character among the strong boxes burgled by thieves. In addition, no less diligence must be employed in the choice of type that makes up the title. English italic type shines beautifully through the spokes of a gentleman's horse-drawn buggy; a flat and massive, almost brutal type

finds its place on the window of a bar in a seedy part of town, while an agile and small type, with little spaces between the letters, thanks to the way its points and hieroglyphics spring out, can pleasantly welcome the feet of a troupe of agile ballet dancers. A twisted and sinister type fits a home under the cruel tyranny of an old mother-in-law; five or six letters all bunched up together spring excellently from the tip of a hooligan's knife; long and languid, almost tired, lettering twists itself very tastefully around the silky dress of a dreamer thinking of suicide among a slow withering of roses...

This long tirade of mine has no pretence to offer advice. The able illustrators of films have already gone beyond all imagination; to be convinced of this, all you have to do is take a glance at the posters that each day astonish us more and intensify our curiosity for city streets.

Human knowledge has passed through paintings and words; of every passion and tragedy they have excitedly charted the truth to the point of celebration, or caricature to the point of the grotesque, or poetry to the point of lyricism, or pain to the point of the macabre, or laughter to the point of paroxysm.

Cunning that has become mischief, love sickness, rebellion anarchy, blood tears, garden a rose, dedication a smile, symphony a serenade, a star the universe...

Let's review them swiftly, dividing them up into

There are monosyllabic titles: *Yes. No. Never. But.*

In general, these lead us to think of a superficial and sentimental job; they are typically put on the protagonists' heads as if they were Sirius, the star of good fortune. The two real, essential protagonists locked up in the monosyllables are usually *He* and *She*. If she holds his hands, the background is an alcove with a halo of lace and flowers; if she doesn't hold his hand, the background is a troubled sky with a profile of a dramatic rock on which the storm's lightning illuminates the open white arms of a cross. The pure and simple *But* is the centre of a semi-plucked daisy one autumn evening or the enigmatic seam of a fat, calm, jolly man's closed lips. That *But* can be the good man's melancholic answer to a certain question of his about family disposition... or the taking of leave with which says good-bye and shows the door his rich and honest daughter's poor and honest young suitor.

There are titles with question and exclamation marks ... ???!!! These Cabalistic signs almost always run through the closed mystery of a black mask, or of a drawn and closed curtain behind which we imagine the held breath of a murderer, or the flat and massive sadness of a coffin.

This is the richest of promises, but also the most dangerous for the public. The botanic, chemical, pathological, physical, metaphysical titles always

promise a thesis of thought illustrated by a wise, studious, level-headed person against another person, the antithesis of the former. Who'll win out? Which of the two spirits will come out on top? Neither of them, usually. Initially, science succumbs, then the layman, after which scientist and layman sing a love song on the bow of a Neapolitan boat.

Epic and exotic titles promise a world of dreams, of unreality. The yellow-skinned opium smoker blows out his poisonous spirals, the *musme*, the young Japanese woman dressed in leather shells, never-ending strings of shiny oriental pearls that resemble drops of blood and the points of daggers. Huge and terrible medieval suits of armour open up in the silences of austere castles out of which bands of heroes and villains pour onto the soft and silent carpets of the rooms, the settings of the final scene in which the catastrophic vision of desperate and horrendous struggles are performed in the midst of flashes of metallic lightning.

The most evocative titles are those that add an unexpected quality to the most common thing in the world by way of the strident bond of an adjective: *The Hopping Table*, *The Harmonic Chair*, *The Wardrobe of Clouds*, *The Incandescent Stone*, *The Spring of Blood...*, *The Creaking Man*, *The Velvet Skeleton*, *Coral Nails*, *The Pupil Necklace*, *The Fanfare of the Chimps*, *The Concert of Slow-Paced Encephalitis*, *The Electric Microbe*, *The Skull Bell*. There is no sense in explaining the charm and mystery of this wording. All you have to do is read them to experience that light shiver of curiosity that basically determines the success of the *film*.

The most modern and fashionable titles are those that form at least a phrase or even a whole sentence of a novel. They have the prerogative of making pedestrians, even those most in a hurry, stop in their tracks. Even in the case of the most lukewarm curiosity, this stop can be the victory over the firmest decision an individual can take not to be tempted by the fictions of the screen. 'When one by one the roses fall'. Under this, we are forced to read: 'accompanied by a large orchestra'. With this phrase, we immediately feel the slow up and down motion of a swing, we anticipate something soft, a sense of floating, a dream suspended in mid-air, an exhausted romantic female protagonist sitting under the beech trees that overshadow the meadow of the solitary...

This vision can be immediately transformed by the addition of a word, a phrase that augments its effect and charm...

'When one by one roses fall on the pond that leads them away.'

By conserving that back and forth motion of a suspended hammock, the title is ever more mysterious; the castle dissolves, the beech trees have been cut down by a wondrous axe, the romantic female protagonist has become

a perverse creature expert in black magic... The roses drop from the bush and in their brief flight of death, an ardent puff of wind scorches them. The petals become metallic, the pond water hard and resistant, and the victim that is the perverse creature, in the long nights of vigil and fear, hears in the garden the tragic crack of the flowers that bounce back up from the crystal water like hailstones striking the bell of the nearby... And with a small variation, the public's imagination is transported into an environment of goodness, poetry, peace, all suffused in a sweet melancholy: 'When one by one the roses fall from your lap, O mother.'

How is it possible not to hear a distant and intimate family tragedy? A betrayal that has inevitably happened amid domestic peace? A father, ignorant of the sacrifice his bride has made, dies of shame and sorrow, his daughter forgives the paternal error, because she understands. The final scene will probably show her on her knees before the old sinner as she picks the roses of pain that drop from her maternal lap one by one...

Titles such as the novels of [Guido] da Verona represent, let's say, the essence of this category. For example, the final title of his novel: *Sciogli la treccia* (*Untie Your Hair*), could be arranged to appear with success on a poster that advertises a cinematographic film: if the character of the film was humorous, with a little trick but without taking anything away from the harmony of the wording, it could come out more or less like this: 'Brush Your Teeth, Filomena!', or—increasing its meaning—: 'Put on the Kimono, O Bertoldina!' and taking on a more serious tone: 'O Eat This Soup or Jump out of the Window, O Serafina!' and more tragically: 'Open up the Bed, O Lucrezia!' and more dramatically: 'I will have your Head, O Cunegonda!'

And so on.

It bears repeating that as far as titles are concerned the writer's imagination has gone beyond every limit and expectation. We are not far away from the day in which advertising posters will reproduce on a real screen a part of the film's final scene. And so, to the Harlequin publicity of the posters will be added the dizzy movement of a hundred scenes that will bundle together their tragedies and farces with the tragedies and farces that people channel in the motion of their daily lives in the city streets, and that motion will become dizziness and contrasts will become evident to the point of exasperation and states of mind will know no truce. The consonance between the unreal and the real will become more tangible, who knows how many intimate expressions of pain or joy will be reflected as in a mirror, from the facial features of the people in the street to those of the people made only of shadow and light, who will repeat on the screens the anxiety or the gasps or the prank induced by fiction.



And so, two lives will exist in parallel between the galloping crowd of the street; and in the superimposition of two speeds, people's brains will find a catastrophic solution to their incessant desire to be ahead of events that, on the path of life, ambush them.

*'L'anima dei titoli', Coltura cinematografica [La Tecnica cinematografica],* 2/3 (31 March 1920), pp. 257–260. Translated by David Ward.

## Note

1. [Editors' note. da Verona, *Sciogli la treccia.*]

## Section 3



# Cinema at War

*Luca Mazzei*

The characteristics of war films from the early years of the twentieth century have been explored by a number of film historians.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, we know a lot about the methods of production, and even the critical reception of these films. However, there has been little work on the theoretical discourses produced by war films. This lack is especially problematic in Italy, the country in which these discourses fulfilled, particularly from 1911 to 1917, a fundamental role, both in the promotion and organization of the cinematic experience.

## **Before the Great War**

The reference to 1911 is not coincidental. The reflections on cinema and the war's events happened in Italy before other European countries. To be precise, they begin during the first interventions of the Italo-Turkish War (1911–1912). In this colonial conflict, Italy sought belatedly, and from a military perspective, also inexpertly, to be in a dominant position in the south-eastern Mediterranean.<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the war was anachronistic. On the one hand, it is a war that was absolutely 'old', in the sense that it was the last step in a phase of colonialism known as the Scramble for Africa, which the rest of the world had basically abandoned.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, it was fully 'modern', fought not only with cannons and rifles, but also with an extensive propaganda campaign, which used every possible medium at its disposal. One of the themes that the propaganda emphasized was the use of new technologies in the conflict. It was, obviously, a construct. In reality, new technologies did not have the same influencing presence in that war as they did in previous conflicts during the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> But, for the Italian political and cultural establishment, the innovations had both a tactical and a political role. It wanted to convey an image of Italy as a nation that, although small and politically new, was also innovative. Thus, cinema became an important point of intersection: on the one hand, the camera was a continual presence on the battlefield; on the other, as the newspapers promptly reported, the experimental, new technology was put to use by the army to communicate with soldiers and for surveillance from airships.<sup>5</sup> These

events also coincide with a period of strong growth for Italian cinema, both domestically and internationally.<sup>6</sup>

This process was also combined with other phenomena connected to the advent of modernity. One such development was the rise of the nationalist movement, which happened exactly between 1911 and 1912 and became the primary proponent of colonial campaigns. Formally connected to traditional values, but completely orientated toward modernity, the nationalists, together with the socialists, were the political parties most interested in creating a relationship with the masses.<sup>7</sup> Among the party members who gave serious attention to communication, there were various entrepreneurs active in the cinematography. The outbreak of the war did not increase their investment in the production and use of film.<sup>8</sup>

Thanks to the Italo-Turkish War, models of communication, based on the quick and massive exchange of images from one part of the world to the other, gained traction. At the European level, the first phase of this process began in the first decade of the century. For photography, it came with the spread of the Kodak brand camera, which was increasingly provided to war correspondents and sometimes even military officials. The circulation of cinematic images began to take off with the establishment of the *Pathé-Journal* in 1909.<sup>9</sup> After 1911, the practices of photojournalism and cinematic journalism considerably accelerated, spurred by a succession of wars beginning with the Italo-Turkish War (the First Balkan War in 1912; the Second Balkan War in 1913; and the First World War in 1914).<sup>10</sup>

As a result, by 1911–1912, Italy found itself at the centre of a lively experimentation with war films, ranging from shots of current events for propaganda purposes to fiction films either directly or indirectly inspired by the war, to military footage from aircraft for tactical purposes, and experimental cinematography designed for families of the combatants, which were real and proper ‘film postcards’ made by Casa Cines in collaboration with the military organization, governmental circles, and volunteers for the nationalist movement.<sup>11</sup> All of these practices were accompanied, sometimes by intense theoretical work, disseminated through various outlets, from newspapers (where cinema was often placed on the front page) to weekly and monthly magazines, and periodicals on film.

### **Italo-Turkish War: Three Themes on Cinema**

This context of rapid expansion, together with the centrality of cinema in the dominant political discourse, led to a complex theoretical debate

in Italy about cinema that can be categorized into the primary threads of reflections.

The first thread regards cinema's ability to 'condense' experience. The cinema immerses us, effectively and immediately, in the complex scenario offered by the war. It was done not only with fiction films, but primarily with *actualités*, which depicted places and events already reported by the press without any ulterior attempt of narrativization. Moreover, the cameramen, even though they were categorized by the military authority as journalists, tended to hide their presence within the film. Rarely did they try to frame the images with subjective intertitles. A solution of this kind, even though it was used at the beginning of the war in a Pathé *actualité* by Bixio Alberini, tended to disappear over time.<sup>12</sup> In the *actualité* and fiction films, the spectator identifies not with the individual protagonist, but with a supra-individual entity. Therefore, the films were in symphony with nationalist discourse, according to which an individual does not exist in and of himself, but only in relationship to the crowd.<sup>13</sup> This comes from a de-personalization of the spectator into a kind of 'mass soldier', an supra-being given a collective identity, who does not have a true physical identity, but who is instead constituted by ethnic and heroic components.<sup>14</sup> This is why the praise for 'a lone tenderness spread among 10,000 beings like a religious faith that is at once unique and multiple.'<sup>15</sup> The soldiers become 'those who belong to us and who are united with us Italians' to the point that what happens on the screen is a singular 'a life hot with passion.'<sup>16</sup>

It was an immersive experience that, as noted in the essays by Prezzolini and Giovannetti, did not always work.<sup>17</sup> However, even in the most jaded viewer, the desire for connection endures, both these 'people' and those at war on the front, both of which are contributing to the action taking place on film, even those upset under the screen.

The second theme that the films of the Italo-Turkish War seem to engender is *ubiquity*. Becoming as light as pure spirit, the body of the new Italian is able not only to rematerialize in a generic colonial war setting, but is also able to express his gestural message in every place he intends return to. For example, in the city where he grew up, where his relatives will see him. Renato Giovannetti and Nino Salvaneschi also touch upon this, referring to the diverse types of attitudes of the soldiers in front of the camera.<sup>18</sup> The most striking example, however, is the inverse; namely, the 'cine-postcards' mentioned earlier, which were screened in Tripoli between 20 March and 24 March 1912. Just like the collective shots made with the participation of the family members from various cities in Italy, the screenings in Tripoli received a lot of attention from the journalists

that were present, so much so that they often earned a spot on the front page of the papers. In fact, there was a lot of curiosity as to whether or not it would really work. Would the message come across? What would the soldiers say? What would be the effect on the psyche? The person most interested in understanding this phenomenon was the Roman journalist, Luigi Lucatelli. What struck him most was cinema's ability to send, without any words, the perfect message ('Seeing them elbow each other, one could intuit the conversations that had taken place a few minutes prior'). However, the ability of the camera to rematerialize the body, to transport it anywhere in space, seemed to attract him. Lucatelli found this quality exceptional. Indeed, if he found a defect in the experiment in Tripoli, this did not seem to reside in the functioning of the 'cine-postcard' device, but rather in a lack of soldier's physical bodies. This, then, raises the issue of the dead soldiers, which are reduced in his essay to invisible shadows, ghosts that now can only exist in a dream, and which is always connected to the stasis of a distance grave. The presence in the theatre of the imagined dead, relegated to their graves, contrasts with the equally metaphorical depiction of their families who, thanks to the cinema, will always be visible and omnipresent.

The third matter that the Italo-Turkish War brings to light is tied to the possibility to archive experience. In Italy, this theme emerges immediately. In June 1898, in the *Rivista di Artigliera e Genio* (*Journal of Artillery and Engineering*)—a publication that aimed to gather the best minds of the Italian scientific-military intellectual community—praises, only a few weeks after its publication in France, Boleslas Matuszewski's idea to create an archive using film as a 'container' of historical facts.<sup>19</sup> It was not like that for other sectors of Italian culture, which were less influenced by positivism. In the same year as his article, which is reprinted in Section 6 of this anthology, the art historian Corrado Ricci, who was very interested in using photography as a way to document archaeological monuments, did not recognize the fact that cinema has the ability to archive the memory of the body over time. A similarly conservative perspective would emerge in many of the Italian narratives on cinema, especially after 1922.<sup>20</sup>

In the political arena, the first formal proposal for an archive reserved for *actualité* of national import is made in June 1911. The Neapolitan film journalist, Erasmo Contreras, originally promoted the idea during the period in which Rome celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of Italian Unification with the inauguration of the Vittoriano monument.<sup>21</sup> Contreras proposed that a film collection be started to correspond with the filming of the inauguration of the new building.

The initiative never took off: evidently, the timing was not right. A few months afterwards, however, with the Italo-Turkish War just beginning, a journalist from Padova offered to use a collection of war film as a monument to the soldiers, a provocative alternative to the icy marble monuments to the war dead.<sup>22</sup> Between December 1911 and February 1912, a project in this vein was finally implemented. Two military *actualité* about the Italo-Turkish War were delivered in an official ceremony at the *Bersaglieri* Military Museum in Rome.<sup>23</sup> The choice of the museum was not coincidental. The *Bersaglieri* not only played an important role in the Italo-Turkish War, but they were also the protagonists of the last important battle of the Risorgimento.<sup>24</sup> In the museum, the events documented by the two films would be ready to return to the screen at any moment.<sup>25</sup> The fact that they were *actualité*, made explicitly for the occasion, is important.<sup>26</sup> During its run through the spring of 1912, *actualité* actually surpassed the popularity of the first feature films. By the spring of 1912, the success of these *actualité* in Italy created a kind of filmmaking that in other countries will only arrive with the onset of the First World War; namely, the first anthologies of medium- and full-length documentaries, or, in other words, the first films 'from reality' with a narrative.<sup>27</sup>

After the autumn of 1912, however, Italian cinema in its many variations, begins above all to privilege fiction.<sup>28</sup> Even with regards to the war. Is everything finished then? Not exactly. Even if the *actualité* of 1911–1912 stimulated in an extreme way the theoretical reflection on the relationship between cinema and life, the theme that did not end after those two years. The idea of a film archive returns even after the peace treaty with Turkey. I am referencing here the journalist, Lucio d'Ambra, who, in May of 1914, proposed the 'Museum of the Present', an institute dedicated to life in the twentieth century. The military influence here is quite evident. D'Ambra is not an interventionist; in fact, he is almost a pacifist. Even so, military history must have its own precise role so that it does not become the singular foundation of the collection.<sup>29</sup>

## WWI: Cinema, Despite Everything

Very soon thereafter, war breaks out. This time it is across all of Europe. When Italy entered the First World War on 24 May 1915, the film industry was very different than it was during the war in Libya: in 1911, Italian cinema was just taking off, but now it was reaching full maturity. The anonymous body of the soldier was no longer at the centre of the cinema; instead, it



was the erotic body of the *divo*.<sup>30</sup> Certainly, the war renewed interest for *actualité*, but fiction film occupied, as the stories Pio Vanzi found in Section 7 clearly emphasize, a particularly important role within the context of Italian cinematographic production.<sup>31</sup> Censorship by the military, in Italy as abroad, became very restrictive in limiting cameramen's access to the battle zones and in controlling the contents of the footage, which made the *actualité* less interesting and spectacular.<sup>32</sup> By the time of the Italo-Turkish War, but now even more, specific military manuals were created to regulate the activities of cameramen. In 1916, production houses operating within an area designated by the Armed Forces were forced to submit a copy of all of the material taken at the front.<sup>33</sup> At the beginning of 1917, the Photo-Cinematographic Services of the Navy and the Army began operating at full capacity. Therefore, it became necessary to not only reflect on the importance of cinema as a propagandistic tool, but also the question then became, once the war ended, what to do with all of the filmed materials of the war that had been collected since the beginning of the conflict.<sup>34</sup> In reality, not much happened; the materials were dispersed. The military archive of audio-visual materials from the war, which was dreamed of and hoped for on a number of occasions, was never made, despite the profound change in Italy's political affairs, with the rise of fascism in 1922. The idea of the archive was substituted by the production of lengthy montages (such as *Guerra nostra* (*Our War*) in 1927 and *Perchè il mondo sappia e gli italiani ricordino* (*Why the World Knows and the Italian Remember*) in 1932, and *Gloria* (*Glory*) in 1934), which created a sense of the present in the film shorts, which better responded to direct contact with the image.

Following the outbreak of the war in Europe, the three major themes that span the period from the war in Libya seemed to become concentrated into a single, much more urgent and problematic concept. It was the permanence of the image of the individual body—the body reduced to a monument, but also a body that resisted death. It was no longer the traditional nationalists that moved the theoretical discourse forward in a more incisive way, but rather two figures that, although they took part in the political dialogue of the era, were two neutral observers, Lucio d'Ambra and Saverio Procida.<sup>35</sup> Lucio d'Ambra discovered that the ability to watch in perpetuity the old comedies of Max Linder (who, in the fall of 1914, was believed to have died in battle) was an antidote to the death of the body of that actor/soldier. His films were destined to be revived and make people laugh at each screening, and therefore contained the capacity to assuage the rampant militarism. The comedic body of Max Linder is not only anti-militaristic body, but also an internationalist body: he made Germans laugh as much as the French,

and therefore seeing his film makes the Germans, who were responsible for his death, cry as well. By contrast, Saverio Procida saw in spectacle of death on the battle fields a 'lost generation', who would be the only antidote against future wars.<sup>36</sup> Despite everything, we could say, paraphrasing Didi-Huberman, that they were images in spite of it all.<sup>37</sup>

More than a revelation, more than a leap toward the present, as we have already said, these theories were the shouts of a generation fearful that what they were seeing in the 'European War' was the crumbling of all certainties, especially those offered by nationalism, which had seemed unopposed during Italo-Turkish War.

To conclude this chapter on this intense theoretical period, I'd like to mention an October 1918 passage from the final pages of journalist Giuseppe Gariazzo's writings from the front, which were published after the war's end. Speaking about *actualité*, he writes that there are two elements that render the memories of the war useless. Objectively, the first is the scarcity of light, which produces adverse conditions and makes it impossible to film at the most crucial moments.<sup>38</sup> The second, more serious problem resides in the vastness of the phenomenon of war, the poly-sensory and full experience, which make it impossible to reproduce the entirety of reality from fragments of events.<sup>39</sup> Film conserves without a doubt, but to gather an experience that has a complete feeling, a 'style'—as he called it—is needed: a kind of film that both in Italy and aboard, had not yet been created.<sup>40</sup>

## Notes

1. Bottomore *Filming, faking and propaganda*; Bottomore, 'Il cinema appare nelle guerre'; Basano and Pesenti-Campagnoni (eds.), *Al Fronte*; Bottomore 'Cinema during the Great War'; Fabi, *Doppio sguardo*; Faccioli, *A fuoco l'obiettivo*; Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema*; Fraser, Robertshaw and Roberts, *Ghosts on the Somme*; Kelly, *Cinema and the Great War*; Kester, *Film Front Weimar*; Midkiff-DeBauche, *Reel Patriotism*; Pesenti-Campagnoni, *WWI. Guerra sepolta*; Pons and Quintana (eds.), *Gran Guerra*; Veray, *Films d'actualité français*.
2. Labanca, *Guerra italiana*, pp. 53–120. On this topic see also, Del Boca, *Italiani in Libia*; Rochat, *Guerre italiane in Libia*.
3. Labanca, *Guerra italiana*, pp. 16–25.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 76–79.
5. Berruti and Mazzei, 'Silent War', pp. 262–263.
6. Bernardini, *Cinema muto italiano*; Martinelli (ed.), *Cinema italiano in Europa*; Caranti 'Disordered Traffic', pp. 287–289; Ercole, 'Pictures From Italy'.
7. Gentile, *Grande Italia*, pp. 3–147; Papadia, *Nel nome della nazione*.

8. Rhodes, 'Our Beautiful', pp. 269–272; Lotti, '*La guerra allusa*'; Lasi '*Viva Tripoli Italiana*'; Berruti, '*Viaggi di guerra*'; De Bernardis and Lasi, '*Bellezze italiane oltre confine*'.
9. Baj and Lenk, '*Premiere journal vivant*'.
10. See among others: Condon, 'Receiving News'; Popple, 'The Anglo-Boer War'; Christie, 'But The Kaki-Covered'; Maliesheva and Noussinnova, '*Actualités et fausse actualités*'; Kardjilov and Mossop, '*Commentari Belli*'; Kardjilov and Mossop, 'First Balkan War'; Berruti and Mazzei, '*Giornale mi lascia freddo*'; Bertellini, 'Dramatizing Italian Turkish War'; Veray, 'First Media War'; Sumpf, '*Mise en scène de la guerre*'; Suarez '*Images de la guerra*'; Castellan, van Depperen, and Cooper, '*American Cinematographers in the Great War*'.
11. Pimpinelli and Seregni, '*Cielo in un globo*'; Berruti and Pesenti-Campagnoni, '*Luca Comerio*'; Berruti, 'Wings Lie Dormant', pp. 79–84; Berruti and Mazzei, '*Giornale mi lascia freddo*', pp. 73–78.
12. Berruti and Mazzei, '*Giornale mi lascia freddo*', pp. 71.
13. Sighele, '*Intelligenza della folla*'; Stewart-Steinberg, '*Pinocchio Effect*'.
14. Salvaneschi, 'War, from Up Close', included in this anthology.
15. Lucatelli, 'Families of Soldiers', included in this anthology.
16. Prezzolini, 'War and the Cinematograph', included in this anthology; Lucatelli, 'Families of Soldiers', included in this anthology.
17. Giovannetti, 'War for the Profit of Industry', included in this anthology.
18. Giovannetti, 'That Poor Cinema...', included in this anthology; Giovannetti, 'War for the Profit of Industry', included in this anthology; Salvaneschi, 'War, from Up Close', included in this anthology.
19. '*Creazione di un deposito di cinematografia storica*', p. 324; Matsszeski, '*Une nouvelle source*'.
20. Tanfani, 'Colour Film', included in this anthology; Borelli, 'Miopetti's Duel', included in this anthology; Bontempelli, '*Mia morte civile*'; Vivanti, '*Concorso di bellezza*'; Mariani Dell'Anguillara, '*Avventura cinematografica*'.
21. Contreras, '*Per un archivio cinematografico*'.
22. 'Because even the soldier from Padova cannot see their loved ones filmed. '*E perché anche i soldati padovani non potranno vedere cinematografati i loro cari?*', p.1.
23. '*Bersaglieri* were light infantry corps. Mazzei, '*Celluloide e il museo*', pp. 74–78.
24. Canosa (ed.), '*Presa di Roma*'.
25. Mazzei, 'Bigger than Marble', pp. 222–223.
26. Mazzei, '*Celluloide e il museo*', pp. 71–73.
27. Gunning, 'Before Documentary', p. 11; Loiperdinger, 'World War I Propaganda Films', pp. 25–31.
28. Giovannetti, 'War for the Profit of Industry', included in this anthology.
29. D'Ambra, 'Museum of the Fleeting Moment', included in this anthology.
30. Reich, '*Maciste Films*'; Alonge and Pitassio, 'Body Politics'.
31. Vanzi, 'Feature Film', included in this anthology.

32. Angeli, 'Cinematografia di guerra'; Gariazzo, *Teatro muto*.
33. *Doveri delle Ditte cinematografiche*.
34. Angeli, 'Cinematografia di guerra'; Rod, *Films di Guerra*.
35. D'Ambra, 'Max Linder Dies in the War', included in this anthology; Procida, 'Cinema of War', included in this anthology.
36. Sorlin, *Operatori alla conquista*.
37. Didi-Huberman, *Images malgré tout*.
38. Gariazzo, *Teatro muto*, p. 320.
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 322–325.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

# The War, from Up Close

*Nino Salvaneschi*

Without having to go to Tripolitania or to the Cyrenaica.<sup>1</sup> Like this: sitting at the cinema. And better still, if you don't mind, from the cheap seats. You can watch a military inspection and a night-time alarm at will, or an entire battle with wounded men and dead bodies, or ships firing their cannons into an oasis crawling with enemies. All of this—mind you—without any danger that some Turkish-Arab gunshot will accidentally escape from the film.

Thus, with that kind of inconvenience absent, the illusion of the battle is complete. And it really seems that the war has come out, all the way from the coasts of Africa, in order parade all its beauties and horrors before our poor, astonished eyes.

And one freely feels a moment of legitimate happiness and national pride. Because, as you know, happiness consists precisely of being what we are not: and for pocket change, we can sit on a wooden bench and, for a little while, we become little grey soldiers. For a little more, we can sit on a velvet chair...

The audience crowds into the lobbies of the movie theatres. They wait, often uncomfortably, for the heavy doors to be propped open. They rush into the empty seats, just like our soldiers rush into the trenches. In the tepid and discreet darkness of the movie theatre, with the friendly whirring of the projector and the music, the audience suddenly awakened and, blooming with pride, senses that certain heroic spirit that is latent in every crowd and which is made plain by a shout, a song, a flag, or a gesture.

All it takes is a single word, thrown out like a seed, to change a mass of people into a savage horde. And it's as if all it takes is a friendly gesture to guide crowds of men towards paths flowering with renewed faith.

All audiences have within themselves the lingering traces of a distant childhood. But, in the shadows of the movie theatres, many accomplished men, many calm elderly men, many robust young men find no shame in turning themselves back into children and innocents before their very own eyes.

The scenes of the war have been far more moving than all the sensational colour scenes made by the house of Pathé in Paris. The tragedies, sentimental comedies, and gloomy dramas fell by the wayside as soon as the living and vibrant early visions of the war presented themselves with their modern spirit and sharp eyes.

Oh! The audience immediately recognized their dear soldiers!

It is like this: their faces calm, their weapons still, with a ready eye, and a smile revealing white teeth. And they call them 'ladies', even if they leave their tents at night with their bayonets ready, even if they leap from trench to trench, even if they fall and die! And they call them 'bandits' even if some *bersagliere* is caught on film affectionately playing with some small Arab child, even if some smiling infantryman shares a little bit of his bread with an Arab dressed in rags...<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the public that fills up the cinema halls does not read the newspapers cover to cover. It will especially not read newspapers. It will especially not read foreign newspapers like the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, *L'Illustration*, *Simplicissimus*, or *Muskete*.<sup>3</sup> It probably doesn't even read *Avanti!*...<sup>4</sup>

The audience will know a few, inaccurate things about the war. But, in front of *films*— which cannot betray the truth, nor serve particular interests, nor tell lies—it saw, with its heart stuck in its throat, all the heroic simplicity of their far-off brothers.

The cinematograph brought the air of war so close to our audience that one could say that the quivering of the screen is nothing more than the breath of our people. The cinematograph has done, is doing, and will do commendable job promoting healthy nationalism.

In the hour of a voiceless and tenacious struggle, a gesture is worth more than a word: the smoke from cannon fire is worth more than a patriotic song.

And when some warship passes through the sea near Tripoli, there is always someone there who says—just for the pleasure of saying it out loud—'It's one of *our* ships!' And when there is a white, fast, and pointed galloping of poles and flags on the film, there is still someone who recognizes the riders and repeats with a loud voice 'Those are our guys!'

One never hears more exclamations of pride and boldness than those coming from the cheap seats during the lunch hours of the metal workers and labourers. At that time, throughout the seats and the benches, there is a crowd of threadbare and tattered jackets, turned-up collars, pale faces. And throughout the hall there is the smell of work and of fatigue. And it is predominantly in those hours—from noon until 1.30 p.m.—that the films of the war have their greatest and warmest reception.

Humble soldiers concentrating on their efforts pass by on the screen, and one smiles and salutes with his hand, and jumps in front of the camera, and then returns to his work. When the hour of battle strikes, he will return to his Destiny. There are others, instead, who do not even look at the camera, even though they know that it is there—so close by—and that a single glance from them would be stamped onto the film and would return home, far away, to be placed in front of so many bewildered and watery eyes.

There is also an advance of the *ascari-gallina*.<sup>5</sup> Those little guys jump from trench to trench, as if they were concentrating not on a battle but on a game. Then they flatten themselves out on the ground and shoot, and jump forward again. Two Red Cross medics take away a man who is no longer moving. Maybe he is wounded. Maybe he is dead. Who knows? Not a single one of his comrades looks at him. Death is a member of the family who comes into the house and leaves without being greeted anymore. A half a metre to the right or to the left, and death came to someone else. People become fatalists and carry on.

The cavalry comes to a gallop alongside the sea and follows a fleeing wild horde shrouded in white. The artillery bombards the skies with fire. The infantry rushes to the reinforcements as if they were taking part in a military exercise. In every scene, there is a d'Annunzian poem in action.<sup>6</sup> In every story, there is a patriotic music that rings out like a fanfare of war.

The audience is silent and follows the parade of episodes and alarms without a movement. Someone touches their eyes. But it is so dark that no one can see if it is to wipe away a tear or a bit of sleepiness. And when, perhaps, the tri-colour flag appears, applause bursts out like gunfire. And, perhaps, no one realizes that the little orchestra of the cinematograph is accompanying the visions of war with a waltz from *La Vedova allegra* (*The Merry Widow*) or *Il conte di Lussemburgo* (*The Count of Luxembourg*)...

In the warm air, there is so much poetry and so much religion, and it's as if everyone's heart is so far away!

With a more intense shaking and with a more sonorous buzz, the film ends as if it were cut off by enemy shrapnel. And, all of a sudden, the lights come back on. All around appear the faces and eyes of people who dreamed sweet and good things with open eyes and serene faces.

A pale row of adolescent labourers, with grey faces and grey, patched-up jackets on their slightly stooped backs, is still applauding.

The little unknown comrades of the sailors of Sciara Sciat, young brothers of the *garibaldini* of the sea who Pietro Verri led to holy martyrdom.<sup>7</sup>

The applause dies out in the hot and bright hall, where everyone now feels more like brothers and comrades. People are smiling for no particular reason.

And I think that if Edmondo de Amicis were to come back to life, he would perhaps smile for some reason.<sup>8</sup>

*'La guerra, da vicino', Il Resto del Carlino, (22 February 1912), p. 3. Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.*

## Notes

1. [Editors' note. These are areas in current day Libya, where beginning in 1911 the Italian take over known as the Italo-Turkish War was already in progress.]
2. [Translator's note. Soldier of the light infantry of the Italian army. In Libya, the *bersaglieri* were widely present.]
3. [Editors' note. These are names of newspapers have expressed very firm opinions about the way Italy should conduct war (in particular, after the bloody reprisals against the civilian population following the massacre at Sciarra-Sciat) and whose correspondents were expelled from the occupied territory.]
4. [Editors' note. National paper of the Italian Socialist Party, which was most adverse to the war.]
5. [Translator's note. *Ascari-gallina* (or literally 'warrior-hens') was the name that the Eritreans gave the *bersaglieri* at the end of the nineteenth century during the first Italian occupation (because they had rooster feathers in their caps). Here, however, it could also refer, potentially as by error on the part of the journalist, to the Eritrean and Somali colonial troops, which were called that very February to fight alongside the Italian troops of the new colony.]
6. [Editors' note. Refers to the *Canzoni delle Gesta d'oltremare* (Songs of Achievements across the Sea) by Gabriele d'Annunzio. Published in *Il Corriere della Sera* (*The Evening Courier*) between 8 October 1911 and 14 January 1912, they were epic poems dedicated to the Italo-Turkish War.]
7. [Editors' note. The first officer to enter Tripoli died at Henni 26 October 1911 during a counter attack. Well-known at the time (d'Annunzio even mentioned it in his *Canzoni*), in his honour a memorial stone was erected at the site of his death that became almost immediately one of the icons of Italian martyrdom. '*I garibaldini del mare*' indicated a group of sailors (he was a captain in the army) who were in charge of the counterattack. The reference to the leader of the Risorgimento, Garibaldi, comes from the fact that the invasion of Libya was presented by the nationalists, the masons, and the radical followers of Mazzini as a kind of final phase of the Risorgimento.]
8. [Editors' note. Edmondo De Amicis (1846–1908), was a writer and patriot. In his writings, among which is the book *Cuore* (which has now become obligatory reading in elementary school) celebrated an Italian national south that would reside not so much in the actions of the great heroes of the Risorgimento as in the acts of the small, forgotten heroes.]



# That Poor Cinema...

*Renato Giovannetti*

For some time, many writers in their newspaper columns have felt the need to direct their attention to the cinema: it is a clear sign that the cinema has definitively entered into the customs of our lives and of our population.

It is worth noting, however, that the judgements that they are making about it are, for the most part, decidedly against this new 'institution'. It seems almost as if our writers—the young ones especially—are making a concerted effort to fight it, almost like an enemy—no, worse actually—like it is a competitor.

Indeed, most of them, in nurturing those forms of art that are more directed to a large audience—especially the theatre—believe that they are seeing in the cinema a Siren that will drag the crowds away from carrying out their intellectual activities, thus increasing the number of already numerous obstacles that stand in the not-easy and not-happy path of the arts and of the artists among us.

Some people say that the cinema gives the multitudes a way of having a little bit of fun without spending much. It is also said that the multitudes, who are not searching for too much intellectual pleasure, are deserting the theatres and, more than ever, are failing to cultivate those forms of literature that should be their healthy nourishment: the cinema presents, already manipulated, a brief recap of every literary conception through the part that most interests the masses: the plot. The plot unfolds quickly, frenetically, without being encumbered by words, immediately giving the satisfaction of knowing *how* the happy or sad stories of the characters in the story *will end*. So—they say—the cinema, while it's emptying out the theatres and suffocating the flourishing of any healthy artistic expression, contributes to dulling the audience's minds, and is supporting their mania to do things quickly and incessantly run towards the future—which creates an insurmountable obstacle for every intellectual project and every intellectual development.

In truth, we believe that, in doing this, people are attributing to the cinema a greater importance than it has or than it claims to have.

It is certain that, for however much people sing the praises of the greatness of modern civilization and the extraordinary value of culture, the masses that form the amorphous, anonymous core of the population—which, however, is also its most numerous part—they will remain immune for a long

time to come to the beneficent contagion of intellectual progress. The masses thus demonstrate spiritual development that is in an embryonic state, and though no longer being the barbarians of other times, is still quite far from the stages of evolution that a small group of men have already reached.

The tastes, desires, pleasures of the masses must then necessarily be childish and naive: suited to their abilities.

Such a very natural need has been felt in every age and in every society: and just as in ancient times the good, ignorant people preferred the tightrope-walkers' performances to the pure and Latin elegance of Terence's *La Suocera (Hecyra)*, and just as, up until yesterday, they rushed to the puppet theatre rather than going to see plays by Goldoni or Alfieri, similarly today they go to the cinema rather than to see the works of Shakespeare, Ibsen, d'Annunzio, or Maeterlink. This is because they have fun at the cinema, while at the theatre they get bored because they don't understand.

Is this state of things sad? Sure. But why blame the people, or even worse, why blame the cinema?

It is necessary to get fed up with our so greatly praised modern culture which, to everyone's disappointment, remains the privilege of a few—aristocrats of thought.

On the other hand, it is wrong to think that if the audience didn't find delight in the cinema, they wouldn't go to find it in the theatre: they would prefer to save their money and stay at home.

No one has ever lamented that people are writing, selling, and reading so many *feuilletons*, which are certainly not lofty forms of literature and which, precisely for this reason, are within everyone's reach. Nor has any one ever reproached Ponson du Terrail, Montépin, Mezzabotta, and the modern Conan Doyle for competing with Victor Hugo, Maupassant, Fogazzaro, Wilde, etc.

Just as no one has ever thought that Neapolitan songs—which are a form of art that, though inferior, is still respectable—are competing with the operas of our past and present *maestri*.

This is about completely different things that you cannot compare, and it is therefore absurd to blame the cinema if the theatres have low attendance. Write some good plays, and the audience will come running—but not the cinema audience. It will be the theatre audience, which has nothing to do with the other.

With that, let's free this poor art—art in a manner of speaking—of light and movement, as people call it, from the accusations that are thrown against it and let's decide to accept the 'death of the word' as a product of the times and as a way to take some customers away from the taverns.

But from the moment that the cinema is the daily bread of the countless poor in spirit of this world, it is right to direct the most serious attention to it, as people do for every other pastime that is granted to the people, so that it will be possible to use it for higher ends and to at least attenuate the damaging effects that could be derived from it.

The most proper reproach that can be directed at the cinema is that it favours, or even instigates, wicked instincts through the depiction of the most horrifying scenes of wickedness.

How can we fix the problem?

As far as censorship goes, it is pointless to consider it: because if the *questura* starts to concern itself with the cinema, it will ban the most innocent movies, which do not merit such condemnation and will never to ban the truly reprehensible filth.

For such a work of improvement, it is necessary to trust the good sense of the cinema producers. On this front, it is undeniable that great progress has been made, so much so that one could say that it is the only Italian film industry—which truly is flourishing in this field—that still conforms to the old method of violent subjects.

But another problem is now threatening the cinema: profanity. The *pochade* and vaudeville are now starting to even penetrate the world of films, and we are already starting to see men and women in outfits that are anything but dignified and beds that are a little too unmade. We are at the beginning of something wicked, so it is necessary to immediately take some measures to prevent it from taking root. It would be extremely damaging to feed films of that nature to the large numbers of children and adolescents that frequent the cinema halls.

With such problems out of the way, it will naturally remain that—for however many efforts are made—and indeed, the ones from French and American production houses are shocking—the films will always be what they are: that is, pure representations of automatons, expressions of exterior and banal life—far from any study of the spirit and feelings, far from any discussion of ideas and principles, far from any artistic painting of places, characters, or passions that are truly and profoundly human.

Someone has recommended substituting today's cinematic representations with the reproduction of only films that show real life. What blessed optimistic naivety!

Do you seriously think that the audience would find pleasure in that? No. In the crowd, there are not many sensitive souls who want to dive the flight of their nostalgic fancies into the calm of the seaside landscapes or among the foggy roofs of Ghent, or to the enchanted shores of faraway lands...

At the cinema—just like everywhere else—the crowd does not know how to understand the sublime poetry of nature and wants representations of the fictitious and unreal—but restless and frenetic—life that dazzles them and takes them away from the worries of their daily lives.

Therefore, there is no hope of a radical renewal. There is, however, the need for loving care so that the wickedness will be less than it is now.

The fact that even the lowly cinema can sometimes be used for something good has been demonstrated to us by the incredible success of all of the films that reproduce scenes from the current war.

These are often small, innocent portrayals that our good soldiers happily participate in. But that does not matter, because the audience either does not realize or they do not worry about it.

The audience only wants to see our dear heroes down there—among the palms and the desert—where every day, every heart longingly flies. And when they see the death and destruction of today's enemy coming out of the mouth of a cannon, along with billows of smoke, and when they see the feathers of the *bersaglieri* moving and coming to life at the start of a charge, the tiny hands of children and the calloused hands of men clap together in unison, and a long, irrepressible applause explodes in the hall while the miniature little orchestra hammers away at national anthems, as if the dear brothers who live smiling on the bright screen can feel and enjoy their affectionate salute.

And perhaps, a small, welcome echo of so much thundering applause, in so many cinemas, in so many cities, has gone over the mountains and over the sea to reach them down there.

'*Quel povero cinematografo...*', *La Vita*, (4 March 1912), p. 3 Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.

# Families of Soldiers

*Luigi Lucatelli*

Tripoli, 20 March

Today, the cinematograph, the only intellectual (?) entertainment in this neo-Italian city, has given us a lovely surprise. Before the eyes of the soldiers, who were called up 'by district', there are parades of the combatants' families in a number of 'films', shot in various cities throughout the Italian peninsula.<sup>1</sup>

I got mixed up in the crowd of soldiers who were entering by the hundreds into the vast rectangular hall, and I nestled into a corner, between a *bersagliere* and a grenadier. I don't know if you have ever—just for the novelty—ended up in the peanut gallery of a popular theatre in order to feel, just for a moment, exiled in an environment not your own, where the spirit speaks its own rough dialect full of strength and candour, where one really does take the 'poor seduced woman' or where you would happily throw an orange onto the head of the poor 'tyrant'.

There was the rustling of people struggling to suppress laughter, a sort of contained glee, an emotional and impatient anticipation. I would have sworn that the majority of people were laughing in order to mask the trepidation that had grabbed them by the throat.

The *bersagliere* near me would throw some witty jabs in Roman dialect at his buddies seated further up, but the sonorous 'r's of his dialect quivered a little bit, as if betraying some un-confessed distress.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, when the lights went down, from the point where no one could see anymore, the laughter stopped and the pale glare of the illuminated screen revealed focused and pensive faces all around. And in that silence, the silent square, which typically shows the vulgarity of the 'comical final scene', opened up like a strange window into the far-off homeland.

I had the indefinable sensation of witnessing an unforeseen coming-to-life of things. It was really life: a life hot with passion, trembling with memories and kisses, a life which was passing before our eyes radiating inexplicable waves of sympathy in the rapt hall, stirring up memories that had laid dormant in their hearts for years, reawakening passionate impulses. In the trembling of the light projected on the screen, there was a thrill of affection, and we all felt an unfamiliar human solidarity, a lone tenderness spread among 10,000 beings like a religious faith that is at once unique and

multiple. All of a sudden, in the silence, someone shouted 'That's my sister!' and he reached a trembling hand towards a pensive girl with the round little face of a good girl who was smiling while her little gloved hand waved 'Farewell! Farewell!'

Then, here and there, many others recognized their loved ones. They greeted them with happy voices quivering with tears. Someone shouted out bizarre expressions in dialect, and in that crowd hidden in half-darkness, a strange and emotional hubbub, a gleeful chatter rose up.

On the silent screen, images of small bourgeois families in their Sunday best, the kindly faces of old clerical workers, and the bowed, slightly tired and slightly sad figures of old labourers all passed by. One could understand that a sort of spontaneous fellowship must have been formed among the subjects that had been filmed—one like the kind that springs up between mothers who wait for the children at the school's entrance or those who wait for visiting hours outside the gates of the hospital.

Seeing them elbow each other, one could intuit the conversations that had taken place a few minutes prior: 'And your son, where is he?'—In Benghazi.—Mine is in Derna.—If only we could see them again soon!... Some young wives demonstrated a diligent and careful coquetry, a yearning to make themselves more beautiful and to keep themselves from being forgotten... One made a gesture with her hand as if to say: 'Watch out, you rascal!'

Others, it seemed, had not decided to leave the camera's field of view yet: one very serious old man—a worried, little old man—turned back and waved again: you could see that he was struggling to hold back tears.

Then, a big group of little kids passed by: chubby little babies whose mothers were holding them up with both hands to show them off. Young girls with their hair all tidied up, budding young women, were clapping their hands. The soldiers greeted the children with a barrage of applause.

A little gentleman of about three or four years, fat as a butterball, got a standing ovation. In general, the children and the young people laughed. The old people had an air of contained sadness, as if they had not wanted to get too emotional. One could tell, however, that for the slightest thing, they would have burst into sobs.

One could tell that one little old lady could not contain herself, and at the edge of the screen, she hid her face in her hands.

Companies of soldiers passed by, waving their caps. Some joker was holding up a sign up that spelled out 'Hi Pinot!'<sup>3</sup>

Gentlemen and labourer, wives of officials and common girls were all blended together in one outpouring of tenderness.

One old man—he had to be a veteran—passed by rigidly, with his medal for bravery on his chest, saluting military style. Some people had put a little message or a little flag into their hatband to make themselves more easily recognizable.

In the film from the district of Rome, one made a series of rather complicated gestures that the *bersagliere* next to me translated, thinking I had not understood: ‘He says: ‘Give ‘em a good thrashing, and then when we get back, we’ll eat spaghetti!’<sup>4</sup>

When a company of conscripts passed by, the soldiers yelled: ‘So long, newbies!’

One man from the ‘Iron class’ of 1888, who had been called back to service yelled out: ‘What a *stecca*, we’re leaving you!’<sup>5</sup> Then, there was an enormous crowd, a fluttering of handkerchiefs, caps, hats, a waving of the tiny hands of children and of bony and trembling hands, a jumping around of poor human figures trying to show themselves—even for a moment—to make themselves noticed, to launch the message of their affections across space.

A little old lady raised herself up on her toes so desperately that I felt my hands contract, instinctively, from an illogical desire to lift her up in my arms.

But a babe in swaddling clothes was lifted up in front of her and she disappeared, overtaken in that torrent of passion.

Then, lastly, an elegant, very serious, lady passes by on her own and gestures with her hand ‘Write me!’

Exclamations in every dialect ring throughout the hall—‘Hi Ma!’—‘See ya soon!’—‘D’you see Gigin?’—‘Farewell sweetheart!’<sup>6</sup>

When the lights grazed a *tosciano* with a nonchalant air about him, that poor *tosciano* was trembling and trembling.<sup>7</sup>

District by district, so many cities passed by...Apparently, Turin contributed a large contingent of soldiers. Those from Settimo Torinese purposely came into the city [for the filming] and we saw them parade by with a big sign with the name of their town written on it.<sup>8</sup>

Here and there, someone showed some war-like instincts, calls to beat up on the Turk, fluttering on white sheets of paper gestures of encouragement for the aforementioned need.

But one could see that the majority of people had nothing but a great tenderness—an immense desire to embrace, to be with [their loved ones]—which emanated from the illuminated screen into the shadows of the hall like a fluid that could not be stopped.

And, all of a sudden, with a shiver, I thought that many of those hands waving so feverishly were greeting a dead man and that their message of

love went, desolately, to the graves in Henni, or Rababa, or way down in the canyons of Derna, or to the heights of Mergheb, to the flat and yellow tip of Jalyanah, under the highest palm trees, or into the quiet corners of the oasis, where the turtledoves coo on the olive trees and the earth, covered by countless poppies, seems to be coughing out blood as far as the eye can see.<sup>9</sup>

It seemed to me, then, in that semi-darkness, I was moved by the invisible presence of deceased beings and that a thousand hands made of shadows were responding to the tragically useless greeting: 'Farewell! Farewell!'

'*Famiglie di soldati*', *Il Secolo*, (25 March 1912), p. 3. Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.

## Notes

1. [Editors' note. He is referring to the 'cinema for the families of soldiers'. There were projects realized between the end of December and the beginning of March, funded by the Cines production studio in Rome, which happened in various cities across Italy (Turin, Milan, Rome, Naples, Florence, La Spezia and Venice, which were added to those made in Padova, made at the expense of the state). The first shots made in Turin and Rome in December 1911 were screened on 20 March 1912 at the Savoy Cinema Tripoli. The soldiers were invited to the screenings according to their city, but in the military draft in Italy always assigned individual soldiers to military units in different areas of the country, greatly complicating the execution of the event.]
2. [Translator's note. In the Roman dialect, the 'r' was rolled.]
3. [Translator's note. Nickname for Giuseppe in Piedmontese dialect.]
4. [Translator's note. In the original Italian, the construction immediately indicates the Roman, working-class origins of the character.]
5. [Translator's note. Slang referring to the long period between arriving and the day to return home.]
6. [Translator's note. The original phrases alternate between Piedmontese and Roman dialects.]
7. [Translator's note. Type of cigar made with Kentucky tobacco and produced in Italy, primarily in Tuscany.]
8. [Translator's note. Suburb of Turin.]
9. [Editors' note. Oasis in the Southeast of Tripoli where, on 26 October 1911, the second attack to the Arab troops on the Italian happened. Despite heavy casualties, Italian troops held their position, unlike what had happened three days earlier at Sciarra-Sciat. Refers to the cemetery in Rebab for about 250 soldiers who were massacred during the battle Sciarra-Sciat on 23 October 1912. These three battles were very well-known at the time.]



# War for the Profit of Industry

*Renato Giovannetti*

The posters with large lettering and flashy colours, generously applied to the walls of the city—and with no respect for the aesthetic sensibilities of others—announce each day to the cultured and illustrious that in one of the countless movie theatres that afflict the City, films of the war in Libya are being shown. At first, they dealt with episodes of life in the field; with images of landscapes that the pens of war correspondents had already depicted, scenes of the new, unique, and varied existence that people are living down there. And everything was going well: the new institution of the cinematograph had, even with its defects, some value. The value, for example, of making us live for an instant with our faraway brothers, of making that land which smiles at us and attracts us with the fascination of a grandiose and glorious mirage, seem close to us. And the public flocked to it. And pretty much all of us—both those who typically frequent the cinematograph and those who do not—would go to get carried away and to dream.

But unfortunately, after the happy times came the dark times. The cinematographs found themselves with a distressing scarcity of subjects: the public isn't so interested anymore in films about the war. That is only because it has seen the same scenes shown hundreds of times: the only variety lies in the name of the production house or in the ability of the camera operator. It was necessary, therefore, to find something new to pique the public's curiosity and to electrify the audience. Those few metres of film were worth their weight in gold: it was a big business opportunity that couldn't be missed. Wars don't happen every day and you have to know how to take advantage of them.

And so, they settled for the next best thing.

Wouldn't the audience have been happy to watch their dear soldiers in action? To sit comfortably and watch a skirmish, or better yet, a battle?

But filming the actions of war is not possible: above all because the bullets have no regard and no respect for cameramen. And one's own skin is a precious thing, even more precious than money. So then people thought: if you can't capture real battles, let's make some fake ones! A fake war! What a great idea!

Then came the first timid attempts. Where do we find the actors? That's easy: our very own soldiers, there, on location. Those brave young men

kindly lend themselves to the filming during their resting time, between gunshots and a march! Then we had—artificially—the patrols through the oasis, the assaults on suspicious houses, and so on... But then, even that wasn't enough. They manufactured battles: the most glorious names of those conflicts in which Italian blood consecrated the new fate of the homeland were profaned by these strange comedies, to which our good soldiers—with an innocence that can only come out in their favour—lent themselves. The industry presented these comedies to us, and continues to present them to us preceded by the most bombastic titles in which all the inevitable rhetoric of these months reappears in front of us, peppered with the grammatical errors of hack writers used for such a task.

An advance towards the enemy? Here is a battalion of our brave young men passing in front of the lens, most likely at a run. The battle? Here are their soldiers behind the trenches pointing their rifles toward the enemy, who no one dreamed would appear that day. And the charge? There is this, too: at any given moment, our young men hurl themselves out of the trenches and pass in front of us, running. What more do you want? You want to see if the enemy—who we never see—is really there? If our men fall from their shots? Three or four men are kindly asked to throw themselves on the ground for a moment and to have one of the Red Cross soldiers—who is standing at the ready off to the side, waiting for the right moment—to come and collect them. And then, the icing on the cake: the orchestra that plays patriotic marches and maybe even the large drum that acts as a cannon complete the miracle! The public rushes in, the cashbox fills up, and the war for the profit of industry becomes as lucrative a speculation as ever.

Is there among you, oh readers, someone who has had the good fortune of NOT witnessing an indecorous spectacle of this nature? It is not likely. But if that someone does exist, he would not believe our words at all and he would think that we were imagining things. And yet, this is the pure, simple, and painful truth.

Who is to blame?

Our brave soldiers who make themselves available? Heavens no! How would you like these innocent kids to know that their innocent manoeuvres will be passed off tomorrow as a bloody battle? They are proud and happy to think that tomorrow their bold cheerfulness and their youthful swiftness will appear on the white screen back home like a salute and a heroic promise. They laugh merrily and joke around innocently while, without knowing it, they lend themselves to the profit of speculators.

Is it the fault of the authorities who permit this? We sincerely do not think so. In times like these, whoever zealously and steadfastly contributes

his own efforts toward the greater purpose does not have the time to laze about in the shadows of a cinema.

Is it the fault of the public who does not rebel against this? Just imagine! However true or false the battles may be, the ones carrying it out are still our brave, heroic soldiers who, with songs on their lips, will tomorrow go off to get killed in the name of the homeland! How can you want the public to rebel, if it could seem that even those who are now at the top of our thoughts could be included in that disapproval.

It is this money that succeeds in silencing in some people even the most noble sentiments: love of country, for example.

And we would not make a big deal, pitying these amoral people, if we did not have to consider that these films are also shown abroad: and abroad, one can always find people willing to laugh at our expense.

It is solely for this that we hope that this disgrace ceases: for the dignity of our glorious army; for the dignity of the homeland, which is on the road to a greater destiny; for the dignity of ourselves, who today more than ever feel proud to call ourselves Italians.

*'La guerra applicata all'industria', La Vita* (4 June 1912), p. 3. Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.

# The War and Cinematograph

*g. pr.*

One year ago, in the columns of a newspaper with which I happily collaborate, I expressed my wish that a national cinema would rise up and abandon sentimental scenes and games of cops and robbers; it would make Italians familiar with our country, its glories and failures, its joys and sorrows; and it would allow everyone to see with their own eyes how the millions in gold that Emigrants pour into Italy each year are put to use, and also what difficulties and hostilities must be overcome in the backward provinces in order to keep our culture alive.

The occasion and the possibility to do this were, of course, provided by the war. The cinemas were transformed unwittingly into national bodies. Such that, next to the professional and the amateur journalist, throughout the trenches in Tripoli or the Cyrenaica, at the encampments, at the departure and arrival of the troops, marching towards the enemy, another eye sprang up—the one belonging to the cinematographer, ready to capture in the middle of the action events that fill so many Italian hearts to point of bursting and fill so many Italian imaginations with dear figures.

Since that time, even I go to the cinema often. Nat Pinkerton has stopped following threatening figures with his ridiculous revolver; the chorus girls of the operetta and the background actresses no longer use their disgraceful ways to feign the sorrows of Marie Antoinette and the orgies of Bianca Cappello. On the fabric of the backdrop, the tops of the dunes follow one after the other; the sparkling carpet of the deserts stretches out; the thousand feathers of the bunting wave in the sea breeze. Then come the agile *askari*, bounding about like sheepdogs, white and mottled; the charge of the *bersaglieri*, grey like the clouds of sand that sometimes swallow them up; and the awe-inspiring artillery men in the act of hoisting a caisson up the steep slope of a deep, rocky valley.<sup>1</sup>

Here is the war right before our eyes.

The tents of a hospital stand unmoving under the relentless gaze of the sun: and it seems that one can hear the moaning coming out of them. The generals are visiting an oasis: a grave silence spreads all around them. The enigmatic Arab crouches, hiding his secret hatred and disgust behind a stony expression. Precious water is taken drop by drop from the wells, which have become the centre of human society—a sort of church and fortress, a meeting place, and the highest financial asset.

The newspaper leaves me cold. At the cinema, I better communicate the enthusiasm the Italian people for their sons who are down there. You can think what you want about the reasons for the war, and about the value of those countries that we are occupying, but you can only think with great emotion about those who belong to us and who are united with us Italians, who are men.

I know, I know...these scenes are brought together, patched and sewn together with spectacles of drills and exercises more than with the direct sight of battles. But regardless of however much that is done, we are left enough reality and immediacy to take us there.

It has been said that the better correspondences have not been from the journalists, but rather from the letters of soldiers. That is often true. But where can you find a better correspondence than the cinematograph?

I have to say, the thing that moved me the most was not the spectacle of the troops going out in formation and seemingly devouring the territory, or even the charge of the riflemen, all of which make the theatre resound with applause. What moved me the most was the soldiers' amusement. That brought me closer to our people and to their excellent, cheerful, firm, and swift nature. At the seaside, they organized plays, antics, and clowned around. They dressed up as ballerinas; they wrestled and did acrobatics; they organized a brass band; they built human pyramids. What a beautiful thing to see those brave boys, down at the seaside, finding the time to joke around and to have fun in spite of the privations, the oppressive climate, and the thoughts of their distant relatives and the Turk nearby. They seemed more heroic and more dear to me, more like complete men, and therefore all the more Italian.

*'La guerra e il cinematografo'*, *La Voce*, 4/34 (22 August 1912), pp. 876–887.  
Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.

## Note

1. [*Translator's note.* Native soldiers in the Italian colonies of Eritrea and Somalia. Refers to the white uniforms which were in contrast to the dark skin of the soldiers.]

# Max Linder Dies in The War<sup>1</sup>

*Lucio d'Ambra*

This is not the title of his new film to be shown tonight. It is the tragic and heroic epilogue to his brief, cheerful day.

I see him again, Max Linder, like we saw him one evening at the beginning of the summer, a few days before the war, with his usual morning suit, with his usual top hat, his usual smile, on the back of a donkey, tied to a train passing through the white, snowy landscapes of Upper Engadin: a small figure of the shadow theatre, a vision of the magic lantern, a black 'silhouette', cut-out from the white backdrop of the alpine landscape. Those absurd and impossible situations were his great ideas. And they were ideas that went beyond the usual comedy of comic actors of the cinema, the Tartufinis, the Cretinettis, the Beoncellis.<sup>2</sup> His comedy was humorous, full of wit, cold, composed, self-controlled. A deadpan humour that drew the most comical contrast from his proper gentleman's attire and from the natural mixing of realistic and precise scenic elements with the most outlandish escapades and the most absurd and preposterous situations. In this way, his success was more than just a theatrical or cinematic success. It was an artistic success.

Max Linder was talked about as a great comic actor, an authentic artist of laughter—and not just by the wider public, but even by that segment of the audience with the most refined tastes and customs. And no one ever heard him say a line! But he had a style. He created a genre, served as a model, and his imitators abound. Both a comedy writer and an actor, he wrote and directed his films himself and acted in them. As a result, the subject and the performer were always marvellously in tune because they stem from humorous observations about men and life that come from the same concave or convex mirror, in which life and men were at the same time faithfully reproduced and grotesquely deformed.

His success had been sudden. In just a few years the *nom de guerre* Max Linder had become famous throughout the entire world because the entire world laughed when it saw him looking so serious, composed, elegant, reserved, and sober, all while enduring the most adventurous and imaginative hardships with a smile that was at the same time foolish and astute. This smile revealed two rows of perfectly white teeth and gave his extremely and extraordinarily expressive physiognomy the air of a cunning and mischievous 'good little boy,' an air of a serious and well-behaved rascal,

who, the more serious he was, the more people laughed, and the more well-behaved he was, he was all the more impudent. His first and last name had a Teutonic air that made some people think he was German. In reality, he was French—very French—a typical cutup, a characteristic 'silhouette', even a representative figure. In the end, he was Parisian, very Parisian. A Parisian of the boulevard and the sidewalks, a hero of the street, the cinematic reincarnation of the Parisian urchin all-grown-up: he was Gavroche in tails and a white tie.<sup>3</sup> The quips of Gavroche find their equivalent in the gestures of Max Linder. On the lips of both figures—Victor Hugo's classic character and the popular Pathè actor—the smile was the same: both with a special air, a unique way of making fun of people. And because people, without realizing it, love being made fun of, Max Linder's smile made its way around the world in a new film every two weeks.

A mediocre actor playing minor roles in minor theatres in Paris, he looked to the cinema to round out his meagre salary. And at the cinema, he was a revelation. After a few years, they say he was earning 100,000, or even 200,000 lira a year. The irresistible humour of his films made them popular, highly anticipated, and sought-after everywhere. Even very serious, sombre, and dignified people who do not go to the cinema would go there on evenings when the thin 'silhouette' of Max Linder appeared on the bill. Despite having to produce two films a month, his comic imagination never tired. In some films, he reached a classic perfection through a classic simplicity. He knew how to make something out of nothing. He knew how to use one eye-roll to express more than a hundred words could. He knew how to ask for and give nothing more and nothing less what the cinema can give or get.

And he went, like all good Frenchmen, to the war—to his great country's desperate and heroic war. And he must certainly have gone there smiling, like at a rehearsal for a new film, with his usual morning suit, with his usual top hat, his usual smile. And today, a brief bit of news from Berlin announces that Max Linder died on the battlefield. For announcements from Berlin, there is no differentiation: destroying the Reims Cathedral and killing Max Linder are actions that Berlin's news would boast about equally. Cathedral or comic actor—it doesn't really matter. What matters is taking something away from France, something that the others do not have: either one of its great beauties, or one of its small smiles.

A small smile that we will not see again. Or rather, since the art of cinema actors is safeguarded for at least a few years from that total oblivion which condemns the art of theatre artist as soon as that artist disappears from the boards where he triumphed. We will find that smile again in a few days when the news of his death will prompt the re-screening of Max Linder's

old films. And we will find that smile again with an emotional shudder as we think about the fact that that smile met death. Because Max Linder must have gone up against even death with a smile. That good boy must have thought that benign destiny would have permitted him, after so many comical films, to also complete his heroic film.

In modern war, in this horrible, anonymous bloodbath, an unseen soldier kills another soldier whom he does not see. And the bullet—which no one knows where it came from—does not know where it is going. But if it were possible, in the evening when the battle had ceased, to find there in the enemy trenches the appropriate targets, and if the German soldier that killed Max Linder without realizing it could find his victim down there—elegant, proper, smiling even in death—I am certain that that soldier would regret not having fired one less shot. Perhaps the night before, in the tent, exhausted from the completed battle, and ready for the one that was going to start, in the horror of war and of death, the anonymous sniper that killed Max Linder will have wistfully remembered with nostalgia the tranquil evenings of peace when, next to his Gretchen, in a village of Silesia or of Brandenburg, in the warm movie theatre, he saw Max Linder with his usual morning suit, with his usual top hat, his usual smile, riding on the back of a donkey behind a train passing through the snow, a small figure of the shadow theatre, a vision of the magic lantern, a black ‘silhouette’, cut-out from the white backdrop of the alpine landscape.

And perhaps as a result, there would also be a German capable of regretting having killed a Frenchman.

‘*Max Linder muore alla guerra*’, *La Tribuna*, (1 October 1914), p. 3. Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.

## Notes

1. [Editors’ note. At the end of September 1914, rumours had spread that the famous French comedic actor, Max Linder, had died on the front. It was soon determined that the news was false and the actor had only been injured, thanks to an interview with the actor published in *La Tribuna* on 10 October.]
2. [Editors’ note. Name of three comic characters from the 1910s. Tartufini was the name of an Italian character played by Charles Prince for Pathé (and known as Rigadin in France). Cretinetti and Beoncelli were the characters played by André Deed for Itala Film and Pathé (known in French as Boireau.)]
3. [Editors’ note. Gavroche is young street urchin in Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*.]



# Cinema of War

*Saverio Procida*

Let's change topics. In the previous issue [of this journal], I acknowledged the physical attributes and behaviours that a writer for the cinema must embed within the dramatic material in order to make its passionate content clear to the viewer, to transform spirituality and emotion into something tangible, and to translate thought into a scene.

That was about the art and the actual making of a cine-drama. Now, we want to read into another facet of this eminently morphological art, which can act, narrate, reproduce, and bear witness.

We want to consider the cine-drama as a document of the era and its customs. We want to put it on equal footing with historical treatises so that it will become a chronicle of imagery. Isn't action perhaps more eloquent than words? Isn't spectacle more effective than description? We see in the cinema a role as an archive. Such an archive will leave no room for objections, discrepancies between sources, interpreters' adulterations, when in 20 years—if not sooner—all the colours of diplomatic books blind the eyes and take over the critical senses of the conscientious historian of the current war.

This is precisely what we want to examine: the function entrusted to the cinema in the terrible conflict that is tearing Europe apart. Do you think that the documentary power of film is negligible? Not only is it not negligible, but in certain cases in the not too distant future, it will serve as definitive evidence. And no admonishment will be more frighteningly useful. The horror of a Maupassant or Zola—two writers who superbly describe man's trials and tribulations—will be able to convey the stench of this war's charnel house. Maupassant's novella *L'Année terrible* (*The Terrible Year*), and Zola's *La débacle* (*The Debacle*) both reach the depths of disgust, just as Hugo reaches its height in the inventive chapter of *I miserabili* (*Les Misérables*). But it is necessary to stimulate the imagination so that the artists picture can come to life in the reader's emotionally touched heart.

This wondrous modern machine, on the other hand, completes this miracle without the help of divine poetic inspiration. It reproduces what happens before the camera lens with a few turns of a crank, and any teacher of prose or poetry is outdone. Gigantesque Reality imposes its tragic view. It is the most authoritative proof and the most imaginative artist.

No one will want to ignore the obstacles, the prohibitions, or the dangers of such an epic undertaking. The most modern films do not shy away from danger, and do not find any problems with—and even takes delight in—the endeavours that stimulate the courage and ‘strategic’ talent of all of the most daring cameramen. A perfect filmmaker aspires a bit to the glory of Napoleon, both in hatching plans and in the pride of carrying them out. Now, here is a field battle-worthy for those kinds of generals!

In the current situation, this comparison is not a figure of speech. This is precisely about a struggle in an open field—exposed to attacks, without any defence. But that isn’t what would put the brakes on the camera operators’ daring. The difficulty to overcome is instead getting the supreme commanders’ approval to catch the salient points of a military exercise, to capture it in progress, and to situate it overall in such a way that it achieves its aim and doesn’t limit itself to fleeting episodic scenes, which won’t allow for a holistic understanding of the situation.

In short, it is necessary to avoid the suspicion of a trick and the disillusion from a spectacle that is promised but never attained. Some recent examples of this will be especially instructive.

If the cinema of war seeks for itself an ethical and aesthetic ideal, if as time goes by it wants to be an original form of this art (which is continually expanding its reach), it is essential that it attains the height of perfection and forgoes fictional substitutes and the construction of a terrible reality. We will soon determine which criteria is necessary to achieve such a goal, and also how effective we think it will be to record reality. This isn’t about the incomplete attempts, fleeting trials, or amateurism carried out behind the frontlines of the war. This is about exerting skills, reaching the summit, battling chance and men, taking up arms—in a figurative sense, and probably also in a literal sense

Uncharted paths of the vanguard—not behind the frontlines anymore. Specifically for that reason, we spoke of the commemorative function.

It is good, then, for war cinema to reach a greater development and to be spurred on with the numerous tools that the great production companies have at their disposal. This will be not only an excellent business deal—given the spasmodic fever that will afflict the public for witnessing real battles between formidable armies, the strategic movements of troops, frightening artillery battles, aerial combat, and the war-time dangers on both land and sea. It will also be—and this doesn’t seem like hyperbolic conjecture—an essential component of historical criticism and humanitarian philosophy.

While the war carries on with unperturbed furore, the unleashing of the conflict is already contributing to protests about its political origin and

the most venomous polemics about responsibility—tossed between one nation and another—let's now think about what would happen when we pass from the diplomatic field to a military one. That is, when we will have to ascertain *how* and with *what results* the battles were carried out, what episodes were the most important, or what critical element determined a victorious outcome. Now, imagine that it was possible to gather in a film the war's unfolding, its alternating events, the final outcome of many of these episodes. Imagine that one can hold before their eyes the tactical, strategic, and combat procedures of a battle. There is no doubt that the future military historian will have at his disposal the most certain document for making an impartial and expert judgement. And the selection of informative materials, the list of specific reports and dispatches that major states contribute to the war's military history will pale in comparison—in terms of evidentiary value—with what a thin photographic strip will have gathered together, with the impartiality of an indifferent witness and with the automatism of an incorruptible machine from all the phases of a military action in their reality.

I spoke of *humanitarian philosophy*. Really! Ooh, that sounds nice. And pretty—it makes you smile. The cinema—which rivals Descartes, Helvetius, and Vico—is the butt of simple jokes in humour magazines and does not promote paradox. But the cinema does not aspire to these laurels because, poor thing, it does not do moral philosophy. Philosophers continue to do it. The only thing is that instead of doing an analysis of dialectical argumentation on one of Plato's dialogues, Spinoza's *Ethica (Ethics)*, Voltaire's *Dictionnaire philosophique (Philosophical Dictionary)*, or [Vico's] *Nuova scienza (The New Science)*—all of which are bread baskets of wisdom—they will rummage around in the bread box of the cinema. And they will find no more maxims and theses, like those in the coffers of Knowledge, no more adages, no more brilliant or profound religious or speculative treatises, no more spiritual imperative that is the judging conscience's uniform, but simply an EVENT. From an allegorical breadbox one can claim no better bread than an event. A grand and terrible *event*, an *event* ripped from the headlines of an incredible news story, an *event* that is the most frightening vision of the Apocalypse, more fantastical than a chivalric poem, more teeming with carnage than any artistic fiction, more authentic than any historical narration.

It is the event that is seen, that assaults you with its flagrancy, that nails you to the scene and yanks pity and horror out of you.

This *event* will cause the philosopher to loath the ferocity of war and the deadly and disruptive instincts of humanity (both of which continue to run their course) better than the most intransigent dogma. What we see with

our eyes cannot be erased from our imagination. The spectacle of corpses piled up like garbage on the bloody battle lines is more striking—in terms of the strength of moral teaching—than the scornful irony of Voltaire, the eloquence of Lacordaire, the austere mandates of Thomas Aquinas, and the modern evangelical preaching of Leo Tolstoy. The moralist—who has noted the failure of human progress and the uselessness of the propaganda advocating for the universal love of man in this savage outburst that bears all the primitive roarings of a Miocene cave—can expect some beneficial effect only from the *physical fear* of what happened and what continues to happen.<sup>1</sup>

*Seeing*:—*Seeing* the massacre that is taking place day after day, *seeing* the flower of every race mowed down daily, the eradication of youth—as if it were the bad root instead of the joyful seed of the human race; *seeing* the howitzers that pulverize, the machine guns that mow down, the bombs that tear apart, the rifle blasts that knock down the thriving of life; *seeing* the collapse of the fortresses, the destruction of the forests, the rotting of corpses, pestilence swarm the trenches; the agony of mutilation, the rage of man-to-man combat, and the duel transformed into a brawl, with fists, teeth, a knife; *seeing* how we have reached this anonymous destruction from the heroic battle of phalanxes that the ancient poets sang about, exalting courage and civic virtue in the holy name of the Patria—with no individual valour and without chivalrous generosity—in which the calibre decides and the arm only moves the overabundant machines of war; *seeing* all of this and feeling its callous barbarity. Here is what moral philosophy can gain from viewing a film: help with its sterile laws, and its very noble whimperings, which will never change the criminal beast into a creature of love and peaceful coexistence.

Let it remain, then—through the will of a fragile and amenable contraction—as an example for those to come, the *sight* of all living things throughout the world. Let the machines work in the battle fields, not to offer a degenerate pleasure or the morbid satisfaction of a cruel feeling to the regular spectators—who have many drops of their own blood on those scarlet fields—but let them gather the horror that will persecute us throughout the ages. We will pass on this *visual horror* to the coming generations in the wishful hope that they will be less foolish and ferocious than we, who will leave only photographs of our foolishness and ferocity in the convulsing gestures of hatred and in the lightning-fast paths of bullets.

It will be the testament to a lost generation that transmits, along with a grisly legacy, the documentation of a collective crime—the crime of a century.

The century, alas, is just a quarter of the way through and it can persevere in wickedness, but the very grandiosity of certain crimes does not authorize their repetition. Like Lady Macbeth's spot, no water will clean murderous hands. Whoever survives the extermination will have before his eyes for many, many years, an indelible shame regarding the rights of the reproduction of the species and regarding humanity's right to life.

And he will have before his eyes that modest number of European descendants that, despite the destruction of youth, did not prevented the survivors or the invalids from generating.

The cinema will be the breeding ground, the unconscious recipient of curses, pity, mockery, and disdain of those who bore witness in irrefutable testimony to the enormous assassination attempt on Life, Joy, Beauty, and the Brotherhood of Man.

Go forth, then, cinema's war correspondents: point your cameras.

Point them; and you will arrive on the screen:

FOR THE HISTORY OF A UNIVERSAL FOLLY AND FOR THE MOST UNIVERSAL DENUNCIATION OF A FOLLY IN HISTORY.

'*Cinematografia di guerra*', *L'Arte Muta*, 1/2 (15 July 1916), pp. 14–16. Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.

## Note

1. [*Editors' note.* In the author's argument, which is informed by Darwin, the outbreak of the First World War is compared to the violence within primitive communities.]

## Section 4



# Politics, Morality, Education

*Silvio Alovio*

Between 1905 and the First World War, Italian cinema underwent a series of decisive transformations. The rapid increase in national film production, the diffusion of movie theatres in urban settings, the gradual participation of middle-class spectators and, after 1912, the popularity of feature-length films, are just a few of the historical processes signalling that cinema had become a mass phenomenon, even in Italy.

Inevitably, these transformations also changed the way cinema presented itself in the public domain and, as a result, the way society dealt with it. In this section, which focuses on political, pedagogical, and religious discussions surrounding the new medium, cinema is increasingly treated like a true *social institution*. The selected articles were written by people from very different institutions and ideologies: two educators, including one radical (Orano) and one socialist (Fabietti); an expert in pedagogy close to feminism (Buracci); a positivist philosopher (Orestano); a progressive priest (Costetti); a liberal political leader (Orlando); and a conservative lawyer (Avellone). All these authors share the desire to place cinema within a broader project, be it social, political, or moral.

## The School of Vice

In the selected articles, as in the wider debate that they reflect, perspectives naturally diverged. The alarming conviction that the new medium represented social danger dominated a series of particularly harsh articles about cinema. A letter sent by a renowned former judge, Giovanni Battista Avellone to Alberto Bergamini, the editor of the most authoritative publication of Italy's moderate right, the *Giornale d'Italia* (*Newspaper of Italy*), perhaps best exemplifies this kind of argument. According to Avellone, cinema was currently 'a colossal, crowded, very alluring *school of immorality* and *debauchery*.' Although Avellone certainly was not the first to causally link the cinematograph and dishonest and immoral behaviour, he did radically update the accusation, which for centuries had been flung at theatre and, more recently, at stage hypnosis and popular literature. It was a stereotype that remained virtually intact across almost two decades of reflections on cinema, both in Italy and abroad.<sup>1</sup>



Similar positions also arose within certain sectors of the Catholic Church. In 1914, the influential *Civiltà Cattolica* (*Catholic Civilization*), a journal published by the Jesuits, inaugurated a series of articles about cinema that ran until 1919. These contributions were directed at the community of the faithful—but, above all, to the ecclesiastical authorities—and presented a highly critical view of commercial cinema, defining it as ‘an evil, a source of social malady that must be eradicated’ and as an ‘inexhaustible source of infinite evils for the body and the spirit of cinema-goers.’<sup>2</sup>

Faced with the rapid spread of this social evil, the Jesuits proposed a *reduction* of the damage, or, more precisely, a disciplined regulation of the cinematographic experience. In terms of the specifics of its operation, the proposal requested the State’s intervention. The Jesuits called for legislation reducing screening schedules and prohibiting children under the age of sixteen. Avellone also requested that the State exercise its responsibility to control public morality through strict surveillance. A number of historians consider his letter *the* decisive spark that launched broader political debate and eventually led to the introduction of film censorship in Italy. In reality, Avellone’s letter was certainly not the first detailing the ‘abuses’ of cinematography to appear in an important national newspaper. Yet, the question of who called for state vigilance first is fairly irrelevant. More important is the Italian State’s response on 20 February 1913. Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti sent a document to the country’s regional authorities that not only required theatre operators to obtain permits to screen films, but forbade the cinematographic representation of topics that were against ‘morality or public decency [...] decorum, honour, the national reputation,’ or that featured images of ‘distressing crimes or actions or facts that provide an example how to carry out a crime, or that could disturbingly impress spectators, to the detriment primarily of young people and excitable persons.’<sup>3</sup> The contents of this document, which became law on 25 June 1913 and instituted State-run film censorship in Italy, were similar to the laws already in place in other European countries, including Germany, Sweden, Austria, Spain, and Great Britain.

An analysis of Italy’s first censorship law brings to light two interesting elements contained within Avellone’s letter to the editor. The first regards the conception of what is viewable. To Avellone, cinema’s danger lay, above all, in some of its content, and he drew up a list that he himself admitted was only partial. The State adopted this interpretation its own power to control the films’ contents. If cinema exponentially increased the power of the human eye to see up-close and in an increasingly universal manner, the State authorities did the exact opposite by restricting the potentially

limitless horizons of the filmable (from scenes of hypnotism and opium dens to lusty dances).

The second element regards the conception of morality. In his letter, Avellone defended morality on the grounds of civic virtues such as honesty, heroism, and sacrifice. There is no reference to Catholic morality, but this absence is not surprising: Avellone and *Il Giornale d'Italia* had a liberal and secular vision of the State and its responsibilities, well-separated from the Church's role. The legislators who introduced the laws on film censorship shared the same political viewpoint: the regulations bowed to the principles of bourgeois morality but did allow films to contravene against the Catholic faith. The Jesuits not only harshly criticized this lack of deference toward religion, they forcefully—and unsuccessfully—lobbied for priests be members of the censorship commissions.

### The School of the Future

In addition to these harsh, anti-film interventions, other, more balanced reflections are well-documented in this section of the book. These essays are interested not just in disciplining the cinematographic experience, but also in *requalifying* of the new medium's power in a positive direction. There are at least three characteristic aspects of this more constructive approach: the attention given to concrete, educational practices, the centrality of empirical data, and cinema's placement within a concept of society, the people, and culture.

The first distinct element shared by all the contributions was the desire to place cinema within a concrete *social practice*, according to their respective domains in education (Orano, Fabietti), pedagogy (Orestano), and religion (Costetti).

Two of the articles presented in this section are institutionally linked to the educational practices promoted by the Minerva National Institute. Founded in December 1912 under the aegis of the Ministry of Public Education, the Minerva National Institute was very active, at least until the outbreak of the First World War, in promoting educational cinema in very diverse places: schools, public universities, libraries, barracks, hospitals as well as in rural areas that had not yet been reached by commercial film distribution.<sup>4</sup> The first piece is the text of a speech given at one of the Institute's inaugural ceremonies at the Teatro del Popolo in Milan by Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, the former Minister of Public Education and future prime minister as well as president of the Minerva Institute. The

second text is from a speech given at a conference held at the Roman branch of the Institute on 10 December 1913 by the philosopher and educational reformer Francesco Orestano, who also designed the academic programmes accompanying Orlando's reform of 1904–1905. Both these contributions were published in *La coltura popolare* (*Popular Education*), the journal of the Unione Italiana dell'Educazione Popolare (Italian League for the Education of the Working Classes), an important educational association with socialist leanings that had strong ties to the Minerva National Institute.

The link to concrete educational practices is important in other texts in this section as well. Romano Costetti, a priest and an organizer of the Società Emiliana di Proiezioni (Film Society of the Emilia Region), published his research in the journal *Luce et verbo* (*Light and Verb*), the official bulletin of the Turin-based company Unitas.<sup>5</sup> The Society was active in the use of projected images to teach catechism and was involved not only in the production of educational films, but also—and above all—in the distribution of slides and films and the sale of projection equipment to parishes and Catholic schools. Published in *La Rivista Pedagogica* (*The Journal of Pedagogy*), the most important publication in the field at that time, Domenico Orano's paper promoted his work organizing educational and social assistance in Rome's working-class neighbourhood of Testaccio.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the article by Ettore Fabietti highlighted the experiences of educational cinema sponsored by the Minerva Institute and the above-mentioned Italian League for the Education of the Working Classes, which he chaired. Therefore, almost all the authors had a relationship with cinema that was not only theoretical, but also entailed a tireless and almost feverish engagement with institutional contacts, logistical support, and educational and promotional conferences.

Naturally, this practical consideration of cinema's role required that the new medium be 'subject to a method'. This concept appears in the title of Costetti's article on the use of projected images to teach catechism and also forms the underlying premise of Francesco Orestano's article on cinema in the schools, which he published in 1913. In June of that same year, during the parliamentary debates on the film censorship law, Claudio Treves, a reformist leader of the Partito Socialista Italiano ('The Italian Socialist Party'), used the same expression in reference to the Minerva National Institute: 'I do not need to mention that thanks to the initiative of enlightened men of every party, a school has been recently formed using cinematography as a *method* of popular propaganda.'

Obviously, the selected texts do not agree on a single method. On the contrary, sometimes the differences appear immense. For example, Costetti argued that the still images in magic lanterns were more efficient than

cinema to teach religion, because they permitted the intervention of a speaker during the projection. Domenico Orano was of the opposite opinion, being firmly against luminous projections. Nevertheless, above and beyond the differences, a fairly coherent idea of school and cinema emerges from the contributions in this section.

They all agreed that cinematographic images were unquestionably similar to life, and thus to 'reality'. For this reason, cinema was perfect for updating the pedagogic methods of school, which were burdened by 'shackles old and new', based on 'theories, maxims, definitions, and formulas that are as difficult as they are fruitless.'<sup>7</sup> According to Orlando, 'We have to put schools in contact with life, in direct communion with reality.' Thus, as all the other authors would agree, cinema had to be able to translate notions still confined to pedagogical theory into experience. These affirmations were perfectly in keeping with the widespread theory of the 'objective method' (from Pestalozzi to Fröbel and Herbart), which placed the direct experience of things at the centre of learning. Orestano went so far as to say that viewing the cinematograph was more effective than viewing direct reality. He wrote,

By using motion pictures, we are able to concentrate on the particular aspect that we wish to study, and in this way intensify the focus on that aspect alone. But when actual working conditions are observed in all their complexity, attention can be distracted in various directions, provoking associations that do not serve any purpose or can even be harmful, and which in any case make analysis of the subject all the more difficult.<sup>8</sup>

In these writings, the psychological capacity for attention is one of the primary reasons cinema was considered to have didactic value. The young spectator 'imagined' by pedagogical reflections on cinema was not a purely passive subject, just as we saw in early theoretical texts such as Maffio Maffii's 'Why I Love the Cinematograph' in Section 1. Viewing a film entailed more perceptive and intellectual engagement than that required by more prevalent didactic methods, such as mnemonic learning. This engagement was highlighted in particular by Orestano and especially by Angelina Buracci. In their reflections on pedagogy, childhood was no longer conceived as an embryonic, imperfect, almost primitive stage of a human being's life, but rather as a specific phase in the is a natural fact, due to the 'natural and gradual unfolding of the individual's psychological energies.' The child 'perceives, associates, remembers, synthesizes, analyses, imagines, judges and reasons,' and in order to produce truly

educational form of cinema, these mental processes had to be understood in depth.<sup>9</sup>

The second distinctive characteristic of these discussions is that the authors sought to base their opinions on empirical data. For example, Domenico Orano started with careful observation, conducted over ‘three months of experiments’ on the inhabitants of Testaccio outside of Rome. Moreover, Orano decided to open a movie theatre for the children and workers in the well-known working-class neighbourhood of Testaccio, partially on the basis of socio-demographical statistics he collected in 1908. As opposed to other countries like the United States and Germany, Italy was sociologically more open to the new medium, but there were still few qualitative and quantitative investigations of the movie-going public. Orano’s research represented a partial but significant exception. He published data on the role of cinematography in 1912, which revealed that movie-going was taking hold in certain sectors of the working classes during the first decade of the new century. ‘Cinematography has entered popular usage,’ observed Orano. ‘The fascination with film, for both the worker in the noisy workshop and for the illiterate farmer is amazing [...] One family candidly confessed to me that every week they put aside six *soldi* for the cinema. Another family, more generous in assigning luxury expenditures, had designated two *lire* per month for the same purpose.’<sup>10</sup>

Ettore Fabietti’s reflections, too, involved gathering empirical data, in this case regarding the quantitative frequency of Milan’s movie-going public. His reflections on the need for educational cinema that was attractive, interesting, and able to compete with commercial cinema sprang from ‘a sort of personal, direct investigation. I have frequented many popular cinemas. I have seen a number of films of every genre, and I have taken note of the plots that unfolded and the impression they left on me and on viewers of various ages and social groups, especially young workers and kids.’<sup>11</sup>

The essay by Angelina Buracci, an expert in pedagogic practices, was based on observations that were even more targeted and accurate. First, the author described in detail the exhibition spaces, or what we would now describe as the cinematic ‘apparatus’: the architecture of the facades and the interiors, the posters, and promotional photographs, the waiting room, the barkers advertising the films, the ushers escorting customers, the furnishings, the lighting fixtures, the seats, and the music accompanying the projection. This was followed by a description of the audience, paying close attention to its heterogeneity, and a study of the spectators’ reactions, particularly those of children and adolescents. Like Luca Mazzei, Buracci made ‘annotations that were both analytical and precise [...] her goal [was

to] analyse the psycho-sociological mechanisms activated in that space.' An interesting aspect of her empirical observations was 'the rather high number of films cited,' roughly fifteen.<sup>12</sup> This was something new. In Italy's nascent theory of cinematography was almost always abstract, and the content of images was hardly ever documented methodically in a precise reference to specific films.<sup>13</sup>

The third distinct aspect within the educational discourses on cinema is their almost strategic attempts to articulated a more complex idea of society, education, and culture. Obviously, not all of the authors shared the same ideas: Domenico Orano's secular and anti-clerical Italy, which came out of the masonic tradition, is not the Catholic Italy of Costetti. Similarly, Ettore Fabietti's proletarian and anti-capitalistic Italy bears no resemblance to Vittorio Emanuele Orlando's liberal and bourgeois Italy. Nonetheless, one has the impression that, at least in regards to the social function of cinema, the inevitable ideological differences are less relevant than a number of shared convictions, particularly in regards to the working classes. The Jesuits' position, that 'public cinematography is not appropriate *per se* for educating the people' was isolated—and temporary.<sup>14</sup> In fact, everyone, including reform-minded liberals and conservatives, socialists, and Catholics, recognized cinema as a key component of popular culture. For this reason, everyone was convinced that the new medium could potentially influence the way the masses were educated. This conviction was based on the ideological premise that the people had to be instructed, and regardless of social and political sensibilities, everyone shared a goal of establishing hegemonic rule over the working classes.

Although the question of the relationship between the elite and the working classes in Italy is too historically complex to elaborate on here, cinema certainly plays a defining role, since it became a social institution at the moment these relationships were being reorganized. Until the early years of the twentieth century, Italy's governing class typically regarded pedagogy in terms of a statist, paternalistic model of *dirigisme*, which was in significant contradiction with liberalism. Elementary education was delegated to the municipalities, but professional instruction was 'left to the initiative of private citizens, or local secular or religious bodies.'<sup>15</sup> But the picture changed with the political rise of Giolitti, who promoted the democratic involvement of the masses in political life and was open to discussion with Catholics and socialists. Giolitti and his political adversary Sonnino, the leader of a more conservative yet radical form of liberalism, understood that the liberal elite could no longer neglect the issue of education. The country's economic-industrial transformation called for new

solutions. During this fifteen-year period between 1901 and 1915, legislation was adopted to promote public and professional instruction under both Giolitti and Sonnino. In particular, Vittorio Emanuele Orlando collaborated with Giolitti to raise the age of compulsory education to twelve in 1904.

Obviously, the socialists encouraged the fight against illiteracy (which was still widespread in Italy) as well as the development of popular and professional instruction, and greatly increased the education of the masses, even though their pedagogical vision was largely subordinated under the educational models of the liberal bourgeoisie. Even the Catholics became increasingly active in developing pedagogy directed at the working classes: 'the Church had always supported the family as a fundamental agent in education, but only as a bulwark against interference by the State: it was not opposed to the idea of occupying an extra-familial and community educational space, it was only against the idea that it would be occupied by others.'<sup>16</sup>

The selected texts, which express the main ideologies of the time, share this widespread belief in the need to create pedagogy aimed at the masses. In these texts, luminous projections and/or cinema were considered decisive instruments in education, not just moral, civil or religious instruction, but aesthetic as well. This conviction was expressed by Vittorio Emanuele Orlando in terms that hint at the idea of a broader political programme: 'We very much want that the people who have the mallet and the shovel waiting for them will raise up their spirit, that they will cultivate their intellect, and that they will refine their artistic sensibilities in order to descend tomorrow into the grand struggle of economic production, into the enormous conflict of social interests.'<sup>17</sup>

In this section's texts, the indisputable popularity of cinema seems to have two consequences: communicational and economic. In terms of their immediacy and communicative effectiveness, the images projected on the silver screen are—as Romano Costetti suggested—a powerful and suggestive modern version of the medieval *Biblia pauperum*, which were images painted on church walls recounting the sacred texts to an illiterate and uncultured populace. On an economic level, cinema, which required low expenditures for its ritual consumption, was 'the only artistic representation that is given to the people to enjoy today.'<sup>18</sup>

While broad sectors of public opinion and Italy's nascent theoretical discussions believed that cinema constituted an alarming aesthetic degradation, in part because of its mass dimension, a few contributions in this section challenge these negative evaluations (including Orano, Buracci, Orlando, and Fabietti). Vittorio Emanuele Orlando explained himself most

clearly. According to him, over the course of the centuries, art—originally an experience of humankind in its entirety, without class distinctions—progressively detached itself from the people and assumed an elitist statute. Cinema reduced this rift, offering an extraordinary opportunity ‘for the socialization of aesthetic sensibilities.’<sup>19</sup>

Orlando’s gradual aesthetic development involved not only the lower classes, but children, too, as Angelina Buracci also highlighted in her analogy between the lower classes and children: ‘Just like the ignorant populace, the child is not an aesthete.’<sup>20</sup> As the historian Antonio Gibelli observed, the paternalistic metaphor of the proletariat-child is, after all, a stereotype that traverses Italian political and cultural discussions of the early twentieth century, regardless of ideological position. He observed, ‘The child is not just a part of the proletariat, but a prototype of it, in the sense that the proletariat is considered to be, and consequently, is treated like a minor to be educated, conquered, deciphered, and, if necessary, deceived.’<sup>21</sup>

### **Cinema between Elitism, Capitalism, and Morality**

In the preceding paragraphs, I have demonstrated the existence of two different political-pedagogical approaches to cinema, the first directed toward censorship and strict regulation and the second toward moral and aesthetic education. We have also pinpointed at least three recurring and distinctive characteristics within this second approach.

However, in analysing the discussions sparked by these two different approaches, at least two simplifications must be avoided. In the first place, the positions in favour of and against cinema did not correspond to specific and distinct ideological positions, but instead crossed the ideological-political panorama of the era. In other words, there were liberals and Catholics who were hostile to cinema (Avellone and the Jesuits, respectively) and others in favour of it (Orlando and Costetti, respectively), just as there were socialists who did not oppose the introduction of censorship, such as Claudio Treves, and others, like Ettore Fabietti, who instead criticized it.

In the second place, a rigid opposition between the two different approaches cannot be established. In fact, even the most measured and constructive contributions sometimes favoured restrictive norms. For example, in 1910, Domenico Orano hoped that censorship would be introduced, while Francesco Orestano proposed that minors be prevented from viewing fantasy films. Moreover, an elitist point of view always came to the fore in all these texts. In almost every case, issue of morality was not directed at



the cultured adult or middle-class spectator, who presumably was able to distinguish between good and evil, reality and illusion. The spectators at moral risk included the proletariat, women, and young people. Whether they were, metaphorically, 'a vase to fill' or 'a fire to ignite,' to quote the distinction made by Giovanni Rosadi, the Assistant Minister of Public Education, the spectators did not benefit from full, mature autonomy, be it moral or aesthetic.<sup>22</sup> In many of the pedagogical-political discussions of cinema, they were not considered able to consciously absorb what they saw at the cinema. They were regarded as reactive, naïve, and excitable spectators. For example, Orano affirmed that in the 'lower classes, instincts prevail over ideas and noble sentiments.'<sup>23</sup> What seems to partially elude a few of these authors—and was instead grasped by the first theoretical texts on cinema—is that the movie-going public was increasingly characterized as an 'impersonal community', in which consumers were integrating themselves in a perspective that reached across class, generation, and gender divides.<sup>24</sup>

Besides their shared elitism, the debates over cinema present at least three other shared aspects that merit a brief examination. In the first place, the opinion of cinema and its communicative power was always ambivalent. Almost paradoxically, in the 'anti-cinematographic' discussions, cinema was also celebrated as an extraordinary medium, while in the more supportive discussions, cinema was considered a dangerous medium. Amongst the often harsh, alarmist tenor of these discussions, Giovanni Battista Avelone provided a more reasoned assessment. He defined cinema as a 'highly ingenious invention,' a 'surprising find,' a 'marvellous way of revivifying history,' able to respond 'to the taste of the new era, more synthetic in condensing and feeling.' The Jesuits were equally enthusiastic when they declared that 'no modern invention [more than cinema] [...] functions in a more efficient manner, intensively and extensively, in propagating ideas among the multitudes.'<sup>25</sup>

Instead, the supporters of educational cinema initially considered the new medium an influential 'anti-school', or as Ettore Fabietti described it, alluring, efficient and modern; its negative power harboured a communicative energy that needed to be converted into a positive school.

Nonetheless, cinema appeared as a sort of super-medium, constantly prevailing over other means of communication, be they books (Orlando; Fabietti), advertising (Orlando), traditional oratory (Orano), illustrations (Fabietti) or the theatre (Orano; Orlando).

It should come as no surprise, then, that efforts to define and socially evaluate cinema contained paradoxical ambivalence. In early twentieth-century discussions about political and social issues, it was common

practice to pinpoint the cause of a problem within a particular phenomenon of modernity—and its possible solution. For example, electricity was perceived not only as a symptom of all the evils of civilization but also—as in the case of electrotherapy—a remedy to combat them.

The same holds true within the political discussions of the new medium. Cinema was always seen as a phenomenon of modernity, a product of the most highly advanced science. Giovanni Battista Avellone placed it among the great modern inventions, alongside the telephone, phonograph, and wireless telegraph. Five years later, Ettore Fabietti, from the opposite political side, wrote that ‘with motion pictures, science has enriched us with a means of representation that is no less important than those that we already had.’ As seen in Section 1, already in the first decade of the twentieth century, the nascent theoretical reflection in Italy had lucidly grasped the link between cinema and the modern experience. But, in the political-pedagogical texts of the following decade, just like in the scientific texts documented in Section 5, the focus of the reflection shifted from a more general reflection on the experience of modernity to a comparison with a number of specific aspects of modernity itself, considered also from the point of view of their social management: the almost traumatic intensification of the gaze, the nervous excitement, the extension and immediate accessibility of its contents, and the rise of a new audience.

The third element shared by all the political-pedagogical discussions of cinema is perhaps the most controversial and calls into question the founding principles of capitalism.<sup>26</sup> What ‘made [the cinematographer] descend from his high and very noble moral concept’ was ‘the greed for profits.’ Vulgar, immoral, and inappropriate, cinema was the product of an intrinsically capitalistic logic of speculation, interested only in ‘titillating low popular tastes,’ according to Giovanni Battista Avellone.<sup>27</sup> On this point, liberals, Catholics and socialists all agreed, even if their analyses and their final diagnoses did not. This centrality of ‘greed’ caused degeneration in the system and could be countered, just like usury had been opposed through a campaign in the newspaper *Il Giornale d'Italia*, which Avellone praised in the first lines of his letter. The author believed that the excesses in the demands of profit could be governed and harmonized with morality: ‘*Capital* must [...] remain within the confines and measure of an honest, moral, balanced, proportioned *productivity* of profits.’ As expected, the evaluation of the Marxist, Ettore Fabietti, who believed in the incompatibility of capitalism with morality, was very different. ‘Capital is by definition an amoral agent. And when it is in search of profits in order to reach its goal, it would be capable of poisoning all of humankind [...] The

capital at play in the cinematographic industry, which is now an enormous amount, behaves no differently.<sup>28</sup> Regardless of political position, the idea that the laws of profit and even competition posed an ethical and aesthetic danger spanned almost two decades of theoretical reflections on cinema in Italy with undiminished regularity. These anti-industrial concerns were an obvious symptom of the broader contradiction within the debate which drew to a lesser degree on the positions of the socialists, who were in the minority anyway, and to a greater degree, the more influential positions of the liberal middle class.

## Conclusions

Before concluding, there is a final and most important question to be resolved regarding the problem of social responsibility, and it dovetails with the contradictions described at the end of the preceding paragraph.

If the middle-class public sphere considered cinematography, in and of itself, a positive medium, then who was to blame for its degeneration? The harmful effects of suggestion produced by the images of commercial cinema were similar to those that the action of a leader could produce on the masses; but, as Eugeni observed, in the case of cinema it was impossible to identify a leader who 'from the screen looks, shows, tells.'<sup>29</sup> Cinema appeared to be an expression not so much of an institutionalized and regulating *power*, but of uncontrollable *might*.<sup>30</sup> So, then, who was guilty of the damage produced by cinema? Broad sectors of the bourgeois political elite identified the culprit in the apparatuses of film productions dedicated to profit. However, this was a contradictory response because the very apparatuses of cinema were an expression of the capitalist bourgeoisie *itself*.

But perhaps, as the political-pedagogical discussions of the period allude, less explicitly, there is also to another 'guilty party'. Pondering the possibility of a throng without a leader, Freud argued that a desire 'shared by a great number of people' may be able to substitute a leader.<sup>31</sup> The political-pedagogical and the scientific reflections of the era seemed at times to outline the role of a shared, repeated desire for viewing and escapism that, during the 1910s began to be observed (Buracci, d'Abundo, Orestano) and even quantified (Orano, Fabietti), both in Italy and abroad. Ultimately, movie-going audiences were perceived as essentially governed only by their own desires.

Gustave Le Bon equated the art of knowing how to make an impression on the imagination of the masses with the art of governing. Cinema's challenge

to Italy's political elite was basically analogous. The new medium, so deeply rooted in the experience of immediate suggestion and spontaneous imitation, could be converted into a conscious experience, able to regulate the relationships between feelings and intellect, and able to recognize the visible while also rejecting content that was too destabilizing. Thus, the objective was twofold: to better comprehend the functioning and the power of cinematographic suggestion and to understand how to convert it into consensus and persuasion.

As I have shown in the preceding paragraphs, the attempts to achieve these two final objectives were synthesized into two correlated strategies, which are documented in the following texts: the first—to regulate the contents of the projections, including through censorship—sought preventive control over production. The second—to promote a form of pedagogy based on sensation—was aimed at spectators in the grip of cinema's suggestive power. These objectives were not easy to accomplish, since cinema's avid public was without limits, constantly growing in number, and considered the new medium a vibrant part of its daily experience and its own, autonomous preferences.

## Notes

1. See de Barbéns, *La moral*, pp. 221–223; Poulain, *Contre le cinéma*; National Council of Public Morals, *The Cinema*.
2. 'Cinematografo e scuola'; 'Voci dell'arte'.
3. 'Vigilanza sulle pellicole', p. 47.
4. Toschi, *Il paesaggio rurale*.
5. Casetti and Alovisio, 'Il contributo della Chiesa', pp. 97–127; Mosso, *Luce et verbo*; Friedemann, 'La SIC-Unitas', pp. 189–214.
6. D'Arcangeli, 'Verso una scienza'.
7. Orlando, 'Speech to the People's Theatre', included in this anthology.
8. Orestano, 'Cinematograph in the Schools', included in this anthology.
9. Buracci, 'Cinema for the Cultivation of Intellect', included in this anthology.
10. A *soldo* is a copper coin equalling one-twentieth of a *lira*.
11. Fabietti, 'Educational Cinema,' included in this anthology.
12. Mazzei, 'Angelina Buracci cinepedagoga'.
13. This tendency towards an abstract critique of cinema, detached from individual films, can also be identified in other national contexts, such as the press campaigns conducted in the United States by Hearst newspapers. See Streible, 'Children at the Mutoscope'.
14. 'Cinematografo e moralità pubblica', p. 438.
15. Di Pol, *Scuola e popolo*, p. 3.

16. Gibelli, *Il popolo bambino*, p. 32.
17. Orlando, 'Speech at the People's Theatre', included in this anthology.
18. Orano, 'Motion Pictures and Education', included in this anthology.
19. Orlando, 'Speech at the People's Theatre', included in this anthology.
20. Buracci, 'Cinema for the Cultivation of Intellect', included in this anthology.
21. Gibelli, *Il popolo bambino*, p. 4.
22. Rosadi, *La missione educativa del Cinematografo*, p. 17.
23. Orano, 'The Motion Pictures and Education', included in this anthology.
24. See in particular, Fossi, 'The Movie Theatre Audience', included in Section 1 of this anthology; Low and Manvell, *History*, p. 15.
25. '*Cinematografo e moralità pubblica*', p. 422.
26. Here, the expression 'capitalism' assumes a meaning that is more historical than ideological. As Ligensa observed, already the first production companies had proposed strategies typical of modern capitalism (such as standardization, international competition and advertising). Ligensa, 'Triangulating a Turn', p. 2.
27. Avellone, 'Cinema and Its Influence', included in this anthology.
28. Fabietti, 'Educational Cinema', included in this anthology.
29. Eugeni, *La relazione d'incanto*, pp. 160–161.
30. Dubois, 'Au seuil du visible', pp. 137–150.
31. Freud, *Group Psychology*.

# The Motion Pictures and Education

*Domenico Orano*

The belief that motion pictures possess an uncommon educational power has been established for some time.

The State, in the 1909 budget for the Mezzogiorno has earmarked a sum for scholastic cinematograph.<sup>1</sup> And the City of Rome, through the initiative of the current Administration, has recently proposed the purchase of some cinematographic projectors to be used—so they assure us, at least—in schools.

However, nothing of the sort is in effect yet, because you cannot attribute the reputation or the value of cinematographic operation to the fixed [slide] projections used in the School of Education in Rome, and in some public schools in Milan, Turin, Florence, and also in Rome, too, in the school in Via Palombella and the Regina Margherita School in Trastevere.

In the end, those are no more than a version of the old magic lantern that is slightly improved and that is put into motion by an electrical current. They are an educational tool that has seen a full and practical development in France, Switzerland, and Germany for some time.

Compared to film projections, fixed projections are absolutely a bad thing. The motion pictures, by bringing the eyes of the spectator the full view of reality—dynamic, varied, rapid, and exact—ends up becoming the most interesting distraction of our time.

The statistics on movie theatres demonstrate the growing, successful diffusion of similar spectacles. Rome alone has 70 of them. Now even the most far-off, most inaccessible mountain towns have their own little movie theatre.

No one can escape the appeal of the film: neither the labourer in the noisy workshop, nor the *petite bourgeoisie* in the small, provincial town, nor the illiterate farmer. Unfortunately, the films that are in circulation, even those that call themselves art and recreate paintings or historical scenes, are practically the opposite of art, or a strict and rigid historical reconstruction. Now, something better could be done, which would be preparing films that have a high moral aim, that are marked by the vividness of scenes from reality, and that are appealingly educational.

But oh! How much capital would be required for such an undertaking!

The companies that are forming little by little in Italy must, because of the iron-clad law of competition, follow the flow of representations that are

risqué, fiercely dramatic, or marked by a paradoxical and theatrical element of fantasy that is devoid of any aspect of aesthetic refinement, never mind morality. Indeed, because they are guided only by making profits, they must have over-the-top plots in order to have more appeal for the poor tastes of the popular class.

A curious example of this is a company in Rome that was established with Catholic funds and is largely subsidized by a very Catholic bank. In addition to grand spectacles for special, Christian occasions—the attendance of which is frequently encouraged in churches, and in Catholic social organizations—by the parish priests and even the preachers—the company puts on romantic representations of castles, grottos, escapes, warriors, vendettas, and hidden treasures, which succeed in nothing else if not in titillating the most puerile spirit of the people, in weakening the soul of the crowd, which needs altogether different examples of life and history, daring and passion, rather than those that they get from the unreal, imagined version of the medieval period that is sung about in dime novels or recounted in novels of the worst kind.

And then, there is one element that they cannot do without: CRIME. Unfortunately, there is crime in life, and especially in the life of the lower class. It is not, however, all there is to life. Nor should it be everywhere and always put before the eyes of the popular masses. This perpetuation of the criminal, bloody spectacle is therefore painful and distressing!<sup>2</sup>

The reality of everyday life, therefore, is not enough. The dark, tragic, noisy halo that the press puts around everyday life is not enough. Even the only artistic representation that is given to the people to enjoy today—the cinema—has to insist upon it, exaggerating the details. And yet, if there is a campaign to be started and to be tenaciously sustained in Italy, it is precisely this: that of eliminating bloodshed as much as possible from the eyes and the ears of the public.

In Rome, this campaign should be presented to everyone. It is urgent, holy, and necessary because our people completely lack a sense of the integrity of life because Italians in general, and Romans in particular, retain the sad, ferocious patrimony of blood—a horrid vein that descends from obscure origins in Latium, in which everything was robbing, aggression, and slashing, and which the priestly regimes—that have inquisitorial perversion in their substance and flaunt grim spectacles—have only enlarged along the way. There ought to be censorship, but does that exist? No doubt occupied with other matters, the censors do not give any care to verifying whether certain ultra-veristic representations are—and they are—appealing to the lowest instincts latent in the people: a genuine provocation to criminality.

It is a duty, then, to attempt an altogether different use for the film projector.

I think that this and all the other marvellous inventions and applications of modern science must see themselves primarily as wicked things, if no benefit can be derived from them for those who, more than the others—who more than everyone—need help to emerge out of the cruel darkness, from which they cannot see the bright beacon of truth and justice.

Let the motion pictures be another means of elevating the people's spirit.

With the support of the Roman Educational Institute, I have attempted this undertaking in Testaccio.

The need to know, to dream, to watch historical scenes and dramas about other classes of society as direct witnesses—in other words, the need to see the most imaginative dreams realized—those which remain latent in every human being, that makes the cinema a tremendous tool—as much for education as for corruption.

The lower class in general, and the poor in particular, lack the essential conditions through which they can participate in the life of the book, the theatre, and even school, and therefore they cannot receive the moral discipline that typically comes from, or can come from a wisely-chosen book, a theatrical representation inspired by noble intentions, and regular school attendance. Deprived because of these three restraints on the spirit, the people give in easily to the exaggerated passion of the wicked deed in the news, and the movie theatre owners take advantage with skilful cunning, making profits by feeding the over-excitability of crude audiences with overly passionate dramas; fantastic coloured scenes not regulated by any artistic taste or pedagogical [approach]; and the comical final scenes of an awkward, grotesque comedy which lacks any duty to be corrective, much less to improve manners.

The lower class manifests all of itself—its melancholic pain and impulsive enthusiasm, with its faith and its fetishism—in the half-light of a film projection. You can capture it—and in these three months of experiments, I had the opportunity to do so—in everything it has of the noble and pure, low and bestial. There it reveals the immense treasure of its ideals and the sinister abyss of its instincts. With eyes wide and mouths agape, this audience follows, stares, with growing anxiety, ready either to condemn an abomination with frenetic howls or to vigorously applaud a spectacle that shows itself to them, moves about, and then slips away from them, launched by the screeching of the mysterious machine.

The case of a Republican working-class man in Testaccio watching the depiction of the death of Marat in the movie theatre is a typical one: when



he sees the heroine of old France, Charlotte Corday, stab Marat in the bath tub, [the working-class man] gets up, brandishing his cane as if to strike her and to prevent her from killing the French Revolutionary leader.

The case of the two local butchers who could not hold back their tears at the film about the Carbonari of 1821 is also a typical one.<sup>3</sup>

Now, seeing how instincts prevail over ideas and noble sentiments in the lower classes, it is clear that any outside influence that will provoke a man's lowest urges can bring about the most serious moral and social consequences.

On the other hand, precisely because the lower classes are instinct-driven, and therefore impulsive, they ultimately have a healthy innocence which can be nurtured and moulded by films. This is the case even if they evoke love, crime, violence, and passion, so long as they are inspired by a moral standard that goes directly toward remorse, a sense of justice, an ennobling faith in rehabilitation, and the ultimate need for punishment: in short, a concept of life that continually raises up the spirit and keeps it safe from contact with the frenetic and savage impulses.

The desire to achieve a profoundly educational goal with a pleasing form is an old one. In past centuries, many literary people—and not just a few actors, too—have longed for a theatre with the sole benefit of educating the masses.

So once again, there remains only the unrealized ideal. Once again, there remains that thing which some are in the habit of calling the unattainable weapon of moralization. There is a lack of men who are willing to completely sacrifice themselves for the benefit of others and contribute to the immense expenditure that it is necessary in order to keep the popular theatre thriving. And finally, let's be honest, the extreme success of dramatic works that are anything but honest, they have made it so that many people speak about the benefits of popular theatre and few people—no one, really—tries to make it happen.

The motion pictures come to the aid of our good intentions with an efficacy that we ourselves did not anticipate. The natural desire for spectacle, the forces of the spirit that lead us to seek out of some object, which keeps our attention alert, the common *need*, almost, for concentration, finds very great satisfaction in the cinema.

And without remotely harming that sense of the art, that great spontaneous art that gave Greek tragedy to the world, we are pleased with the motion pictures as the most docile educational tool.

Even a theatre started by an uncompromising mind can stray from and almost flee the constant control of the director through the cleverness of the

actors, but the motion pictures cannot trick the one who starts it up, who establishes it, and who directs it with a firm desire to educate souls. And to whoever would say to me that lectures are more educational and moral than the theatre and the movies, I would respond that that is not true. It is not true because the theatre affirms a psychological need, because the theatre reveals the inclination of the spirit towards *spectacle* as a form. And we, by using the motion pictures, we set a trap for the theatre, we free ourselves from its dangers, using, however, the very same means of enticement.

Lectures can be pleasing—are pleasing sometimes—when the voice of the speaker raises them up in a theatrical form. But nothing conquers, impassions, and convinces like spectacle. Fondness for spectacle is one of those qualities that the educator ought to exploit for the absolute benefit of the souls that he wishes to ennoble. Fondness for spectacle must always be encouraged because it is this incontrovertible energy that pushes them towards an awareness of the world. And the lower-class people feel this quite deeply. Whoever lacks this fondness, however, is holed up in some dive, once work is finished, with no other desire than to get drunk for the thousandth time, and doesn't even take advantage of non-working days to set foot outside of the neighbourhood.

Now, motion pictures are also better than the theatre for children because they can show, in an enchanting game of sights, all of those divine legends that lead to an ethical formation. The motion pictures, rather than squandering the natural inclination towards knowing, develop it, make it gigantic even, because it leads the spirit not only to glorious acts and to noble reflections, but also to the study of history, and the physical and natural sciences.

I insist on the importance of the fondness for spectacle because I know how much the knowledge of the greatness in the world lifts the soul. There is no vice that is the result of little discernment which does not come from the narrow-mindedness of the soul.

In his *Memorie dalla casa di morti* (*Memoirs from the House of the Dead*), Dostoyevsky recounts the day that the inmates got permission to organize a spectacle. Why does he give so much importance to something, which, for someone serving a life sentence, for a man used to every form of suffering, could seem like something so foolish? Because Dostoyevsky found himself in front of a fact that drove him to the keenest observation. Only then he understood what it meant to offer a closed and perhaps abject spirit a new spectacle that in some ways takes an artistic shape. He affirmed, therefore, that the educator needn't take advantage of anything else except the common fondness for the spectacle.

'From universal beauty I foretasted the feeling of universal goodness,' says Nievo, narrating the great and unsurpassed feeling he felt as a boy, having left the confines of his house for the first time, to see the sea and the sun setting on top of it.<sup>4</sup> He fell to his knees, as he himself says, 'like Voltaire on Grütli when he, bowing before God, announced the only article of his credo.'<sup>5</sup>

But are these quotations necessary to demonstrate the value that grandiose spectacles have on the soul?

The only task that remains for us—and I do not know that it is small—is to be grateful again to science, which offers us such extensive assistance. And it is our responsibility to formulate a complete educational method around the cinema. It is not enough to enjoy the child's joy: it is necessary to take advantage of that enjoyment in order to teach.

Entertaining for entertainment's sake would be of little import. Of great import would be guiding toward the good without the least bit of boredom. For the same reason that the elementary school teacher makes use of a book of ABCs before a book of grammar, we must work to organize film spectacles. In order for a child to be able to draw lasting benefit from it, it is necessary to begin with the ABCs of simple projections—with patriarchal scenes—in order to arrive at fantastical, historical, and sentimental ones. What is needed is a slow, thoughtful, and graduated process that is appropriate in every way for the child's psyche. Indeed, I don't think that it is appropriate to wear the child out with excessive spectacles.

He needs to be able to demonstrate that he understood the previous film before being admitted to the next one. This rouses the attention more than ever, and it forces the children not to miss a word spoken by the person who gives a prefatory lesson before the carefully thought-out projections.

We believe that the action psychiatrists wanted to exert on the child's mind through suggestion is more attainable through representation. Sentimental spectacles cannot but open the way to emotions. Heroic deeds and all magnanimous acts cannot but leave some fertile seed of goodness in the men of tomorrow. And because childhood is the age that is most inclined to laughter, we must not for any reason inhibit this blessed form of vitality. But it is appropriate to ban that less-than-honest hilarity that arises from [observing] the sufferings or the crimes of other people.

The child must never sully his mouth with a smile that is less than pure.

I have been able to ascertain that children, the littlest ones in particular, enthusiastically and happily recount everything that they have seen at the cinema in detail. The fantastical and symbolic scenes, the fables truly have a profound impact on the little innocent souls and perfume them with that

kindness and that tender grace that gives us hope for the future of Man, just as the little plant that flowers with a beautiful green from the earliest phase of its development gives much hope.

Nor should films for adults be overlooked, because we also believe that by immersing the spirit in the mysteries of the world, instead of bumming around on the street, one can grow a great deal in virtue. We are certain that the cinema, this school of the future, this universal language, this clear, infinitely erudite teacher, combined with conferences and subjected to a methodology, can excite people to work and joy and can demonstrate how many treasure troves of virtue even the most modest of men holds in his heart.

What is happening in Testaccio is an experiment that needs the moral assistance of those willing to show through their actions, and not just their words, their interest in school and in educational initiatives for the working-class, which in Rome—let's be honest—are a myth. A myth because school must be alive in [a person's] life and not be a dead thing, outside of the aspirations, the desires, the needs, and the goals of the people.

If education for the working-classes existed, if the so highly-touted non-religious school worked, we would not have thousands of illiterate kids, and the religious schools in Rome would not have 25,000 students.

Scholastic cinema is one of those initiatives, which in this age of enormous riches and widespread, terrible human misery, can demonstrate in full light the bright destiny of the discoveries and the applications of science. It is perhaps the only initiative—if I am not incorrect—that can bring the blessing of science to the redeemed hearts and the emancipated souls of the lowly.

*'Il cinematografo e l'educazione', Rivista pedagogica. Pubblicazione mensile dell'associazione nazionale per gli studi pedagogici, 2/10 (July 1909), pp. 956–961. Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.*

## Notes

1. [Translator's note. The Mezzogiorno refers to Southern Italy].
2. Orano directs his readers to '*Letteratura criminale e cinematografo*' ('Criminal literature and the motion pictures'), *Rivista Pedagogica (Journal of Pedagogy)*, 2/8, p. 783).
3. [Editors' note. *I Carbonari* were members of the *Carboneria*, an Italian secret society of a liberal and nationalist persuasion, which was begun in the early

- nineteenth century. The name of the organization, its symbols and rituals were inspired by the *carbonai* or coal vendors.]
4. [Editors' note. The original Italian reads, '*Dalla bellezza universale pregustai il sentimento dell'universale bontà.*' See Nievo, *Le confessioni*, p. 189.]
  5. [Editors' note. Nievo cited an episode that would have happened in 1775: Voltaire, in his old age, wanted to be present at the sight of the dawn seen from the summit of a small Swiss mountain, and there, moved, bowing down in front of the natural spectacle, he would have pronounced his faith in God. '*Come Voltaire sul Grütli quando pronunziò dinanzi a Dio l'unico articolo del suo credo.*' See Nievo, *Le confessioni*, p. 189.]

# The Intuitive Method in Religious Education

*Romano Costetti*

The intuitive method consists of making an impression on the senses, but especially *sight*, in order to arrive at the intellect's comprehension. This method, which was organized in schools by [Johann Heinrich] Pestalozzi [and] applied in kindergartens by [Friedrich] Fröbel has now become universal. Indeed, what modern school does not have abacuses, wall charts, and other intuitive objects?

Catholics, however, have not always done a good job in this regard. I remember that at the Seventh Italian Catholic Congress held in Lucca in 1887, a certain Professor Bottaro, a Genoese priest with broad-minded ideas, proposed that we adopt the Fröbelian system in our religious boarding schools and recreation centres.<sup>1</sup> Commendatore Paganuzzi, with that excitement, that impetuosity, and with that eloquence all his own, sprang into action.<sup>2</sup> He railed against such a method, calling it heretical, worthy of excommunication, and a promoter of materialism, since—as he rightly said—it is not possible to have objective representations of spiritual or supernatural things. He added that the Catholic members of Venice's city council have only one victory, which was using their vote to prevent the city from adding a bronze crown to the tomb of Doctor Froebel. By stating these words with the aforementioned vehemence, [Paganuzzi] aroused the enthusiasm of the assembly, which broke out in waves of applause. That applause naturally buried the proposal of poor Professor Bottaro.

Despite this applause, I remained sceptical, and with melancholy, uttered that famous verse: '*Victrix causa Diis placuit sed victa Catoni*' ('The victorious cause pleased the Gods, but the conquered cause pleased Cato').<sup>3</sup> Indeed, how can you call a method heretical and excommunicatory when it coincides perfectly with the genesis of our ideas and follows the sequence of our learning? Who doesn't know that the higher faculties always start from some perceivable element in order to exercise their function? In other words, who doesn't know that sensation is the primary material that when elaborated on by human intelligence is transformed into an idea? Call to mind, gentlemen, that stupendous tercet with which the divine Alighieri sculpted in just two [*sic*] verses the entire gnoseological system of scholasticism: '*Così convien parlare al vostro ingegno, | il quale solo da sensato*

*apprende | ciò che fa poscia d'intelletto degno.*' ('It is necessary to speak to your faculty, | since only from sense perception does it grasp | that which it then makes fit for the intellect.')

<sup>4</sup>

But, if all of the senses are worthy helpers of the intellect, sight is the most precious of all. It is indeed the king of the senses, the most active of all because it acts from a distance, it is more comprehensive than all the others because it perceives the most disparate objects and understands not just the existence of each one of them, but their dimensions, their shape, and their colour.<sup>5</sup>

These ideas, as you must understand, inspire in me a feeling of profound bitterness because they remind me of having had almost lost the most precious of all the senses, sight, and my words put me in a rather strange position before you since I must seem like a bankrupt man who, despite his poverty, persists in speaking about millions.

Be that as it may, if sight is the strongest aid of the intellect, no, rather, if sight is the most ordinary way of reaching the intellect, isn't it reasonable to employ sight in order to arrive at intellectual perception? And if this method is the most suitable for human psychology, it is much more suitable to the child's psychology, because a child lives primarily on the senses and populates his mind with ideas because he keeps his great big eyes focused on everything and everyone. This method is taught by Mother Nature and is unconsciously used by all mothers—even the stupidest ones—who, by pointing out various objects to their child, promote the development of the child's intelligence. This method, then, has been around for a long time and existed many centuries before Pestalozzi made it into a discipline with principles deduced from science and experience. Even good old Horace was saying back in his day: *'segnius irritant animos demissa per aures, | quam quae sunt oculis subiecta fidelibus'* ('Matters transmitted through the ear stir the spirit | less forcibly than those set before the trustworthy eyes'): which, in simpler words, means that things that are seen make more of an impression than things that are heard.<sup>6</sup>

But someone could observe that if this method is very useful for lay education, it would not be equally useful for religious education, whose content does not always lend itself well to an objective representation and sometimes does not even lend itself to a figurative one. And I immediately exclude objective representation for certain notions since, for example, we do not claim to visually show God, the soul, grace, etc. to the child. But, we can indeed use figurative representations with symbols whose meanings were consecrated by art, by tradition, by conventionalism, and correspond to those phantasms that spontaneously swarm about in the children's imaginations when they hear talk of certain things.

And then the invisible God was made visible under the veil of flesh, was born, lived, and died among us, and therefore by taking advantage of historical elements of religion, we can represent the wonderful mysteries of his childhood, the splendours of his public life, the tragic scenes of his painful martyrdom.

The Church has always adopted this method and in the Middle Ages, in that time of living and industrious faith, it covered the walls of its basilicas with a mass of symbolic images and historical figurations which, used in the instruction of the ignorant, were called the 'Bible of the Simple': *Biblia pauperum*. The Council of Trent in its twenty-fifth session established the use of images as a powerful means of religious instruction and our bishops in Emilia in their famous 'practical norms for catechists' recommend images and illuminated projections as aids in teaching the catechism.

What I have said up until now serves to prove the legitimacy of the method and to overcome the mistrust of those who are sceptical. I want to add a few words to demonstrate its precious advantages and thus to awaken the most lively interest in favour of this very method.

Let us recall that every good catechist seeks to study the means by which he can make his instruction *clear, easy, and appealing*. Teaching by means of images unequivocally achieves these three goals and adds a fourth one: *efficacy*.

*Clear*: Often catechetical education ends up being abstruse because some religious notions are too abstract, too transcendent, and too far from that which forms the object of our perceivable experience. Let us remember, gentlemen, that the mentality of people our age is absolutely positive, because they were born in an environment rich in materialism. Even more positive is that of children, either because, as I just mentioned, they live primarily on the senses, or because they find themselves surrounded by the triumph of the material. Now, go and speak to them about God, about the soul, about grace. They will stand there cold, indifferent, and unenthusiastic—as if they were faced with a discourse whose meaning they cannot grasp. But try to materialize, so to speak, these notions, by supporting your words with symbols appropriate for them. They will instantly grasp the things that are necessary to know about those notions. In other words, with the use of images, teaching more abstract things becomes clear.

Remember that guy who had to write a sonnet for the Capuchin sisters and had to make it simple and clear enough to be understood even by the porter?<sup>7</sup> He made it so clear and transparent that he could declare: '*Un sonnetto più chiaro di così | le cappuccine non l'avranno più*' ('A sonnet more clear than this | The Capuchin sisters will never have again').<sup>8</sup> And now it



is my turn to say that with the use of images: *‘Un’istruzione più chiara di così | i nostri bimbi non l’avranno più’* (‘An education more clear than this | Our children will never have again’).

*Easy:* In order to learn, it is not enough to listen to or to read an explanation. It takes the mind going back into itself in order to grasp the connection and the coordination of the things that were read or heard. In other words, it takes reflection. But this act of reflection takes a bit of effort, and many children, dragged by their own, in-born indolence, flee from this effort or commit as little to it as possible. We see this in our elementary schools where they are even teaching things that should be interesting to the child and certainly are interesting to the parents. Despite the fact that our poor schoolteachers make themselves hoarse shouting from morning until night, after a few months, half of the students will have understood barely 20 per cent of the things they have explained. Now, just imagine what must happen in our catechisms, where they teach things that are often dry and difficult, that are not materially interesting to the child, and which, unfortunately, most parents take no interest in. We must save kids from this struggle, we must insure they are up to the task of reflecting without effort. And we can achieve this very well with the assistance of images. To see an image takes no effort—it is enough to have two eyes in your head. To understand its meaning takes no effort because the child is drawn in by natural curiosity. Therefore, teaching through images is the easiest kind of teaching there is.

*Appealing:* The sight of an image is suggestive for everyone, but it should be even more suggestive for us Italians, who have inherited from our fathers a rich patrimony of artistic glory. A child buys a book or an illustrated magazine. I guarantee you that before reading a line of text, he will look at all of the pictures. And children aren’t the only ones to do this—even we adults with grey hairs and a half a century in the saddle do the same thing. Watch with what enthusiasm kids scrutinize all kinds of figurative representations—good and bad—that they see in the newsstands and how they press their noses up against the store windows selling illustrated postcards—even though there is a chance of stumbling across something that would damage their innocence. So, let’s take advantage of this yearning, this passion for the image in order to teach our young people the principles of faith and morality. We will succeed in teaching them by entertaining them, or rather, we will achieve the goal that Dr. Fröbel was proposing.

But I also said that teaching by means of the Image makes instruction more *effective* because the effects of it will be longer-lasting. Think about how we remember things in direct proportion to the impression that they make on us. But the image makes a big impression on us because it strikes the

imagination and leaves an imprint there of a little idol, a phantasm which, even though it vanished, will reawaken one day or another. Oh gentlemen, yes, without acknowledging some kind of incrustation on the cortical walls of the brain like the materialists, it is certain that the phantasm remains fixed in our imagination and will come to life continuously in the presence of the idea with which is it associated. Look at your own experiences. Have you ever thought about the transfiguration of Jesus Christ without your imagination reminding you of the canvas of the divine Raphael?<sup>9</sup> Have you ever thought of that great leader of the Hebrew people without your imagination reminding you of that great statue by Michelangelo Buonarroti?<sup>10</sup> Using images to teach, we imprint on our children's imaginations a mental image of the drawings they have been shown, and this indelible or nearly indelible imagery makes the lesson unforgettable.

But what are these means of intuition that we could take advantage of for this purpose? They are the catechistic images, among which the most recommended are those of the Bonne Presse of Paris. They are wall charts like those by Bertarelli of Milan, Don Vincenzo Minelli of Genoa, Paravia of Turin and the Bonne Presse in Paris. They are the illustrated text books, like *Storia Sacra (Sacred History)* by [Antonio] Parato, that by [Joseph Charles] Benziger from Einsiedeln in Switzerland, *La vita di Gesù narrata ai fanciulli (The Life of Jesus Told to Children)* by the Society of St. Jerome in Rome, the illustrated *Breve Catechismo (Brief Catechism)* by [Don] Bosio of the V.E.R.E. of Treviso and the *Lezioni di Catechismo illustrate (Illustrated Lessons of the Catechism)* of the School of Brescia.

But the king of these intuitive methods is indisputably the illuminated projection. If a small five centimetre by seven centimetre image in chromolithography is effective, if a 60 centimetre by 80 centimetre wall chart is even more effective, then an illuminated image that, depending on the intensity of the light and the distance of the apparatus from the screen, can reach enormous proportions, will be extremely effective.<sup>11</sup> Even among children there are some near-sighted people who cannot clearly see a wall chart, but no one can miss a beautiful projection that measures 25 or 36 square metres.

Throw in the instantaneous appearance of the luminous frame on the screen, which seems almost a *creatio ex nihilo* ('creation out of nothing') and the equally instantaneous disappearance, which one could call a vanishing vision, and you understand that all of this gives the spectator a certain air of mystery that is perfectly suited to religious subjects.

Finally, the projects are always accompanied by the living word of the orator who explains the subject of the frame, puts into action the immobile

figures, makes them pulse with life, makes them jump from the screen in order to imprint them on the imagination of the listeners. With this method, you can more easily allow religious notions to penetrate into the children's psyche because it enters there through two means—through vision and through hearing. And you understand that it is easier to seize a fortress when two breaches have been created instead of just one.

I am initiating a challenge that I hope some of you will take up. Let's take 20 children with the same intellectual development and the same religious upbringing. Give ten to me, and give ten to someone else. We will give both groups the same lesson on the catechism, but I will use the projections, and he will not. At the end of the lesson, we will test the kids, and I would bet my life that you will find that my ten will have understood more from my uncouth and boorish words than the other ten will have understood from the brilliant and carefully crafted words of my competitor.

So, gentlemen, I invite you all to use this great tool which will double, as if by magic, the effectiveness of your lessons. [...]

But you will tell me that the movies are more effective and more suggestive than fixed projections. It is very true, gentlemen, the movies add movement to figurative representation, and with movement, comes life, with its charms and passions. But we must be aware that it cannot be useful for religious instruction for a number of reasons that I won't get into explaining to you. I will point out only two. First, it is difficult to accompany the cinematograph with words.<sup>12</sup> The second is that there are very few films with sacred subject matter, and these few are for the most part profane, scenographic, and sometimes grotesque. Nevertheless, even the cinema could help us reach our goal in a direct way, that is, as a way of enticing children to our catechisms. If you, dear parish priests, will promise them a film projection after catechism, attendance would instantly double because with this distraction, you would neutralize those many distractions that attract children on Sundays and that for the most part keep them away from catechism.

But I insist on fixed projections because only they are able to effectively bolster your teachings. By now thankfully, the projectionists are no longer satisfied and those opposing projections are *rari nantes in gurgite vasto* ('few and far in between').<sup>13</sup> Would you like to know who these last ones are? *They fit in one of the following categories: (a) the misonicists, or those stuck in their ways, who are alarmed at everything that is new; (b) the lovers of quiet living, who are reluctant toward the thought of a new intrigue or a new effort; (c) those misers who cling so tightly to their purse strings that they are*

*appalled by the idea of sacrificing another lira for the blessed cause.* Which of you, gentlemen, could it be safe to say fit into one of these three groups?

Monsignor Ketteler has said that if St. Paul had lived in his time, that is, in the middle of the nineteenth-century, he would have been a journalist.<sup>14</sup> I do not have the authority, like that of the great Bishop of Magonza, to claim that if they lived in our times, the apostles would all be projectionists. But I can assert with the certainty of the most profound conviction that if the honourable Senator Cesare Bianchetti were to find himself at the dawning of this century, instead of walking through the neighbourhoods of Bologna with a cross in his hand to call the children to Christian doctrine, he would arm himself with [a magic] lantern and go from place to place illustrating his stupendous explanations of catechism with luminous projections.<sup>15</sup>

Let's do it ourselves then, gentlemen. If the apostles bolstered their words with the power of miracles, we who unfortunately don't have their miraculous power, let us at least bolster our words with the miracles of science!

*'Il metodo intuitivo nell'insegnamento religioso', Luce et verbo, 3/25–26* (June–July 1911), pp. 271–275. Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.

## Notes

1. [Editors' note. Luigi Bottaro (1819–1904), priest, middle-school teacher, anthropology professor at the University of Genoa, promoter of kindergartners and professional institutes for teaching.]
2. [Editors' note. *Commendatore* is an honorific title. Giovanni Battista Paganuzzi (1841–1923) was a lawyer and leader of a prominent national conservative, pro-papal Catholic movement.]
3. [Editors' note. Lucan, *Pharsalia*, p. 128.]
4. [Editors' note. Alighieri, *Paradiso*, pp. 40–42.]
5. Some maintain that hearing is superior to sight. In response, we distinguish the senses as such and as having a relationship with the intellectual faculty. So, as a sense sight surpasses in activity hearing for the reasons mentioned above, but in relation to the intellect, it remains in second place, because it represents only the object, leaving the interpretation to the perceiver, while hearing with the means of language, not only represents the idea, but gives an interpretation and even the nuances of it. Moreover, that does not harm the efficacy of the intuitive method because it embraces both senses and harmonizes them in such a way that about them one can say with Horace: *'Alterius sic altera poscit opem et coniurat amice.'* [Editors' note. Original can be found in Horace, *Ars poetica*, pp. 410–411.]
6. [Editors' note. See Horace, *Ars Poetica*, pp. 180–181.]

7. [Translator's note. The *suora portinaia*—the nun who is the gatekeeper—apparently a task that does not require great erudition according to the author.]
8. [Editors' note. The author is citing, in a not exact form, the verses of the famous sonnet of the Abbot of Vicenza, Angiolo Berlandis (1733–1793).]
9. [Editors' note. A well-known Raphael painting, *The Transfiguration*, now housed in the Vatican Museums.]
10. [Editors' note. The statue referenced is Michelangelo's famous *Moses*, which is found in the church of San Pietro in Vincoli in Rome. To describe Moses, the author uses the term '*condottiere*' for leader, which is a military term, really. Moses is positioned almost as the warlord or military captain of the Hebrews.]
11. [Editors' note. A process of lithography that produces multi-colored images.]
12. [Editors' note. The original text in *Luce et verbo* has an editorial note that disputes this point, saying 'On this point, we cannot agree with the distinguished speaker: that is it more convenient to not explain cinematographic scenes, we'll let that pass; but that this is difficult? No. It is rather easier than explaining fixed projections.' The note is signed 'T.M.']
13. [Translator's note. This Latin quotation is from Book I of Virgil's *Aeneid*.]
14. [Editors' note. Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler (1811–1877) was a Catholic bishop, theologian, and politician, who led the centrist party in the German Parliament and supported the major themes of social Christianity.]
15. Cesare Bianchetti (1585–1655) was a nobleman and senator from Bologna who founded the congregation of San Gabriele in Bologna.]

# The Cinema and Its Influence on the Education of the People

*Giovanni Battista Avellone*

*We publish with pleasure the letter that the valiant Commendatore Avellone sent us today.<sup>1</sup>*

*He is advocating for a new and just cause: morality in cinematographic spectacles, which thousands of people from all social categories spend a great deal of time attending.*

*Commendatore Avellone sounds a warning call concerning the pernicious influence that certain dramas have on the hearts and minds of those who fill the theatres. It is a school of vice, which calls for the attention of the authorities and the advancement of measures to deal with the situation.*

Dear Signor Bergamini,<sup>2</sup>

Your distinguished newspaper's campaign against usury has been and will be welcomed by all of the unfortunate, starting with its immediate victims, the *honest and needy fathers*—employees of the State and its Administrations, worried about increasing needs and the modesty of their salaries—as well as *delinquent children* and *slacker husbands*, and finally the many women who, as *wives, mothers, aunts, and grandmothers*, cry and feel the painful, agonizing, and poison bite of the *usurious vampire*.

Please continue, Signor Bergamini, in this highly moral and holy war against *usury*, which is practically protected by prevailing laws, or at the very least, remains unmonitored and unimpeded. Continue to expound the idea *that money is not merchandise* that can be sold at a *discounted price*, and that *capital* must (in carrying out its activity and exercising its power, whether used in industry, commerce, or agriculture, or for any sort of *lending*) remain within the confines of an honest, moral, balanced, and proportionate *yield* of profit. *Il Giornale d'Italia* (*The Newspaper of Italy*) will be blessed by the entire Italian people, who love and value it for the excellent, reasonable morality of its aims in the *social and civil* work that it carries out on a daily basis for the benefit of the people.

But to this campaign directed at ameliorating of the economic conditions of the many, unhappy slaves from *need*, I would add another, directed at preventing *great moral harm to the education of the hearts and minds of the*

people; we must raise our voices against the abuses of the *cinema*, which out of shameful greed has become a veritable school of *immorality*, but which could, I believe, carry out holy and wholesome work.

'Are you saying, then, that the *Newspaper of Italy* should also fight against the *cinema*?'

To this question I respond immediately:

Yes, Signor Bergamini, [the journal should fight] also against the abuses of the cinema, and here is why:

This ingenious invention, like the *telephone*, the *phonograph*, and the *wireless*, has shaken and impressed the entire world; this astounding discovery that produces the living, pulsating reproduction of acts, facts, political events, major natural catastrophes, incidents and accidents of every sort from life as it was lived in times past, artificially bringing them back to life with admirable precision; this marvellous way of bringing history back to life gathers and expresses the great moments of today's history as *luminous truths*, securing them for posterity. It has also entered into the minds and spirits of all because it makes the reproduction of scenery and action more rapid, less costly, less boring, and less wearying, all while conserving the enthrallment and magnificence of the old theatricality. Responding to the taste of the new age, which is more synthetic in its apprehension and feeling, it attracts everyone from every class, every sort of culture and education, and conquers, dominates, and feverishly appeals to the desire to see, relish, and admire new, original, and exciting things and events.

All of these things, in the field of novelties and attractions, *have been and will be the great destiny of the cinema*, and they are the reason why the first ones to have brought us this *marvellous* discovery have gotten rich, and their numerous *followers* are striving to keep the yet to be established productivity of the extraordinary invention high by any means necessary, even immoral ones.

If the illustrious Liesegang family—its father, sons, and nephews, all devoted themselves to perfecting the astounding reproductions of life in all its movements, forms, and things through the *cinema*—[if they] could have known that their classic and artistic *cinematographic manual*, translated from German into all languages, including Italian (by the esteemed engineer Henry Hirsch of Torino), was going lay a path for *greedy and rapacious theatrical speculation*, dragging the invention from its noble and moral idea—its capacity to produce profound impressions that function, through the feelings that it arouses and the historical grandeur that it brings back to life, a school and a model of virtue, valour, honesty, sacrifice, and heroism—into the lower depths of a *vulgar and titillating industry*, which

attracts crowds and appeals to the most *insalubrious and perverted curiosities* through horrid spectacles reproducing *adultery, suicides, financial ruin brought about by fraud, forgery, and swindling, shameless loves, lascivious affairs, crooked businesses, attacks on coaches, and brazen robberies using buzz saws, accompanied by the slaughter of those robbed*; if the Lisegang family had known all this, believe me, Signor Bergamini, that hard-working, wise, and honest family would have destroyed that product of lengthy, costly, and ingenious experiments, and would not have vulgarized the *magnificent art*, in order to prevent it from falling into the gutter of a petty and immoral business.<sup>3</sup>

However, *here we are*: the famous Lisegang manual is in the public domain, available to all. There are hundreds of *cinemas*. The most cruel and horrid spectacles are offered, advertised by posters showing the *face of a man killing himself, or a thief who kills and then breaks open a safe*. People come running in droves, pay a small price, and have a good time—so shall we just calm ourselves and leave things at that?

So says the so-called modern man, who adapts to everything. But you do not say so, Signor Bergamini, nor does the *Newspaper of Italy* think or write so, and I, who venture to guess at your mind-set and that of your authoritative and beloved newspaper, would ask your hospitality to say in protest:

Our women and children, attracted by the *low cost* of *cinematic* entertainment, must not flock to the *cinemas* to view *immoral* pulsating or living *spectacles*, which impart in the souls of the *young people* the tormented need for an explanation and the trouble of explaining to their parents, and in the souls of adults, their horror at the life-like reproduction of human degeneration in its most vile and wicked acts.

The *cinema* must be a true school of ancient and modern history, reproducing heroic acts and deeds, highly moral scenes of public or private life, suffering, sorrows, passions, joys, pleasures, and excitement, arising from human misfortune and fortune on the basis of honesty and virtue.

To conclude, the political authorities must fully carry out their duty to oversee public spectacles and to come to the defence of public morality, rigorously and without fail, preventing the depiction of immoral acts (historical or otherwise), and seizing *films* to prevent their circulation.

Will this voice of protest, supported, after all, by the law, be heard?

I hope that it will, if you, Signor Bergamini, will help me, because a government that has so zealously (and rightly) pursued illegal *gambling houses and their proprietors* cannot leave at full liberty the *cinematographic speculation* that, out of greed, has transformed the cinema into an enormous, crowded, and very attractive school of immorality and perversion.



With the promise to submit to you a list of all of the immoral cinematographic productions being shown here in Rome, your devoted.

*'Il cinematografo e la sua influenza sull'educazione del popolo', Il Giornale d'Italia, (18 October 1912), p. 3. Translated by Michael Cramer.*

## Notes

1. [Editors' note. *Commendatore* is an honorific title.]
2. [Editors' note. Alberto Bergamini (1871–1962) was a journalist and Italian politician who was the editor of the Roman newspaper, *Il Giornale d'Italia* from 1901 and 1923.]
3. [Editors' note. See Liesegang, *Il cinematografo*.]

# The Cinematograph in the Schools

*Francesco Orestano*

## General Observations

Scholastic educational cinema completes and raises to the highest level of efficiency and resourcefulness that positive method which, invoked and prescribed by great educators for centuries, has remained until today a timorous and ineffective teaching method. It is true, despite the fact that theoretically all the needs of this method are well recognised, we continue to find ourselves having to give almost all our lessons (this is no exaggeration) *verbally*, as in the past without the help of any adequate illustrative material. A few faded maps and charts on the classroom wall; meagre and invariably out-of-date collections in the so-called educational museums; experimental equipment that is rudimentary and lacking precision when it exists at all; all the educational material of the method so pompously called modern positive method, is very limited.

However, this method establishes that the foundations of knowledge, and therefore, for teaching as well, should be based on: (a) *Intuition*, direct and immediate relations between subject and object; (b) *Observation and experimentation*, which include the condition that the experiments must be repeatable, both in identical situations, and where possible, also with variations; (c) *Genetic-evolutive investigation* of certain processes.

Motion pictures can fulfil these three methodological criteria completely, thoroughly, and without limits, for educational as well as for scientific ends. We must not forget that some phenomena can never be repeated in an identical manner, but, by using motion pictures as a method, we discover, to our surprise, that these phenomena remain permanently available for our analysis for as many demonstrations as may be required.

However, let's put aside the considerable help that motion pictures can provide for scientific investigation, which makes results obtained or experiments attempted in any laboratory available for observation and control by any scientist anywhere in the world; and let us focus simply on the educational function it can provide. We have discovered that there is no longer any object, fact, or phenomenon, any case and any place, visible to the human eye that cannot be reproduced for direct and immediate perception by any other person. There no longer exists an observation or experiment that once it is performed cannot be repeated hundreds of

times as desired in any situation, in any place, or at any time; and finally, because of motion pictures, we are no longer limited to fragmentary images, stationary and isolated from reality, but we can reproduce these phenomena in their successive stages whenever necessary, throughout their complete cycle, from beginning to end.

We would also like to add that, for teaching purposes, motion pictures are even better than direct observation, given that they are always accessible.

And although this may seem a paradox, it is fully justified by the following considerations:

1. By using motion pictures, we are able to concentrate on a particular aspect we wish to study, in this way intensifying the focus on that aspect alone. Observation is carried out in real working conditions, which are more complex, and attention can be distracted in various directions, provoking associations that do not serve the purpose or can be harmful, and, in that case, makes analysis of the subject all the more difficult;
2. Motion picture viewing does not require any effort other than focusing the attention, which can be concentrated on the object in question; a visit to another area, a factory, etc., requires an effort by the whole body and, in a certain measure, provokes a dispersion of forces;
3. Motion picture screening is far more rapid than any other form of inspection, and saves considerable mental effort, not to mention the question of the time that any form of on the spot inspection requires;
4. Motion pictures can be repeated hundreds of times as required, fully, or partially, but this is not possible in field trips, where it would be impossible to reproduce the same conditions;
5. Motion pictures can collect and assemble in a single reel images of objects and phenomena that are remote from one another in both time and distance, a fact that is extremely helpful for any comparisons, any work for analysis or synthesis, and for more accurate and efficient identification of contrasts, similarities, analogies, etc., and this is something that is impossible under any other conditions.

In short, the advantages to be gained by using motion pictures for teaching are so great that it is perfectly valid to conclude with another seeming paradox: if motion pictures did not exist, then they would need to be invented purely for educational reasons.

However, motion pictures cannot enter the schools as they are today, but must adapt to the needs of education, both from a *technical* standpoint, which concerns the way in which the projections are made; and from a

particular *method* with which the material of the projections themselves must be selected and ordered.

## The Technical Aspects

For the *technical* aspects, it is well to consider the following fundamental points:

1. There is considerable concern about the effects that motion pictures may have on the eyes. Already back in 1908, in *Aerztliche Sachverständige-Zeitung (Journal of Medical Experts)* Dr. Paul Schenk published a strong warning on this subject:

The modern man is systematically destroying his eyesight. We are suffering from an excess of luminous stimulations. In motion picture theatres, even more than the intensity of the light used during screening in a dark environment, the incessant oscillations and flickering of the light at such frequent rhythms is even more harmful. The dazzling effect criticised so much, produced by motion pictures, is such a serious problem that this aspect alone eliminates any pretext of using motion pictures as a 'hygienic' means of culture. This negative influence is made even worse by the far too rapid and unnatural succession of the various scenes. In addition, when the individual frames are shown in rapid succession one after the other, there are slight deviations between one and the next that are increased even further when they are enlarged. Strained and overtired eyes are the inevitable consequence caused by incessant oscillation of luminous stimulation. The dazzling effect produced by the motion picture is none other than the even more intense glittering provoked by the light source, and it is damaging to the eyes. Therefore, purely for health reasons I feel I must protest against the introduction of motion pictures in schools.

These comments by an expert eye specialist from Berlin are not an isolated case, but simply one of the many demonstrations of hostility and implacable aversion shown towards motion pictures for reasons that are certainly serious from an artistic and moralistic point of view as well as that of public health.

But we want to adopt motion pictures in schools with the frugality and measure that are necessary because of its educational purpose,

the same approach taken on by the entire educational system. And therefore, while paying close attention to the objections, which seem well-founded and serious, all the same we can avoid the radical and certainly excessive pessimism shown by many even authoritative adversaries of motion pictures; and we can attempt to reap the benefits of the best these means have to offer.

As far as the flickering and the resulting dazzling effect harmful to the eyes is concerned, it is a well-known fact that this depends mainly on the small number of images projected within a certain period of time (approximately fifteen per second), whereas theoretically, the established number should be more than double this amount. This disadvantage cannot be eliminated except through technical progress, but these techniques are so numerous and so continuous that we feel confident that the problem described will be soon resolved. But since the problem is worsened by the excessive enlargement from the distance to the projection box and deficiencies in the light source, the equipment used for educational motion pictures must find a way to reduce as much as possible any cause of malfunction.

Moreover, care must be taken so that pupils are not subjected to long screenings, and the room must not be darkened completely, first for obvious disciplinary reasons, and also because the luminous stimulus produces a far more intense effect when surrounded by a very dark room.

2. Another condition that must be met is that the screen must be sufficiently large so that it can easily be seen by all pupils from their desks... They must be able to see not only the complete scene, but must be able to see all the details clearly; this is not an easy task when we remember that the scenes could be filled with figures rich in interesting details, which must, however, be easily observed by the pupils without straining their eyes.

In fact, if the rapidity with which the scenes alternate is combined with very small images, then the screening will occur before the dazzled gaze of the pupils without leaving any clear and distinct image in their minds. It is extremely important to take this essential concept into consideration when designing the educational equipment before spending sums of money that could be totally wasted.

3. A third aspect concerns a special characteristic for educational motion picture equipment, which should be able to pause the film projection at any moment necessary to maintain a stable image fixed on the screen.

The reason for this is obvious. In this manner, the teacher can attract the pupils' attention to certain points, encouraging them to participate in analysing, identifying, proposing hypotheses and deducing answers, providing opportunities that could otherwise be minimized or even lost completely if the images are fleeting or pass too rapidly. Another aspect that should not be neglected is the fact that this could also contribute towards savings in educational costs because when motion pictures contain the same images that are normally shown using fixed projection, this provides the possibility of observing the images, both still or in motion, using the same piece of equipment.

4. A fourth aspect of scholastic motion pictures concerns screening colours. Films should be coloured with natural colours. This condition is essential when the colour is an integral part of the filmed reality, as we will see for geographical, scientific, and technological films, etc. It may not be so necessary for other films that represent contemporary aspects, partly because the colour is not necessary in order to understand the action, and partly because it is easy to compensate with a little imagination. However, when films concern historical representation, coloured screenings should be shown. Not simply because they are more captivating, attract the imagination, and create more interest, but also because they complete the realistic effect of the scenes that are shown.

## The Method

As far as the *method* is concerned, both in terms of the educational content and the way it is used, it should be established first that the general standards to be followed for educational motion pictures are the same as those applied for general and special educational programmes.

Evidently, there is not a pedagogical principle that does not extend to the choice and the use of the motion picture screenings in the schools.

Moreover, still with the general standards in mind, we would recommend the following:

1. All screenings should be used in moderation, even more—used sparingly and *only when necessary*; not for pure entertainment. In fact, the sometimes irresistible influence of motion pictures often leads to their excessive use, creating an authentic passion, above all in the children, who are attracted to the motion picture for the simple fact that it is a motion picture, but with the result that a single screening can

lead rapidly, in fact almost immediately, to boredom. It is for this very reason that motion pictures have to constantly offer something new, and this creates avid but superficial interest, which is easily sparked and just as easily switched off. Each one of us may have had the same experience, no matter how much a motion picture may have interested us; it is extremely rare that we would watch it a second time. Having to sit through the same film three times would be intolerable. This would not happen so easily if the screenings had a truly useful content that inspired the viewers to want to learn more on the subject to fulfil some more strongly felt cultural need. And therefore, this must absolutely not happen with educational motion pictures, precisely because if films of a more frivolous type were created, this could represent the greatest danger for the application of the entirely new process. Therefore, we must attempt to prevent and combat fatigue, which is the inevitable result of overindulgence. Good motion pictures should be able to be seen more than once, like reading a good book. Scientific, technological films, etc., should be shown again at appropriate times, each time analysis is needed, and the very opportunity of being able to see the film again should dispel any boredom.

2. Each screening should be preceded by an introductory explanation, conversation, or reading to attract the attention of the pupils and to awaken them with a feeling of anticipation, which is the best way to stimulate curiosity.

The teacher can direct the pupils' attention to salient points during the screening, stopping the film where necessary, either to analyse some image better, or to point out some important detail, or even to ask the pupils what they imagine will happen, or what they would like to happen later on. This helps to stimulate their intuition, imagination, logical powers, deductive and inductive capacity, as well as their critical sense, etc.

To help the teacher provide all these additional aspects, each film should be accompanied by an explanatory text for the teacher's use and, if necessary, also for the pupils' use, in order to identify the salient points of the film and to provide useful advice on how it should be used. In this way, scholastic motion pictures can also be used to enrich the general culture and educational training of the teachers. Following each screening, the class should be involved in long discussions, comments, summaries, exercises in learning nomenclature, etc. A clever teacher will first let all the pupils feel free to express themselves, and could even use this liberty of expression to make useful observations concerning

the *eyewitness psychology* (not to mention many other activities), which are extremely important for practical daily life (an example is the explanation of the functions of justice), so that pupils learn to give a correct version of what they have seen.

3. Each screening must contain exactly the number of images (neither too much nor too little information) pertinent to the subject in question in a natural, logical, and motivated order. The contents must not be shown in a manner that is fanciful, desultory, arbitrary or absurd, but must evolve naturally in a perfect concatenation of logical deduction, from introduction to consequence—a demonstration of cause and effect.

The essential requirements for good educational motion pictures should be, from a psychological point of view—authenticity, from a logical point of view—coherence, and from scientific point of view—the causal connection between phenomena described. Any form of deceptive or untrue portrayal of life must be prevented at all cost; no lack of correct logic, no insinuation of false notions to represent the real world must be permitted, when using a form of representation as realistic as a motion picture. Errors can acquire the unquestionable authority of things that have been seen, becoming implanted through the fascination of immediate intuition, in other words, that knowledge which for us assumes the highest level of obvious certainty.

“*Il Cinematografo nelle scuole*”, 10 December 1913, speech at the Istituto ‘Minerva’, Rome; repr. *Il cinematografo nelle scuole* (Rome: Istituto Nazionale ‘Minerva’, 1914). Translated by National Cinema Museum of Turin.



# Speech at the People's Theatre<sup>1</sup>

*Vittorio Emanuele Orlando*

If Mr. Ludovico Ariosto could come back to see things down here on earth, even for just a little while, Oh! How his keen eyes would be filled with wonder! Because those fanciful imaginings of his—which Cardinal Este originally called ‘foolish nonsense’ and later came to describe with greater respect as ‘lovely fantasies’—those fanciful imaginings, those dreams, are now reality. The monstrous and gigantic Orc, who swiftly dives to the depths of the sea, swallowing up knights and ladies in the ample recesses of his belly, has now become the submarine, this new and terrifying mechanical sea creature that itself contains men of great daring who are ready to kill or to be killed.<sup>2</sup> And that enchanted *Brigliadoro*—the steed who breathed flames from his nostrils and who, in running, competed with the winds—what is to become of him when faced with the 120-horsepower engine of an automobile hurling through space like a flash of lightning?<sup>3</sup> And *Ruggero* and *Astolfo*, who flew through the sky on the back of the hippogriff—that large and bizarre bird—how confused and surprised would they be to find themselves surrounded on all sides—near and far, above and below—by monoplanes and biplanes of every make, every kind, every size? And when the good fairy *Melissa*, in the chamber where the spirit and the bones of *Merlin the Magician* were resting, made an endless series of shadows and shapes parade past the astonished stares of *Bradamante* at the command of her magical incantation, was the good fairy not perhaps making some timid experiments in cinema for the distant future?

Truly, this epoch of ours is the epoch of wonders: wonders that are accomplished not through mysterious enchantments or through supernatural or occult powers, but through natural forces developed, regulated, and governed by the human genius. And every day, they follow one right after the other, they press on, they crowd in all around us in such a way that our wonder remains subdued in a certain sense: nothing seems wondrous to us anymore because we have seen too many wonders, and we live in them, and we are used to them. As a result, for our generation, which has seen men fly, underwater navigation, the turbine engine, the type-setting machine, the telephone and the phonograph, the spreading of ideas across the continents and the oceans by means of electrical waves, I mean, for our generation, the cinema—this new miracle which seems to stem from the mysterious craft of a necromancer—has come harmonically, almost spontaneously, to

take its place among the totality of the triumphs that contemporary human genius has raised up to its own glory throughout the ages.

But, nonetheless, the cinema perhaps holds a special kind of record over other similar inventions: that of quickness. It has been quick not only in its development and improvements, but also, and above all, in its diffusion. Printing had to struggle for nearly a century to attain primacy over copying by hand. It took nearly a half century for the steam engine to overtake the sail. In about fifteen years, though, the cinema has come into use everywhere—widely, triumphantly, and definitively. And it could well proclaim, with pride, to have conquered the world; seeing as how it has on its own so much power of propaganda, so much power of expansion, that it doesn't just give life to hundreds of spectacles every day in large cities, but it has succeeded in penetrating into countries that are the most obstinate and most closed off from our civilization (like China) and into the most removed and remote villages, where not even the most feral pack of canines has ever dared to push itself into barking out *Il trovatore* (*The Troubadour*), nor has even the most ravenous herd of amateur actors dared to burst out *I due sergenti* (*The Two Sergeants*).<sup>4</sup>

I will not elaborate on statistics regarding the movement of capital—which the cinema companies have calculated and is numbered in the billions of *lire*—nor those regarding the collaboration of work, for which film productions require thousands of minds and tens of thousands of hands. I don't even want to highlight or celebrate the new triumph of public finance in this theatre of the poor, which, although it only requires a few dozen cents, can nevertheless compete in its salaries with the most aristocratic [opera houses, such as] La Scala, the Opéra de Paris, and the Metropolitan—and can even beat them if it is true that a lucky mortal, an artist for the motion pictures, can have a guaranteed check for a half a million each year. But another phenomenon does merit particular discussion here, a phenomenon which, of those previously discussed, is less reducible to statistics, but which will nevertheless make a rather deeper impression: I'm referring to the impact that the invention—though still very recent—has already exercised on manners; I'm referring to the transformations through which it has shown itself capable of dominating the social psyche (in such a tremendous way).

Without a doubt, all great inventions—even when they seem to circumscribe their own effects within the realm of economics—nonetheless have effects and repercussions in the areas of psychology and morality. But naturally, this last action will be just as much, if not more immediate, wide, and profound as the new findings of human genius more directly seek out

a spirit of collectivity and use that to put themselves in communion with one another. When looking at this aspect, the analogies and connections between motion pictures and print are as deep as they are obvious; both constitute a means of stirring up feelings of every intensity and spreading knowledge of all kinds to countless multitudes. Moreover, we could add that the force that cinema exerts on the intelligence and conscience can, at least in a certain sense, be even greater than that of the book or printed materials more generally. This is equally true in regard to quantity or diffusion as quality or intensity. By extension, because not everyone knows how to read, and because not everyone who knows how to read can read *all* the books and *all* the newspapers. The cinema, however, speaks directly to everyone, and about everything. As The Poet would say, it passes through the eyes to the heart.<sup>5</sup> And here is the second aspect—the second element of its strength which we said prevailed over the written word: since a suggestive power that is more rapid, penetrating, and driving emanates from the image rather than the concept expressed in the symbols of alphabetic writing. In the former, the image appears decomposed, dissected, dead. And the mind must laboriously recompose it and make it come back to life. In the latter, however, it sparkles and leaps intact, real, full of life. This is a truth fully known to all those experts in that other contemporary science and art: advertising. Keen and sharp psychologists, advertisers rely more on images than on letters—even if the characters were printed a half a metre tall—to give credence to their products. And look—a foot reaches out, shod in a miraculously shiny shoe, proclaiming the virtues of a shoe-polish; a lovely, feminine mouth, which is giving you the most loving of smiles, reveals the benefits of a tooth-powder; and a shapely woman who, like Mary Magdalene, unfurling her blond or brown tresses to gloriously billow in the wind, exalts the miracles of a hair tonic. And the advertisement will be all the more effective and majestic if from time to time those images, with the help of electric lights or the cinema, sparkle in the darkness of the night from the grand terraces or the roofs of houses like silent, luminous sentinels, or like bizarre genies guarding over the city.

It is still necessary to say something more. The efficacy of the cinema is not just greater—still in certain ways—than the efficacy of press, but also the theatre. Here is why: even when, through the power of interpretation, the dramatic action takes on a tone, a colour, a suggestion of truth, it nevertheless always remains imaginary or outside of reality, since the theatre necessarily brings with it so many conventions that cannot be reconciled with reality. However, film action, unless it purposely, and I would add, foolishly, chooses an implausible and fantastic subject, always

has in its favour the presumption of truth and of reality: it is a fragment of the world; it is a piece of lived life that happens in front of us—quick and urgent, but sure of itself, certain, inescapable.

I do not claim to delve deeply into the question of cinema's influence on the public's character, which is of such high ethical and social significance, or more specifically, [its influence] on the developing conscience of children, adolescents, and young people. But at the same time, the corresponding analogies with print and theatre have other consequences, which confirm those same analogies in a way that is extremely interesting for a sociologist: I'm referring to the rapid mobilization of distrust and the reaction which is already taking place against the feared harmful effects of the cinema on the soul of the people. Out of this comes the search for ways of curing these ills through prevention and repression. This happens in no greater or lesser measure than it did with regard to printing and to the theatre. Worried by the depravities and aberrations, which unfortunately are not infrequent in films, Morality and Art are already demanding that State action intervene. And not only in singular and authoritative protests of distinguished philanthropists and educators, but also in the acts of public authorities, since interventions and limitations are being worked out that will give content and form to those Institutes of policing and censorship that already exist for the press. There is an ordinance dating from 1920 by Berlin's Chief of Police which prohibits children under the age of fourteen from entering the cinema, even if they are accompanied by an adult. I read in the newspaper that similar orders were recently adopted in Norway and Manchester. The Italian commission charged with studying the frightening increase in juvenile delinquency and with concretizing their findings into law, has already spoke out against and dedicated special directives to the dangers posed by the cinema.

The remarks that we have just made regarding the suggestive power of cinematic representation already make it clear that we are perfectly aware of the concerns that have prompted the mobilization [against cinema]. Indeed, for the purpose of our conference, it is useful to insist on that argument, starting with an anecdote so that, in illustrating our idea—and even we are doing so in a cinematic manner—real facts, images from lived life, which are more conclusive and more suggestive than any abstract reasoning, will be helpful to us.

So, Bruno Franchi recalls the case of two boys, students in a Roman school, who sneak into the house of one of their classmates by climbing through a window and steal some of his pen nibs. Caught and under questioning, they candidly admitted that they had only intended to reproduce a scene that they had seen at the cinema: only, the film dealt with grown men.

And even more recently, the press in New York was abuzz with the following story. Three boys (it would seem, my fellow Italians, that this means that the Italian is not more prone to delinquency, but is only more impressionable) had witnessed a scene of cannibalism in a film at the cinema. Upon leaving the theatre, they lie in wait at 104<sup>th</sup> Street, waiting at a passageway for some kid to come by who they will make play the part of the Catholic missionary destined to be killed, roasted, and eaten. In the meantime, they set up and light a small blaze. To his misfortune, a nine-year-old boy, Joseph Jaeger, happens to walk past. They attack him, knock him out with a stick, and drag him to the fire. Fortunately, some women came rushing over, and that sent the three little cannibals running. The unlucky victim muddles through, but is left fearful and with some burns, which are by no means slight.

And moving from this anecdote to a more general observation, one cannot deny that a simple reading of the titles of old, crummy plays of the arena (which come one after the other on the cinema advertisement posters that cover the walls of large cities) reveals to us the existence, if not even the prevalence, of repertoire about which one can't decide whether to complain more about its immorality or its bad taste.<sup>6</sup> The representation of lewd and immoral scenes, of the bold and successful acts of thievery, of cruel and horrific crimes, makes us wonder rather often if the cinemas aren't schools of vice and of immorality, that is, when they don't seem to be actual public universities for delinquents. And we feel offended no less in the name of morality than good taste or the sense of art, which has been trampled and violated, too. Because those representations, even when they aren't disgusting and depraved, are quite often ineffective, absurd, clumsy, and grotesque. The same comedy, when forced to repeat itself, demonstrates a distressing emptiness: it is always the same robber, followed by the same ridiculous cops, who knock over the fruit vendor's cart, the same painter's ladder, the same basket or the same laundry of the same girl or the same washerwoman, in such a way that the fruit vendor, and the painter, and the girl, and the washerwoman are added to the useless and laughable chase [...]. And please forgive the abrupt switch from the aesthetic sensibility when I say that I rebel against the depravation of good taste even more than against the spread of immorality: a healthy conscience can react, spontaneously, against this latter violence; but against that other violence, which operates with obscenities that are supposed to make people laugh, but which are instead puerile and foolish, what defences, what protections can the innocent mind of the public—which is certainly not strengthened and trained to acquire an exquisite artistic sensibility—put in place?

So you see, gentlemen, how I understand and respect the feelings of those who seek repressive interventions against evil; but even if the consensus is full and fervent in this premise, some not-so-minor doubts grip me and leave me disconcerted when it comes to accepting those consequences. What do you want? To resort to police methods, with the proud aim of regulating the multiform manifestations of the human spirit, instinctively disgusts my liberal conscience. And let the memory of the censorship of books speak for censorship of all kinds. This censorship suppressed no idea, did not appear to effectively stand in the way of any idea, and did not achieve any other concrete result except to miserably and eternally mire itself in endless ridicule. In the world of ideas and thought, just as repression does not stifle the good, nor does it destroy the bad. The good, even when it is constricted, burns like an unquenchable flame; the bad, even when it is chained up, wriggles out of its bonds, like a slimy snake, to unwind in its coils the souls of the depraved, the weak, the inexperienced. In any case, I prefer whichever remedy is the more liberal, and therefore, more human and more worthy, means of confronting the spread of wickedness with goodness, fighting in an open war, in equal combat, with the same weapons. Let us oppose the bad book with a good book and the bad movie with a good movie.

And there she is, coming down onto the battlefield—on our side—shaking her bright shield and bouncing her formidable lance: Minerva, the young and victorious daughter of omnipotent Jupiter.<sup>7</sup> Snowy Olympus, having been abandoned, is now deserted. She wants to be here among us, to show herself a worthy sister of those generous and brilliant initiatives that are radiating forth from the meritorious *Unione Italiana dell'Educazione Popolare* (Italian League for the Education of the Working Classes).<sup>8</sup> She wants to take a conspicuous place among them, to fight a good and vigorous battle. And, to leave behind the metaphor, the institution we have founded proposes that the cinema—this wonderful daughter of the light—truly make use of the light, that is, of the good: so that for the People, for whom this institution came about and for whom it lives, it may depict great, useful, and beautiful things; so that it might elevate the soul of the People, comfort their spirit, guide their taste; in other words, so that it can be for the people the most prized and effective teacher of morality and art.

In this way, as I have said, the cinema will do good works: I will even add that it will, wherever and as much as it is possible, also do works of justice and social equality, by removing that odious privilege through which aesthetic pleasure has become for the most part a class-based pleasure. How many people attended a conference that I gave in Milan on 'The Word and Writing', they will perhaps remember the complaint that we raised at

the time, accusing civilization—from which, although, so much light of wisdom and of knowledge radiates—of having distanced art too much from the people, of essentially having violently broken that living and original foundational bond, which linked the people to all manifestations of beauty, the shining patrimony of not one or a few classes, but of all of humanity. And let us add that the generous efforts of those who want to lift up the lowest classes must strive precisely towards this goal: to make it so that the humble can participate in aesthetic emotions. It is from here, standing before the beauty of nature and art, that the spirit re-creates itself, individual energies are restored, and the solidarity of human sentiments is reaffirmed. Now, motion pictures make it possible for an Alpine man, who has never and probably will never leave his mountain home, to witness the grandiose spectacle of the ocean roiled by a storm, and for the fisherman—who is only slightly less attached to his shores than the oyster is to his rock—to feel for himself that overwhelming fascination which comes down from the snowy peaks of the Alps, spreads throughout the earth, and calls the determination and hearts of men back up towards the heavens. Up until now, only millionaires could grant themselves the luxury and experience the pleasure of seeing the Aurora Borealis, or the sunset on the sands of the desert, or gothic cathedrals, or Moorish palaces, cities buried in the shroud of history, and cities shaking and pulsing with the most fast-paced rhythm of modern life; well now, even the lowly worker, the son of the poor man, can at least have an idea of these phenomena and of these fantastic spectacles as they are, thanks to the little white screen. It will even give them the most genuine documentation of the visible world and of reality. Separated in this way from all of its impurities, or whatever it might have in it that is harmful or unhealthy, the cinema will be able and will know how to be a powerful mechanism—perhaps stronger than any other—in the socialization of aesthetic sensibilities: no other means, working like this one in such an immediate and communicative manner on the soul of the masses, will be able to awaken the most noble enthusiasms in them—whether it inspires admiration for the spectacles of divine nature, or glorifies the works of human genius. [The] *Minerva* [Institute] sees this path unfolding before it; and on this path, she wants to move forward with determined strides and persevere with every bit of her strength.

But within this complicated goal, which our *Minerva* [Institute] is proposing, we want to very briefly sketch out a more particular aspect, one which in an even more direct way has to do with the progress, diffusion, and purposes of education. And that allows me to pick up again, though under a different guise, that theme already mentioned before with respect

to the analogies that can be made between the cinema and specific forms of representation and the expression of ideas and deeds, like those that exist in writing and in the printing press. Everyone knows that there was a period in the history of civilization (a period which persists among some peoples), when the visual representation of thought happened not through letters that expressed sounds, but rather through images that recalled the thing or the concept that was being referred to. But perhaps not everyone knows about the proposal of a contemporary writer who is lobbying for the return to ideographic writing, which he claims has great advantages over phonetic writing: this proposal constitutes, certainly, a paradox; but, like all paradoxes, it still contains a grain of truth. And the grain of truth, in fact, lies in the greater suggestive power, that, as we have said, the image has compared to the signs of writing; in the ease with which it is immediately understood, independent of knowing how to read and being able to understand what one reads, independent even of the knowledge of the language spoken by the person who drew the images. Why then couldn't we have, for the purpose of instruction, alongside phonetic writing, the assistance of ideographic writing in motion, which is a way that the motion pictures could be described?

In truth, the notion and the awareness of the wondrous pedagogical benefits that can be drawn from images is anything but new: books are frequently, and usefully, illustrated to one degree or another. In school, the teacher, in order to make his teaching more effective and clear, colours—in a manner of speaking—his words with diagrams, drawings, paintings on the walls. But think what sharper stimuli, what more energetic impressions cinematographic representations would have on the students, who are themselves so desirous of novelty, so eager for living and real spectacles! And with regard to this, permit me to share a brief personal memory. Dozens of times, I heard my geography teachers explain glaciers and other things that I had continued to learn about by reading this or that book. And yet, I admit that I did not have a clear and accurate idea of what a glacier was until, unfortunately at an advanced age, I was finally able to see a glacier up close with my own eyes, thanks to the Swiss organizations that allow you to arrive there comfortably on a train. If instead of hearing all of those verbal explanations I had happened to see a movie about them, I would have had an accurate, certain, and definitive idea of what a glacier was from that point onwards.

What I have said for me about glaciers, I think can and should be said for everyone and about everything. In school, in order to explain, to excite, to animate, words are not enough: you need images. And the image isn't



even enough anymore; you need the moving image. Why have so many bits of knowledge fallen out of our minds, almost like yellowed leaves that the wind has stripped off, and in blowing them all about, has carried them far away and left them scattered? Because there lacked a penetrating and clear perception; there lacked a clearly delineated image: with both of them being weak, they wavered, weakened, vanished. If you want to give a faithful and indelible description of countries and places, phenomena and events, locations and processes, and demonstrations of every branch of the arts and of the sciences; if you want all the disciplines studied in our schools, but particularly, geography, physics, natural history, agronomics, mechanics and so on, to create results that are rather more concrete and fruitful, it is necessary to resort to the live and direct reproduction of the thing and the process. It is only in this way that pieces of knowledge are transmitted more vividly to the intellect and solidly imprinted there. And can we wish that for school—or is the wish too haughty? Or is that day in a too distant future? Can we wish that, just as today each subject matter has its own textbook or textbooks, they will have one or more series of their own ‘text-films’?

For a long time, and from all over, people have been clamouring that we have to put schools in contact with life, in direct communion with reality. And from time to time, we change the rules, or more simply and comfortably adjust programs/plans when we do not prefer to nominate a...commission. And in this way, we believe and we show that we believe we have reached that goal, or at very least, that we have taken another big step towards it.

Alas! We remain in the same place as before, exactly because in spite of all the aspirations and theoretical affirmations, our schools continue to lack the means, the instruments, the vehicles that must lead it towards real, actual life. Even without continuing to the point of exaggeration or paradox, who does not see something to deplore in the excessive use of the mnemonic device, which is still favoured among the pedagogical methods of us Latins, which to this day looms over schools and their students like a dark, grey, wintry sky over a flock of sparrows who are longing for blue skies and the sun? We torture our young people with an education based on theories, maxims, definitions, and formulas that is as difficult as it is fruitless. All of the teaching is entrusted to the word and to writing; and as a consequence to memory. And yet—as Montaigne was already saying over three centuries ago—memorizing does not mean knowing.

It is not necessary to delve into the arduous and intricate paths of pedagogical metaphysics in order to perceive the full validity of the maxim that the first and mightiest impetus towards knowledge is curiosity. In the child who has been put into contact with life, this curiosity develops the spirit of

observation and reflection, intellectual qualities that are much more important than memory. And while the Anglo-Saxons owe all their wondrous effectiveness to their educational methods and to having had understood this truth and put it into effect, our educational methods and systems seem more suited to hog-tying and suppressing, rather than promoting, that initial impetus towards education that nature generously provides.

And be aware: this contrast—actually, I'll say it more precisely—this triumph of theoretical teaching over practical teaching, of mnemonic teaching over experiential teaching, has consequences that are far more grave and pernicious for the education of the working-classes than for institutions of classical education. For the latter, once the humanistic learning has been acknowledged, when it is recognized that it is desirable and useful to write verses in Latin, I even understand myself how resorting to experimental methods or practices could be rather less ideal and how, instead, one needs to train oneself with the versions of Horace and of Virgil and to master the rules of syntax and of prosody. Nor do I see the use of cinema as easy for explaining Platonic philosophy. But it is not this way—I was about to say 'fortunately'—for public culture.

This is our ministry, this is our faith—we very much want people who have the mallet and the shovel waiting for them to raise up their spirit, to cultivate their intellect, and to refine their artistic sensibilities so that tomorrow they can enter the grand struggle of economic production, the enormous conflict of social interests, ready to bring a more intelligent and personal contribution to the work they must tend to, ready to react against the depressing nature of their surroundings with a more clear and fervent sense of human nobility and human dignity. But, to accomplish this very important dual goal, they have neither the time nor the capability for laborious mnemonic training exercises. From that stems the need for visions as beautiful and noble as what nature and art can boast, and the for notions more wondrous and at the same time more practical than what the sciences have produced, which can be acquired equally for the people with the most direct and immediate means—with lesser effort and greater returns.

And there you have it, the other goal toward which our *Minerva* [Institute] is striving: to introduce, to diffuse as widely as possible, to make as welcome and useful as it can, the use of projections and of films in school, especially—naturally—in the public elementary schools and in the supplementary institutions that the *League*, to which we are connected, operates and promotes. In this way, with neither vanity nor arrogance, we can nevertheless affirm that this our modest initiative contains seeds that could beneficially and radically renew and transform institutes, systems,

and methods of our culture. Seeds that would operate in such a way that, freed from shackles old and new, freed from everything inside that is superfluous, cumbersome, or obsolete, school will joyously come closer to life, as though it were coming to a pure spring of fresh and ceaseless energies. May propitious fates and the young Goddess of Wisdom smile on this promise of intellectual flourishing of our people!

Gentlemen, at this point, however, I want to curb the lyrical fervour of our sincere enthusiasm in order to prevent two misconceptions may easily take root in people's minds. The first, for goodness sake, is that there will be as many good educational spectacles amusing all of Italy as there are flowers popping up in the springtime, penetrating all the miserable and squalid slums, where unfortunately, a great number of our schools are located. The other is that with the definitive triumph of good cinema guaranteed, the tree of knowledge and good will, of course, lift itself up to heaven and cover men with her immense crown of leaves, just like in the Earthly Paradise, before the original sin. The men who will have the honour and the burden of running the new institute, are too much aware of reality to engaged in any delusions. And they have too active a sense of probity and responsibility to delude others. We are aware of and we have taken account of all the difficulties of similar endeavours up until now, especially at their beginnings: we know that there is a battle being waged, and that, as in all battles, there are risks, dangers, and failures awaiting us. Spurred forward by strong faith, we happily face such a battle; and in the meantime, with our best wishes, we want our Minerva [Institute], whose Baptism we recently celebrated in Rome, to receive her Confirmation in Milan. In this generous and strong Milan, where the tree has dense and expansive roots and perennially springs up all the most brilliant and progressive initiatives, which will raise up the spirits of our workers towards superior forms of life. And this your 'Theatre of the People' is a symbol and evidence of this edification. It is within such a brief time that you have learned and have been able to demonstrate that the soul of the people, through education itself, is capable of understanding great Art and that Art is truly great when it knows how to seek out and move the soul of the people.

Now, among the many manifestations of artistic Beauty, please welcome with hospitable grace the serene and shining cinema, which we intend to present to you. Although it does not claim, as I have said, to suddenly transform hearts and intellects and establish on the earth the kingdom of knowledge and goodness, it will certainly be useful in developing and in making the desire to know oneself, others, and the world more acute. Remember that generous invocation:

'Considerate la vostra semenza: | *Fatti non foste a viver come bruti* | *Ma per seguir virtute e conoscenza.*' ('Bethink you of the seed whence ye have sprung; | for ye were not created to lead the life of stupid animals, | but manliness and knowledge to pursue.')<sup>9</sup>

And let Democracy herself speak to the innumerable multitudes in the same words Dante's Ulysses spoke to himself; on his path, which only has Love and Light as its borders; may they pass eternally, not as herds of beasts, but as enormous phalanxes of knowledgeable and virtuous men.

'*Discorso tenuto al Teatro del Popolo di Milano*', *La coltura popolare*, 5/5 (15 March 1913), pp. 223–232. Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.

## Notes

1. [Editors' note. 'Speech to the People's Theatre' was an editorial title proposed by the editors for this volume. The text and the transcription of the speech made by Orlando in the spring of 1913 at the Teatro del Popolo di Milano (The People's Theatre of Milan) to celebrate the inauguration of the Milanese headquarters of the Istituto Nazionale Minerva (The Minerva National Institute), a society organized for the promotion of educational cinema. In the original text, the text had the following title: *A Milano—Teatro del Popolo. Discorso dell'On. Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, Ex Ministro della Pubblica Istruzione e della Grazia e Giustizia* ('Milan—The People's Theater—A Speech by Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, Former Minister of Public Education and Grace and Justice').]
2. [Translator's note. In the original Italian, *cetaceo* or any of the various aquatic, chiefly marine mammals of the order Cetacea, including the whales, dolphins, and porpoises.]
3. [Editors' note. Brigliadoro and the other names mentioned by the author in the opening paragraph, such as Ruggero, Astolfo, Melissa, Merlino, Bradamante, are characters from the 1532 poem, *Orlando furioso* (*The Frenzy of Orlando*) by Ludovico Ariosto.]
4. [Editors' note. *Il trovatore* is an 1853 opera by Giuseppe Verdi; *I due sergenti* is an 1823 drama by Jean-Marie-Théodore Baudouin under the pen name d'Aubigny.]
5. [Editors' note. The idea of passing through the eyes to the heart is common in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italian love poetry. Dante's '*Tanto gentile*' ('So Kind') also refers to this idea: '[...] *che dà per li occhi una dolcezza al core*' ('and through her eyes a sweetness touches the heart').]
6. [Translator's note. The original used the term *arena* to refer to low-brow entertainment.]

7. [*Editors' note.* The mythical image of Minerva, goddess of virtue and wisdom, metaphorically evokes the Istituto Nazionale 'Minerva' (Minerva National Institute).]
8. [*Editors' note.* L'Unione Italiana dell'Educazione Popolare (Italian League for the Education of the Working Classes) was an association started in 1908 in Milan for the promotion of books, and then later—with the support of the Istituto Nazionale Minerva—also cinema for the popular classes.]
9. [*Translator's note.* From the famous verse from the twenty-sixth canto of the Dante's *Inferno*. The poet recites this verse to Ulysees, the principle protagonist of the canto. The translation is from Langdon (trans.), *The Divine Comedy*.]

# Cinema for the Cultivation of the Intellect

*Angelina Buracci*

Why do children go to the cinema indifferently, without informing themselves as to the subject of the film?

Why does one see a considerable number of exuberant little heads in cinemas, bringing distress to mothers and nannies, and a note of gaiety and laughter to the theatre?

Because the mother wants to be entertained, and brings her little children with her, not knowing who else to entrust them to; because the children themselves are entertained; and because (even if the film is a bit racy) the children don't understand anything. These are the reasons why one often sees ladies burst into cinemas followed by a throng of lively and talkative children; this is why so many little imps rush about, running between the seats, shouting with joy, and calling to each other in loud voices, as though their choice of seats were a matter of the utmost seriousness.

I have heard this last reason, adopted by the majority, discussed, affirmed, and proclaimed out loud in a circle of acquaintances, even by those who have a reputation for being sensible, and who are sure that they possess a discreet intelligence.

This reputation is undeserved, no doubt, since a discreetly cultivated and intelligent person could not make such a gross error, which goes against the first principles of good sense and logic.

A child understands nothing? If so, then why are so many childhoods corrupted by the bad examples of parents, so many youths prematurely tainted by depravity, intellectually unbalanced and descending, little by little, down the slope of perversion and perdition?

Why do we hear, with horror, children's mouths speaking obscene words to their friends; why do we see them, with repugnance, commit acts worthy of the most brutally perverse man? If children understood nothing, then they would take nothing away from films, and their innocence would remain untarnished.

The facts, however, demonstrate the contrary.

Children understand neither everything, nor nothing: they understand badly.

This fact is not a result (as many believe) of the late development of their intelligence; it is a natural fact, due to the natural and gradual unfolding of the individual's psychological energies.

The child, as an organism that goes through successive periods of formation in which his capacities develop, work, and extend themselves, perceives, associates, recalls, synthesizes, analyses, imagines, judges, and reasons.

If the child's perceptions are quantitatively and qualitatively commensurate to his age, and in consequence, his psychological development, association will take place without effort and in an orderly fashion; memories will be faithful, ideas clear, and judgement and reasoning correct.

On the other hand, disordered perceptions following one another with vertiginous speed will correspond with confused associations, incomplete memories, and overly general ideas, since the rapid succession of perceptions allows only for the most notable resemblances between objects to be comprehended. False ideas, judgements, and reasoning will thus follow.

We thus find a proliferation of errors in the mind of the child, the fruit of work that he carries out in secret and which makes itself apparent from time to time in a few ambiguous or incoherent sentences, with a few embarrassing questions that astonish mothers and nannies.

The latter, shocked, ask themselves, 'How could he have come to understand certain things, this child? He is very intelligent, too intelligent for his age [...].'

This child is neither too intelligent, nor precocious, nor even less a little genius: he is simply a normal child, whose psychological functions are carried out with the same regularity as a machine that must be charged at a given time or with a given system: change the system, accelerate it or slow it down, intensify it or diminish it, and its functions will undergo an analogous change, possibly harming the machine.

During early childhood, the child receives and stores sensations and the resulting perceptions, which are then coordinated, in respect to one another and to the environment, during later childhood and adolescence. To an early childhood that passes normally in a healthy environment, then, corresponds a normal later childhood and adolescence, in which all functions are carried out normally.

This is why the cinema, with its reproduction of so many different subjects, which often do not follow the principles of logic and truth, can generate an irrational direction to childhood energies, can give them a mark that will be the basis of further and significant development, of new and definitive marks; this is why the cinema plays such a large role in the

development of attention, memory, and imagination in both early and later childhood.

The child himself demonstrates this in following, dumbfounded and immobile, the scene that unfolds before him, and in his memory and misalignment of the things he has seen as he recounts them to his family or friends.

It is not necessary to attract the attention of young children with special means, because any stimulus of a certain intensity arouses the attention, even in a baby of just a few months. The goal is to give the attention a certain duration without producing fatigue, following two fundamental principles: the attention is produced, in an unforced way, by a variety of stimuli, and is the main cause of the pleasure produced by a given object upon the subject.

The child will easily remember, because he will from time to time easily associate images with one another, not only on the basis of their relationship in space and time, but also in relation to their content; because mental associations will be enriched through the links between ideas, acquired in the various environments in which the child lives.

Only through the production of a rational mental association will children become properly developed intellectually, and not susceptible to false and damaging judgments and reasoning.

By now it is an old lie, told by many, which claims that a child possesses an imagination superior to that of an adult. This affirmation can be refuted and contradicted: the child does not have imagination in greater or lesser quantity in respect to the adult; rather, he possesses a different sort of imagination. It can be granted only that it is more expansive and has a dominance over other capacities, because reason, not yet at its full development, cannot restrain, discipline, or limit it; it must be granted that it has a considerable liveliness due to the child's imperfect knowledge of the external world. This external world, which arouses wonder and curiosity, fills in the gaps in his knowledge, providing him with innumerable particulars about the people shown on the screen, making him create in his thoughts the strangest heroes, making him judge everything that surrounds him in a way that does not match reality.

Because the child believes, after having developed the cinematic scene in his mind, that things are as he sees them, that the adventures are real, and that the characters exist.

I recall the exploits of Maciste, the giant friend of children and the weak, always ready to protect and defend them. I remember him among a group of evil-doers, with whom he fights and from whom he easily frees himself, only to meet more, even more obstinate and wicked adversaries, who lay



a thousand traps for him, [but] from which the giant nonetheless emerges victorious. One quickly understands that although Maciste's muscular strength may be real, much of the scene relies on many strange and exaggerated shot combinations.

How can children be made to understand all the tricks of the cinema?

Once the non-existence of the action has been demonstrated, the scene loses all of its attractiveness, because the child is aware that it is not real.

I recall the words of a child of around seven years old in relation to this question. A long series of exploits of Protea, the policewoman, were being projected; at a certain point, in order to elude her pursuers, as she is speeding away, she makes a flying leap on her bicycle, reaching the opposite bank of the river.<sup>1</sup>

The child looked in awe at the actress's ability, and to his mother, who was trying to explain the impossibility of the feat to him, responded in amazement, 'Of course it's true; I saw the jump.' Anyone would agree that one could make a jump from one bank of a river to the other with an aircraft, but never with a bicycle, and that the effect of this very convincing scene depended upon artfully simulated tricks that give the illusion of reality in films.

And yet, the child remained convinced that he could fly with a bicycle, just as one flies with an airplane. I do not wish to make a list of all of the films whose predominant characteristic is their implausibility, both because one volume would not be enough and because intelligent people know perfectly well that such projected scenes plainly contradict reality, with the exception of some that I will discuss later on.

Many will undoubtedly smile, incredulous, while reading my claim: the cinema is a means for intellectually ruining a child. Intelligent people, however, to whom the good education of their children matters, will not smile. If all parents considered the negative effects that a film can produce in the mind of a child, they would exercise greater care in choosing the cinematic scenes their children watched, or look for other forms of entertainment for them.

It is true: children and adolescents are entertained at the cinema. Their smiling faces, their wonder, their praise, and their applause demonstrate this.

The young child is entertained because he is fascinated by the novelty; the older child because he is satisfying a strong need to widen the scope of his cognition and to clarify many nagging questions; the adolescent because the passing of various scenes on the screen provides him with a means to satisfy, through watching a wide range of films, the tendencies that his sex and his surroundings reinvigorate and intensify.

But any activity that engages our children must have an educative goal, both for their intelligence and their emotions; thus, entertainment too must pursue this aim, must be a means and not an end, and as such, must serve this end.

This, then, is the problem: how to educate while entertaining, to adopt the cinema as a means of intellectual and moral education, not only among families but also in schools. We should imitate the American institution of the Children's Museum, follow the idea of Spencer and Wundt and add a cinema to every scholastic institution, as a subsidiary element of the school itself, so that all children can partake in entertainment, even the poor ones who cannot go to a public cinema.

Since experts consider the cinema to be an important means of education, the poor must not be deprived of it. But since this institution remains in Italy, for now, one ideal among many to be achieved, let us turn, with patience and goodwill, to the cinemas of our cities, to choose the scenes that respond to our goal.

I have spoken of choice, but I have made a mistake, and one may rightly laugh at my optimism. How can one choose between things that do not exist?

Where can one today see educational scenes? In some cinemas, sometimes, by pure chance (and the exception is not the rule).

So, since we are in the realm of desires, since we are among ideals, let us imagine the cinema of our dreams, which would completely satisfy our educational aspirations.

Teachers weary themselves teaching children the conventions and customs of various times, historical facts, and the elements of geography. Children, for their part, weary themselves learning and remembering. Would it not be more practical and more fruitful to illustrate the knowledge to be studied through cinematic reproduction?

We can certainly not presume to show Napoleon's descent from Gran San Bernardo or the wars of Italian independence, because the cinema did not exist when these things occurred, and they cannot be reconstructed now for economic reasons. Beyond the financial means, we lack the multitude of men that would have to be brought together in order to represent a battle scene, and the work of an artist or critic who would oversee the unfolding of the scene in order to avoid it falling into ridiculousness or grotesqueness.

Our children have seen, however, episodes from the Libyan war, have been excited by them and excitedly applauded, and have learned about war. Now we see episodes from a closer and more terrible war, and in ten years, other children who are now only a few months old, and others of another

generation, will see the terrifying reproduction of the German invasion of Belgium and will witness our war. They will see the march of our infantry, our Alpine troops' ascent on snow and ice-covered peaks, the attacks of our gunmen, and the firing of our artillery. Within ten or twenty years, the sight of so many horrors, committed by modern barbarians in *Passano gli Unni (The Huns are Coming)*, which will still move and elicit applause; *Mio diario di Guerra (My War Diary)* and *Alla baionetta! (To the Infantry!)* will tell the children of the future how much blood was shed for an ideal; the notes of the royal march will echo beneath the vaults of the cinemas and other hearts will beat as ours do now at the sight of the trenches and the fighting soldiers.<sup>2</sup> And if we cannot reproduce the wars of the past, we can reproduce the main figures and heroes that took part in them.

Describe the face of a soldier to a child and he will remember it for a few days; take him to a cinema to see the same soldier, and he will remember it for several years, because seeing his stature, his build, his attitude, and his gestures will provide an intense stimulus that will keep the image alive and the idea precise, without the aid of excessive mnemonic effort.

The facts that lend themselves best to being taught by the cinema are those of geography.

This field cinematic art can be taken advantage of because there are numerous landscapes that can be projected, and along with them the men, buildings, monuments, animals, and rich plant life of different countries.

Travel instructs while entertaining, as many say. If our children cannot travel, let us give them the illusion of travelling in far-off lands through the means of the cinema.

What use is it to study the physical characteristics of Indians, Africans, Chinese, and Arabs with a textbook? What use is it to make the effort to imagine a far-off group of houses, an unknown part of the sea, an exotic plant, a ferocious animal? None, because for the child, all of this will take on the form of a phantasmagoria and be quickly forgotten.

I recall a film on Rome's Zoological Garden, which showed it as though in real life: the spectacle was marvellously natural and perfect in form, worthy of admiration.<sup>3</sup>

Several children watched, astonished, while others were a bit afraid: the children chattered and asked questions of their mothers with intense interest, as though they were truly in this internationally-famed zoo.

I had the pleasure of seeing in the cinema a number of local monuments and festivals, with the characteristic headdresses and customs of the inhabitants that were different than our own. I lived for a long time before

enjoying such spectacles; if I had been able to admire them as a girl, I would have learned many things that would have been beneficial to me.

Today, cinemas show various landscapes and the life that populates them as an intermission, between one film and another, as though afraid of boring the spectator, but they are not the subjects of an entire screening.

And yet, it would be very simply to project a landmass with a drawing of the coastlines and the elevation of the terrain, or a river with vegetation on its banks; then a bit of the sea, a prairie, woods, a group of houses, the work of peasants, children from other countries, a monument, a building. Photographs of these things exist, but do not perfectly serve our goal: we want to see life, the life that animates these scenes and which can only be found in the cinema.

Only in this way, by adding to the geographic projections of scientific phenomena, will teaching be made less wearisome, study more pleasing, and the child made able to gradually acquire new, exact, and clear knowledge, without squandering intellectual energy.

*'Il cinematografo e la coltivazione dell'intelletto'*, in id., *Cinematografo educativo* (Milan: C. Sironi, 1916). Translated by Michael Cramer.

## Notes

1. [Editors' note. Female character played by the actress Josette Andriot, who was the protagonist of a long series of films in the 1910s, which began with *Protéa*, directed in 1913 by Victorin-Hippolyte Jasset by the Pathé production company.]
2. [Editors' note. *Passano gli Unni* was directed by Mario Caserini in 1916 and produced by Films Manipulation Agency; *Il mio diario di guerra* was directed by Riccardo Tolentino and produced by Latina Ars in 1915; *Alla baionetta!* was directed by Eduardo Bencivenga and produced by Polifilm in 1915.]
3. [Editors' note. The film recorded by the author was almost certainly *Il giardino zoologico di Roma* (*The Rome Zoo*), produced by Cines in 1910.]

# Educational Cinema

*Ettore Fabietti*

Press reports of all kinds have been highlighting for some time the very serious danger posed by educationally harmful motion pictures. This new, very powerful transmitter of ideas, notions, and sentiments, when left completely to the impulses of private speculation, knows no limitation other than the interests of the industry: attendance at movie theatres and the intense production of films. The lone criterion that inspires the motion pictures industry is success—with the audience and at the box office. The industry has no scruples about social utility. Production, in any field, is never inspired by a concern for moral character. No manufacturer of alcoholic beverages, fashions, pharmaceuticals, etc., has ever dreamed of yielding to a socially-useful aim. Nor has a manufacturer ever considered among its responsibilities that of preventively examining its products to see whether they will be used to instruct, heal, elevate, or debase, corrupt, or in some way harm its clientele. Capital is by definition an amoral agent. And when it is in search of profits in order to reach its goal, it would be capable of poisoning all of humankind—at least in those places where prudent and strict laws don't intervene to save the society threatened by the dangers it poses.

The capital at play, in the cinematographic industry, which is now an enormous amount, behaves no differently. State censorship, as one could easily have predicted, has barely served to tone down the coarse and vulgar—and therefore less dangerous—forms of indecency. And with that, morality is thought to be saved. Because morality, in its current and vulgar conception, is almost completely wrapped up in ladies' lingerie: if the panties are not too scanty, and the camisole covers a little more than half of the beautiful female body, morality is safe from any offense. The rest doesn't count. You can teach how to steal, kill, hide stolen goods or a victim, flee the police, laugh in the face of the law. You can surround the criminal with a sort of halo and elevate him to heights of heroism. In every popular cinema, you can effectively erect a tremendously eloquent and influential chair of corruption and delinquency. You can even get children to participate in these popular classes of perversion, creating next to school an 'anti-school' that has infinitely superior means of attraction; an efficiency of teaching; and a modernity and perfection of didactic devices which are a thousand times better than those used in school.

We have come to this point: in a city like Milan, in the first eight months of this year, there were on average 778,968 visits to public cinemas each month. Moreover, this figure does not include soldiers and cinemagoers who pay less than ten cents—and there are many in this category, as one can easily deduce from the fact that soldiers and children are admitted into almost all movie theatres by paying only half of the ticket price. In any case, around 26,000 or 30,000 people—especially adolescents and children—crowd into the city's movie theatres each day, watching spectacles that generally stretch out for more than an hour and sometimes reach up to two hours in length. But why are we saying '30,000'? These figures are taken from the calculation of the *marche da bollo* ('tax stamps') purchased by the exhibitors in order to put them on the admission tickets. Now, we know that, in popular cinemas in particular, an adult can take a child with him with only one ticket; that in many of the cinemas in the most outlying neighbourhoods, exhibitors generally evade the obligation of the tax stamp; that the staff's friends, acquaintances, neighbours, and family members all get in for free. Nevertheless, in order to not work from conjecture, let's stick to the figure of 30,000 daily visits, and let's say the length of the show is on average an hour and a quarter. In this way, there are 37,500 hours of lessons—and what a lesson!—that the Milanese cinemas are giving every blessed day that God puts on this earth—without ever having a day of rest—to a population that in large part is lacking in those critical elements that protect cultured people from suggestions of all kinds, even bad ones.

Faced with hundreds of these 'seats'—which have invaded every neighbourhood in the city, which broadcast their incessant teaching all the way out to the streets through their blaring, multi-coloured advertisements, and which make themselves understood even by people who cannot read—what happens to the roughly twenty or thirty poor, small local sections of the Popular University, where the bread of science is broken modestly for two hours a week for six or, at most, seven months out of the year for an audience of 30, 40, 50 people? What about the 20 Popular Libraries, which even though they are mostly open to the public every day, end up distributing on average 1500 books a day? 1500 books! But in one day, the cinemas of Milan show an entire story that could be contained in a book to 30,000 people. In other words, they are the equivalent of a colossal library that circulates 30,000 books each day and manages to make those books be read in their entirety by the same number of readers. And then, what about this: not everyone understands the books that they read, but everyone understands a story that is shown physically in luminous images on the screen.

In short, as a disseminating power, no comparison can be made between the motion pictures and all the other means of diffusion that make of use teaching and the book. Only the newspaper can compete with the cinema in this contest. Perhaps, though, the days of its supremacy are numbered: because in a contest between a verbal interpretation and a direct image of things in motion, the winner is clear. Tomorrow, when technical advances will have reduced the cost of producing films and film projectors a good deal, there will be great circulating collections of films, just as there are already circulating collections of phonographic records, and just as public libraries have existed for centuries.

I think that not everyone will see the immense value that the motion pictures have as an instrument of dissemination. And yet, all it takes is a small bit of reflection to be convinced of this. We have seen how unquestionably more widespread the activities of the cinema are compared to those carried out, most notably in a city like Milan, by the Popular University and the Popular Libraries, where these two institutions are flourishing rather better than in any other city in Italy. Now, if students at the Popular University and readers of the Popular Libraries are added to the visitors of museums and art galleries, of the Braidense and Ambrosian libraries, of the Philological Society, and the theatres—in short, to all the centres that in some way attempt to educate and instruct the population (public schools not included)—we would still be far, very far, from the 30,000 patrons who gather together in the movie theatres of Milan each day. Whoever doubts this, let him get a hold of the statistics, and he will be convinced.

Not too much time will pass before the faithful attendees of the motion pictures will be greater in number than faithful attendees of Mass and other religious services (so long as no one tries to thwart that danger by bringing the film projections into church, as has already happened in some cases).

But the superiority of the cinema as a disseminating instrument does not lie entirely in the large number of people who go to it—a number that is still growing from year to year in unheard of proportions. (The war, with its discomforts and its conscriptions, did not prevent the number of visits to Milanese moving theatres from increasing by 1,288,073 in the first eight months of this year compared to the same period in 1916.) Whatever is taught, the motion pictures teach it better than nearly all other means and instruments of culture we can think of. Let's take as a point of comparison the Museum of Natural History, which in Milan has great importance and has collections, like the ornithological collection, that are world-renowned. It is true that it shows the visitor the real object, while the motion pictures only project the image of it. But how much more effective it is to see, for

example, the depiction of a living, moving animal in direct relation to its natural environment than to see it dead and stuffed in a setting that gives no indication of its habits and its way of life!

In this respect, the zoo marks a noteworthy development compared to the museum, but it still doesn't achieve the educational efficacy of a film representation. I have admired magnificent examples of lions, which were stuffed in museums, or living in great big cages in a menagerie, or moving about in the false liberty of a zoo. But I only understood what a lion truly was when I saw one at the cinema, in a great hunting scene, slowly rise up from his den and turn his eye to the burning distances of the desert.

As a means of representation, the motion pictures—and I'm not the first one to note this—has capabilities that even the theatre lacks. If its characters don't speak—at least for the moment—the fullness of vision that it presents is immense compared to what even the most vast stage can offer. Here the action that is shown can unfold in infinite settings. Armies on the march, crowds in movement, volcanoes erupting, cities in flames, planes flying, water flowing, open horizons, all the most grandiose aspects and phenomena in nature and life pass before your intent eyes, giving you the perfect illusion of the real thing. Meanwhile, these things are excluded from the theatre, which must limit itself to barely giving you an indirect impression of it, making them be recounted or described by some character who—lucky him!—says he has seen them.

I saw the opera, *La figlia di Iorio* (*The Daughter of Iorio*), by Gabriele d'Annunzio at the theatre and at the cinema. That small sense of truth that the author into a play that had otherwise been too literary, seemed better to me in the cinematic version. Here the style and the artifice are, to be sure, still present in the exaggerated gesturing of the characters and in the improbability of some of the episodes, but a genuine view of the places where the author imagined that they had taken place brought it a good deal closer to reality. As a result, the play manages to give a person the chills.

In general, every cinematic version of a theatrical work has had the same effect on me. Going from the stage to the screen, the action is enriched and extended, gaining in clarity and in truthfulness, that is, in suggestive power, which is, of course, the ultimate goal of every representational art. Indeed, sometimes the person adapting the play abuses this advantage of the cinema and adds episodes to the plot that have very little to do with the subject, just because the cinema offers him the possibility of filming them in vast and grandiose settings.

Conversely, if the plot loses some episode in going from the book to the screen, it is not because the motion pictures lacks the means of representing



it—whatever the scene might be. In this case, the sacrifice is determined exclusively by the need to not excessively prolong the show. Otherwise, there is no action recounted or described in literary works of any size that could not be wholly and completely translated into motion pictures.

Should we say, then, that the motion pictures, as a representational means and as an instrument of dissemination, ought to replace teaching, the book, the museum, the theatre? It would be absurd to think that. Let us only affirm that, with motion pictures, science has enriched us with a means of representation that is no less important than those that we already had and that is very well suited to *integrating all of them*.

As an aid to understand and retain what one learns, film representation marks an advancement, which one can have an idea of only by comparing it to the explanatory methods that have been used most often up until now to increase the clarity of texts: the illustration.

It doesn't take a lot of imagination to predict that in the near future books which have action, and especially books for youths, will all be illustrated in the cinema. And we should not be amazed if tomorrow we were to read in the newspaper that one of the great lending libraries of the United States had installed a cinema in its building in order to show its readers every new book that enters the catalogue. We must get to that point.

We can and should be amazed, however, that in Italy we are not yet succeeding in widely introducing the motion pictures into popular teaching, and that the efforts made up until now in this area have not had encouraging results. It has thus remained a free and uncontested field for motion pictures, which are by now an untouchable institution which triumph in a way and to a degree that everyone is well aware of, to contribute to bad upbringings.

The well-intentioned, who believe in the theory of educational and instructional motion pictures are, however, very quick to add that in practice, this cannot compete with the other kind of cinema because—they don't give the because, but it is implicit in their reasoning—one is entertaining and the other is boring.

But is it really true that motion pictures with an edifying and didactic purpose can only be an instrument of torture muzzling the spectators? That's what people who think that one cannot educate and instruct without being boring believe. We believe otherwise. This prejudice is old. It is also applied to readings that are 'pleasurable'—as opposed to those readings that are 'instructive'—by those people who find learning and pleasure incompatible. They are very compatible, so long as what presides over their marriage is that great matron of honour, which is Art. Jules Verne taught

geography, physics, and natural history to two generations of children, entertaining them and holding their interest by telling the most extraordinary adventures on land, at sea, and in the air that the imagination of a writer could dream up. Camille Flammarion, with the same procedure, made the most abstruse of the sciences, astronomy, popular.<sup>1</sup> Henri Fabre did the same with the world of insects, impassioning readers by presenting the events in the lives of insects, just as a great playwright depicts a human tragedy.<sup>2</sup> Art brings joy and life to the most grim and dry disciplines—including moral philosophy, which many consider the most deadly boring of all.

What has happened in popularized literature can and must happen in popular cinema—on the condition, of course, that it remains entertaining and knows how to hide its purpose.

The people—this is certain—when looking to distract themselves, don't go where they know people want to teach them and preach morality to them. The motion pictures can impart ideas and even warnings, but must not seem to be doing so on purpose: the viewers would not forgive it for having premeditated such a blow. The success of educational motion pictures lies entirely in this: it will begin to thrive only when it is able to produce shows that are no less interesting than those offered by the regular motion pictures.

There are those who would say that in large urban centres, even a movie theatre that proposed goals that were exclusively and openly didactic and moral could find its audience. At teaching institutions? Yes. Whoever goes there knows they are going to class. But as public entertainment? No. Pedantic dads would bring their children there a few times. The league of good manners would recommend it to restrained people. But, instructive and moral motion pictures would close very quickly for lack of clientele, just as in Paris, when *Le bon Cinéma* (an initiative of well-intentioned people who thought it was possible to teach virtue by representing it visually) had to close.

No one will succeed in stripping popular cinema of its fundamental requisite: that of offering an hour of fun to people who have little time and little money to spend. Whoever wants, or is able, to deprive cinema of this essential aspect would kill it. The issue to resolve is something quite different: that of how to intellectualize and moralize the motion pictures, while still preserving all of its efficacy as public entertainment.

Is that possible? Yes. Even without professing to revolutionize the film industry on the basis of a program of healthy, educational propaganda (which cannot be of any great interest to producers), it should not be difficult to find, among the thousands and thousands of films that people are

making all around the world, spectacles that are engaging and capable of exerting some positive influence on the minds and spirits of the viewers.

A public movie theatre following this firm standard in choosing what films to show would, of course, have a man of intelligence and of culture as its director—not the leader of a three-ring circus—and it would take its distinguished place among the other movie theatres in the city and create its own success. Literature and history are inexhaustible mines from which education cinema can draw source material. But until, for example, we want to combat tuberculosis by showing the public a monotonous series of paintings that depict all the stages of the disease and all of its treatment methods, adopting, in other words the same objective method that would probably be excellent for an in-class lesson, it will succeed in neither interesting people nor moving them emotionally. If instead, an artist with good intuition knew how to weave together a moving story regarding the same subject—an interlacing of events, people, and passions—he could teach the audience how this terrible disease is contracted, how it is treated, how one inherits a predisposition to it, how one gets well or how one dies from it: all without their realizing even for a moment that they are being taught. This would leave the audience satisfied and convinced of having witnessed not a lesson on hygiene, but the unfolding of a great human interest story.

Let the same be said for propaganda against alcoholism carried out through the cinema. Take the usual flimsy, barebones story of the good worker whose house is all in order, and who, having contracted the terrible vice of drunkenness, sends his family into ruin and ends up at a mental institution or in the poorhouse. It is too rudimentary and primitive to strongly stir up the emotions of the spectators and to leave its mark on them. If instead, around this basic nucleus a great artist like Zola constructs a play like *L'Assommoir* (*The Dram Shop*) and another conscientious artist faithfully translates it for the cinema without toning down its emotional power, the propaganda against alcoholism will have found an incomparable means of penetrating the masses. And that has been done.

This examples defines rather well what we mean as educational and instructive cinema and how we can arrive at it. It also shows that a cinema made in this way is not necessarily boring and that it has all that is required to hold up to competition with cinema that sets a bad example, about whose tremendous reach we have been complaining.

To ask—as some do—the law to repress the abuses of this kind of cinema is dangerous. In the act of limiting the freedom of thought and of art, one knows where this limiting begins, but one doesn't know where it will end. On the other hand, it is clear that State's censorship, wanting to respect

these freedoms, has failed its purpose. And it would be better to do away with it. Whoever wants to give new and wider powers to the censors would risk making the cinema a servant to the affirmation of an official and philistine brand of moral philosophy, as opposed to the servant of ideas of culture and social progress.

Other advocates of educational motion pictures ask that public powers intervene to protect its birth and development with financial aid, convinced as they are of the inherent incapability of this kind of motion pictures to withstand competition from commercial cinema. This kind of protectionism would end up damaging the very cause of educational motion pictures, by allowing it to remain boring. No, not even one cent should go to a motion picture that does not have its own methods for engaging the audience (which is also a motion picture that the audience would abandon). There is only one possible educational motion picture: the one that is entertaining at the same time. This one has its own ingredients for success just like any other cinema, and it is capable of living off its own resources.

The conclusions that I have come to are not just the result of theoretical reasoning. For research purposes, I have frequented many popular cinemas. I have seen a number of film of every genre, and I have taken note of the plots that unfolded and the impression they left in me and on viewers of various ages and stations, especially young workers and kids. I resigned myself to the tastes and predilections of the audience that frequents popular cinemas, and I have specified here the results of this sort of personal, direct investigation, in hopes that they have something that could persuade someone and be useful in some way.

'*Cinematografo educatore*', *La cultura popolare*, 7/11 (November 1917). Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.

## Notes

1. [Editors' note. Camille Flammarion (1842–1925) was a French astronomer, editor, and scientific huckster, and an author of more than 50 volumes, among which were guides of astronomy and scientific novels that anticipated the science fiction genre.]
2. [Editors' note. Jean-Henri Casimir Fabre (1823–1915) was a French naturalist, considered the founder of entomology.]



## Section 5



# Film, Body, Mind

*Silvio Alovio*

At the dawn of the twentieth century, the encounter between cinema and psychology was doubtless facilitated by the fact that both lay within the ambit of modernity.<sup>1</sup> Between the late nineteenth century and the early decades of the new century, cinema established itself as the most widespread performance and communicative phenomenon in the Western world. During that same period, psychology, psychiatry, and neurology affirmed their importance on the scientific and academic level. Thus, it is not surprising that cinema immediately attracted the interest of disciplines involved in the study of the psyche, even in Italy.

Although unavoidably incomplete, the selected texts presented in this section illustrate how cinema and the filmic experience were 'envisaged' by the mind sciences in Italy during the course of this period, important not only for the social and aesthetic legitimation of the new medium, but also, and above all, for the controversial construction of twentieth-century modernity.<sup>2</sup>

The selected contributions were all written by men of science, active in universities and/or mental institutions. Nevertheless, the publication sources are not limited to academic scientific journals (such as the authoritative *Rivista italiana di neuropatologia, psichiatria ed elettroterapia* (*Italian Journal of Neuropathology, Psychiatry and Electrotherapy*), founded in Catania by Giuseppe d'Abundo in 1907. The contribution by the psychophysiological Mariano Luigi Patrizi was published in Turin's daily newspaper *La Stampa* (*The Press*), and the article by the experimental psychologist Mario Ponzio appeared in *Vita e pensiero* (*Life and Thought*), the journal of Milan's Catholic University, neither of which are medical-scientific periodicals. The heterogeneity of the publication sources illustrates the widespread scientific reflection on cinema, even within broader social and cultural circles more receptive to popular phenomenon.

## The Historical-Scientific Context

In Italy during the early 1900s, the study of the mind had not yet been subdivided into well-defined fields. There were many shared elements among the various disciplines, including the same scientific vocabulary,



similar topics, and the desire to propose solutions to social problems. In particular, the field was still strongly characterized by the tradition of nineteenth-century positivism and its faith in science's ability to interpret the development of society and guarantee its equilibrium. Its positivist and anti-metaphysical legacy constitutes the cultural and ideological *koine* uniting scholars of different perspectives.<sup>3</sup>

Nonetheless, a short overview of the disciplines' historical development might be useful. In the early 1900s, Italian psychology had consolidated its scientific aspirations by developing experimental methods.<sup>4</sup> This experimentation, still partially influenced by medical physiology, studied the relationship between the body and mental phenomena in a perspective that was no longer biological but psychological. Besides experimental psychology, influenced by German psychology (in particular, the associationism of Wilhelm Wundt and—starting in the 1920s—Gestalt Theory), Italian psychology, on a theoretical level, also proved to be open to the phenomenological psychology of Franz von Brentano and the pragmatic psychology of William James. Before the rise of fascism, it also developed other areas of research, such as social psychology, dedicated to the study of collective persuasion and mass suggestion; and applied psychology, interested in social, pedagogical, and economic problems.<sup>5</sup> Instead, the influence of Freudian psychology was fairly irrelevant and did not impact reflections on cinema.<sup>6</sup> Only later on, after the Second World War, did psychoanalysis—opposed by fascism, Catholicism, and authoritative idealist philosophers such as Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile—take root in Italy. This scarce penetration of Freudian psychoanalysis also explains the difficulties clinical psychology encountered in its development in early twentieth-century Italy: care of patients was entrusted primarily to psychiatrists and neurologists.

But the relationship between neurology and psychiatry was not simple: pathological anatomical research on the nervous system dominated academic studies, while psychiatry, which concentrated on administering mental institutions, struggled to find efficient methods for rehabilitation and cure; instead of considering patients as individual personalities, it regarded them as a combination of symptoms to be interpreted on the basis of proven classification systems.<sup>7</sup> The theoretical reflections, experimental research, and clinical observations presented in this section take into account the complex historical context of study of the mind in Italy, highlighting two main trends.<sup>8</sup>

On the one hand, we have an exclusively psychological line, interested in the process of cinematographic perception. From Roberto Ardigò's philosophical psychology, which came to fruition in the late 1800s, to the early

studies of the future psychoanalyst Cesare Musatti, published during the second half of the 1920s by way of Mario Ponzo's fundamental contribution published here, this trend studied normal cinematographic perception (or rather, perception that is not disturbed by emotional or pathological alterations) as a situation that can help provide a better understanding of a number of mental phenomena: perceptive memory, imagination, imitation, and emotion.<sup>9</sup> In these studies of perception, cinematography was described as a phenomenon that was certainly new, but 'understood as the continuation of existing devices,' or rather, rooted in its time and placed without prejudice within a shared network of scientific discussions.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, we have a line of research, above all neuropsychiatric, but also in part psychological, regarding the social effects of cinema: this line of research also continued with notable success during the fascist period.<sup>11</sup> These contributions no longer studied the perceptions of an ideal spectator who was adult, male, healthy, educated, and middle class, almost abstract in his normality, but the body and nervous system of spectators who, for various reasons, were considered emotionally and cognitively fragile. As opposed to the former, perceptological trend, these latter studies considered cinema a radically new phenomenon, which contemporaneously sparked attraction and preoccupation, amazement and disconcertion.

### Discovering Cinematographic Perception

In Italy and abroad, the scientific debate over perception, which had animated almost the entire nineteenth century and crossed into the twentieth century, was largely divided into two trends. The first, interested in physiological factors, explained perception in biological terms and assigned an important role to involuntary sensorial experience. Instead, the second trend, coming out of a psychological-experimental perspective, considered perception as a complex, profoundly unrelated experience within the dimension of the psyche. Both trends placed the act of viewing at the centre of their reflections and also addressed the cinematographic experience.<sup>12</sup>

The study published in 1911 by Mario Ponzo (a future protagonist of Italian psychology) can doubtless be placed within the second trend and represents one of the first international scientific contributions to cinematographic perception.

According to Ponzo, when experiencing a cinematographic projection, the spectator perceives a representation which, even though it mobilizes above all the sense of sight, nonetheless 'acquires the characteristics of

reality.<sup>13</sup> But how can an impression that is essentially visual, and thus partial, produce in the spectator the illusion of truly finding himself 'in the face of the events' and not 'in front of a screen'?<sup>14</sup> According to Ponzo, the illusion of reality is reinforced by the activation of associative processes.

To interpret these processes, Ponzo drew on a number of concepts from Wilhelm Wundt's associationist psychology. During the viewing experience, the spectator perceives an incomplete series of external stimuli within the image, but thanks to the perceptive processes of assimilation and complication, he integrates them with other sensations to produce a complete impression. The images projected on the screen interact with the viewing environment but also with the spectator's memory. The sensorial incompleteness of silent movies assimilates real sensations on the edge of the illusory: for example, if the spectator does not hear the sound of the rain, he immediately tends to activate the sound in his memory or mistakenly perceives real sounds in the viewing room (for example, the hum of a fan), and interprets them as the sound of rain. Thus, the spectator perceives neither the reality in which he finds himself (the viewing room) nor the incompleteness of the images he is watching. Rather, a new mental construct is created in which reality and image, present and past, and visual, tactile, acoustic, and olfactory sensations intermingle almost indistinguishably.

Ponzo's highly complex text presents numerous elements of interest, at least three of which are worth mentioning. The first regards the observation method he adopted. According to Ponzo, in order to understand how the perception of cinematographic images functions, the most effective method is to go into a cinema and attempt self-observation. Ponzo highlights the limits and the inevitability of this method: in Metzian terms, one could say that when the psychologist enters a cinema animated by scientific intents, he, too, must lower his threshold of vigilance, entrusting himself, almost paradoxically, to the diametrical opposite of experimentation: randomness.<sup>15</sup> In fact, as soon as the psychologist-spectator begins to observe himself, he becomes aware of this self-observation and the possibility of directly experimenting with the typical perceptive processes of the cinematographic experience immediately vanishes.

The second element of interest in Ponzo's text lies in its 'ecological' and synesthetic view of the cinematographic experience. As opposed to what Giovanni Papini argued in the wake of William James, Ponzo sustained in his 1907 article on cinema that the cinematographic experience does not only involve the sense of sight, but also entails the interaction of various sensations, above all acoustic and olfactory ones. Moreover, two aspects that

greatly condition the cinematographic experience are the physical space of the viewing room and the presence of other spectators.

The third important element in Ponzio's article is the active role played by perception. Images spark processes of integration, whose realization calls for active cooperation on the part of the spectator. If the spectator does not associate, does not synthesize, does not commit errors, does not move at 'the extreme limit of the consciousness' to recover the memory of certain sensations, the cinematographic image cannot produce any impression of reality.<sup>16</sup> This activism of cinematographic perception, already theorized at the end of the 1800s by Roberto Ardigò, is in evident opposition to a deterministic conception of perception proposed by the positivist physiologist. The conviction—also expressed in other international scientific contexts—that going to the cinema is not a passive experience was also shared by opinions outside the scientific community, as exemplified in other contributions in this volume (Maffii, Bertinetti, Toddi, Orsi).

### Cinema and the New Crowds

The first signals that the Italian scientific community was paying attention to the social aspects of cinema did not emerge within neuropsychiatry but in so-called 'collective psychology' (a precursor of modern social psychology). Following the unification of Italy, the country was still fairly unindustrialized, not yet urbanized, and wracked by mass protests. Nonetheless, it was one of the cultural areas in which collective psychology first found ground for development, thanks to the work of scholars influenced by the positivism of Cesare Lombroso or with juridical training such as Enrico Ferri, Pasquale Rossi, Paolo Orano and, above all, Scipio Sighele. All these secular and progressive intellectuals 'felt themselves invested with the moral duty to provide their contribution to resolving the social question and renewing the country on a more modern basis.'<sup>17</sup>

But, as opposed to what was occurring, for example, in France, many Italian scholars reflecting on the psychology of the masses did not seem to pay any specific attention to cinema.<sup>18</sup> Pasquale Rossi was an early and significant exception. Continuing the intuitions of Gabriel Tarde—who saw in the mass media, which in the past had united and conditioned the people, the modern evolution of mass suggestion—Rossi considered cinema a means for rapidly propagating artificial 'sympathetic discharges' in space and time, thanks to which 'we live in the affective world of others'. The image of the 'discharge' evokes not only the famous theories of

Franz Mesmer regarding magnetism, but also, and above all, the theses of Aleksandr Herzen concerning the physical laws of consciousness, according to which 'the internal working of every nervous element discharges itself onto another element, sensory or motor, central or peripheral.'<sup>19</sup>

The sympathetic relationship activated by cinematographic images propagates like a contagious wave among the audience, 'from the more sensitive people, who are a multitude [...] to the less sensitive,' generating an authentic fusion of single individualities into a collective body.<sup>20</sup> What determines the effectiveness of the 'sympathetic discharge' is the very ancient human ability to comprehend and render comprehensible their own emotional states and those of others through external expression. Thus, the sympathetic process calls for an imitative reaction.

Rossi considered photography, the phonograph and, above all, cinematography an expression of scientific progress that not only consent 'emotional externalizations' to be reproduced with an effectiveness that is even superior to the corresponding real-life situation, but also allows them to be diffused to a crowd disseminated in space and time. Rossi, sensing the great persuasive and educational potential of the cinematographic medium, concluded that if one wants to act upon a dispersed mass of people, then precisely these 'devices of long-distance diffusion' must be employed.

Rossi's reflection presents several elements of originality. He affirmed that the senses do not only serve to perceive, but to express, as well: for this reason, psychology must also deal with communicative and social implications. A few years after the invention of cinematography, Rossi judged it positively. The concepts of sympathetic identification and imitation delineated a stimulus-reaction dynamic, which although it entailed a reduction of self-control and inhibitions, is not dramatic, but rather is a widespread form of collective relationships that should, above all, be described and not demonized.

Fifteen years after Rossi's contribution, the psychophysicologist Mariano Luigi Patrizi intervened on similar topics, reflecting in particular on the cinematographic expression of emotional states. If Rossi considered cinema's capacity for intensifying the emotions expressed by a person's face an efficient communicative opportunity, Patrizi considered it, instead, a serious limitation. According to Patrizi, the primacy of physiognomy, mimicry, or gesticulation over the word reduced cinema to an exclusively emotional performance.

As Leonardo Quaresima observed, a large portion of the international theoretical discussion concerning cinema during the 1910s was 'dominated [...] by the topic of the responsibility and idiosyncrasy of cinematographic

gesticulation and mimicry.<sup>21</sup> However, as opposed to Rossi, even though Patrizi, like other authors, grasped the centrality of gesticulation in cinema, he did not perceive its communicative and symbolic potential: to him, gesticulation was an object of physiological study, like movement. Adhesion to a logocentric prospective led him to see cinema not as the progress of modernity (as opposed to the microscope, microphone, or chronometer) but a regression in mankind's development. His analysis of the gesticulations and expressions of actresses and actors, which carefully underlined the excesses, the agitation alternating with contracted poses, evoked that broader neurotic dramatization of gesticulation in film, interpreted by a number of scholars as a sign of the historical crisis of the human body between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>22</sup>

### Cinema, Neuropsychiatry, Society

In the first Italian scientific discussions on cinema, when Ponzo's generic spectator was thrust into the concrete dimension of contemporaneity, his identity was separated into various categories according to social connotations, race, culture, and age; neurological and mental pathologies were addressed. The categories which sparked preoccupation were primarily women, children, and young people, 'ignorant, or scarcely evolved, or neuropathic minds [even] discretely intelligent and of good social extraction.'<sup>23</sup> It was inevitable that the mind sciences would encounter these 'concrete' spectators. In the early 1900s, the vocation of neuropsychiatry was not only medical but social as well, interested in proposing solutions to problems linked to the phenomena of modernization (including cinema, an agent and symptom of an amazing and alarming modernity): neuroses, juvenile delinquency, suicide, alcoholism, prostitution, the family crisis, postwar traumas, etc. Giuseppe d'Abundo was probably the first neurologist in Italy to propose scientific reflection on cinema from a neuropsychiatric perspective rather than a psychological one. This change of perspective also transformed the study methods: if, as we have seen, Ponzo chose self-observation, d'Abundo concentrated on clinical observation of his neurotic patients, above all women and young people. He believed cinema could generate neurotic problems with various degrees of severity, not only because of the flickering of the projected images, which was so intense they remained visible even with the eyes closed, but, above all, because of the content of the images. The most disturbing cinematographic visions for his patients dealt with dreams, phantasmagoria, magic, and occult,

pathological, and violent images. Establishing a cause-effect link between neurotic problems and certain types of scenes and images, d'Abundo launched a critique of cinematographic viewing that was later radicalized in interventions by other psychologists and psychiatrists.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, there is nothing moralistic or ideological about d'Abundo's criticism: in his reflection, he defines cinema a 'welcome distraction,' and even 'intellectual enjoyment.' The problem lay in the fact that the power of suggestion unleashed by the images in motion could also do harm. In the eyes of an inexperienced or impressionable spectator, cinema can throw the distinction between fiction and reality into crisis because it hides its artificial nature, conceals its artificial 'mechanism of production,' or rather, the technical-technological genesis of the images.<sup>25</sup> This is why, in the darkness of the viewing room, the representation of events is mistaken for their disquieting apparition. The most serious and frequent effects upon the spectators of these cinematographic apparitions consisted in hallucinations, not only visual, but tactile and thermal as well. In researching the mental symptoms of his patients, d'Abundo had discovered, without yet realizing it, the mentally complex process of the spectator's involvement. When the author cited the case of a very young patient who confused his own parent with the image of the infanticide father he had seen the evening before on the screen, he prefigured in clinical terms that which filmologists would later define a process of identification (the patient identified with the child who was the victim of the murder). Instead, a girl who had seen an image of a sleeping stationmaster surrounded by numerous threatening hands later felt constantly persecuted by those same hands. In this case, a process of projection came into play: the young woman attributed to the onscreen character's situation a series of (markedly sexual) fears and obsessions that were hers alone.

The number and severity of neuropathological symptoms tied to the cinematographic experience tended to increase greatly in later scientific studies.<sup>26</sup> A clinical picture took shape that, although fully aligned with the medicine of the time, presented remarkable differences. As a result of cinematographic viewings, the patients involved in the clinical observations suffered not only from hallucinations, but from insomnia, histrionics, psycho-motorial agitation, constriction of the throat, heightened palpitations, confused vision, tremors, irregular heartbeat, somnambulism, spasms, dizziness, tactile and thermal paraesthesia, headaches, anorexia, weight loss with anaemia, enuresis, convulsions, sitophobia, and apathy. The spectator under psychiatric observation was described as a sort of Golem, a suffering automaton, contracted by haphazard reactions, unable to control

the power of the cinematographic stimulus.<sup>27</sup> Spectators susceptible to excitement reacted before the images almost as though they were Luigi Galvani's frogs, reanimated by variable and intermittent electrical stimuli.

This image of a 'galvanized' public was not a novelty tied to the nascent reflection on cinema, but was backed up by a scientific tradition that is rooted, for example, in Thomas Laycock's research on the 'cerebral reflex function' in relation to mesmeric phenomena, and was strongly relaunched in the late 1800s thanks to the popular images of crowds hypnotized by *meneurs*, extensively described by Gabriel Tarde and Gustave Le Bon as well as Freud.<sup>28</sup>

### Delayed Shocks: Cinema and Memory

According to some early twentieth-century psychologists and neuropsychiatrists, cinema's impact on the spectator's mind could modify individual memory. In 1911, Ponzo ascribed to the memory of preceding experiences a resolutive function in cinematographic perception. Instead, the position of those neurologists, psychiatrists, and psychologists who studied how the effects of cinematographic perception develop after the viewing was different and more worrisome. The excitement induced by animated images seemed to induce reactions that were not immediate, and for this reason, more unpredictable. To use a bacteriological metaphor, in keeping with the biological discoveries of the time, the cinematographic image penetrates the spectator's nervous system with the same invisible insidiousness as a germ, installing itself in a mental dimension that is increasingly close to the subconscious. As with germs, the pathogeny of the cinematographic stimulus has a certain incubation time, after which it becomes active and generates hallucinatory phenomena, following a mental course that had already been described in the second half of the nineteenth century and later developed in extensive literature on the phenomenon of false recognition or paramnesia.<sup>29</sup>

Once again, d'Abundo was the first to underline this particularity in the evolution of suggestions following a cinematographic viewing. He held that the film projection 'silently explicates its influence, and then very rapidly escalates.' In the description of this mental dynamic of the re-emersion of cinematographic images, the analogy with Christian Metz's reflection on the evolution of mental excitation is surprising. Metz wrote,

The impulses originate in the external world (daily surroundings or filmic *bande*); they reach the psychological apparatus via its perceptual extremities



[...] and finally come to be inscribed in the form of memory traces, in a less peripheral psychical system [...] and sometimes the unconscious with its own memory, when the case involves impressions of the world that have been repressed after their reception.<sup>30</sup>

An analogous conviction was held by Mario Ponzo in his 1919 contribution, which was no longer dedicated to filmic perception but to the social effects of the medium. Ponzo, quoting d'Abundo, observed how a film continues to exist in a part of the mind after viewing. Nonetheless, the images of the movie that exist in this area are in a new form, extraneous to coherent, linear structures encapsulated in the plot. Ponzo wrote of 'a chaos of scenes lacking any connection' as the prelude to 'a new order' in which the cinematographic images transform and regroup themselves according to new criteria. The spectator does not keep the memory of the cinematographic story in his mind but rather 'disconnected traces of multiple representations, traces that continuously transform themselves and regroup themselves in different ways.' These images-traces have cut their ties with the source of their representation (the space-time in which they were projected in the cinema) and now live independently in the mind of the 'former spectator'. Thus, cinema, well before proposing a systematic pathway of meaning through a narrative-representative construction, offers a pathway of the senses that is unstructured, fragmentary, selective, and able to nullify the rhetoric of the story. The film is thus interpreted not as an organic representation, with a cohesive and structured pathway of meaning, but instead as a '*réservoir d'émotions*', whose construction begins with the encounter, which is first and foremost sensorial, between the film itself and the spectator's body.<sup>31</sup>

Above all, these images have an intense ability to disorient because they are erroneously remembered as fragments of real life. They produce artificial experiences that associate themselves with the memory of real events, creating with these memories a unitary mnemonic landscape, the result of an indiscernible fusion between reality and the imaginary, similar to the retroactive hallucinations described in nineteenth-century literature on hypnosis, or the '*attitudes passionnelles*' induced by the hallucinatory re-emersion of a traumatic past depicted by Paul Richer.<sup>32</sup>

## Conclusions

The selected studies show how the study of the mind dedicated non-marginal research full of theoretical potential to cinema in the early

twentieth century. Despite the diversity of methods and objectives, all of the contributions in Italy expressed a strongly holistic and relativistic conception of the cinematographic experience, later developed by the international theory of the 1920s.<sup>33</sup> Holistic, because the process of viewing involves not only the observer's eye but also his body, nervous system, memory, and emotional-affective and intellectual faculties. Relativistic, because the cinematographic experience is described as a temporary and subjective process, restricted by mental and environmental variants and susceptible to errors, illusions, and uncertainties. A number of studies pinpointed questions that were successively developed by international filmological research in the post-Second World War period. These included the perceptive centrality of the spectator and the mental processes of involvement in film, the memory of filmic images, attention to the relationship between the screen, and the viewing environment, and the links between cinema and hallucinations. Even if the Ponzo's Wundtian associationism or d'Abundo's positivism doubtless confirm a lag among Italian academics compared to other authors (in particular, Münsterberg's contribution), the selected studies appear anything but isolated regarding international scientific reflections on cinema. Mario Ponzo's observations in 1911, for example, stand out for their originality and, above all, for their precociousness, with respect to the—more famous—experiments conducted in France by Edouard Toulouse.<sup>34</sup> Instead, to remain in a scientific ambit, Italian neuropsychiatric reflections converge fully with the observations on the dangers of film-induced hallucinatory suggestion proposed by the Belgian psychiatrist Henri Hoven, the German criminologist Albert Hellwig, or by Hugo Münsterberg himself.<sup>35</sup>

Nonetheless, the clinical observations and psycho-perceptive hypotheses formulated in an embryonic fashion in Italy during the 1910s were unable to sustain an organic field of study and were rapidly forgotten. This destiny of oblivion can also be explained by the more general crisis which affected Italian psychology during the 1920s, marked by the supremacy of fascism's neo-idealist culture and its steadfast hostility to psychology.

## Notes

1. Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, pp. 259–260.
2. Casetti and Mosconi, eds, *Spettatori italiani*; Mosconi, *Impressione del film*; De Berti and Locatelli, (eds.), *Figure della modernità*; Casetti, *Eye of the Century*.

3. Scartabellati, *Intellettuali nel conflitto*.
4. Cimino and Dazzi, (ed.), *Psicologia in Italia*; Marhaba, *Lineamenti della psicologia*; Lombardo and Foschi, (eds.), *Psicologia italiana*; Ceccarelli, (ed.), *Psicologia italiana*; Dazzi and Lombardo, (eds.), *Origini della psicologia*.
5. Lombardo, Pompili, and Mammarella, (eds.), *Psicologia applicata*; Passione, *Origini della psicologia*; Cornacchioli and Spadafora, (eds.), *Pasquale Rossi*; Palano, *Potere della moltitudine*.
6. Michel, *Psicoanalisi*; Mecacci, *Psicologia e psicoanalisi*.
7. Ferro, (ed.), *Passioni della mente*; Guarnieri, *Storia della psichiatria*; Babini, *Liberi tutti*.
8. Rossi, 'Collective Psychology', included in this anthology; Patrizi, 'The Ongoing Battle between Gesture and Word', included in this anthology; d'Abundo, 'Concerning the Effects of Film Viewing on Neurotic Individuals', included in this anthology.
9. Musatti, *Scritti sul cinema*; Hediger, *Fallgeschichten, Filmgeschichten*, pp. 136–160; Ponzo, 'Alcune osservazioni psicologiche'; Alovio, 'Immagine prima della coscienza', pp. 67–94.
10. Elsaesser, 'Is Nothing New?', p. 588.
11. D'Abundo, 'Sopra alcuni particolari effetti', pp. 433–442; Lojacono, 'Turbe nervose consecutive', p. 14; Masini and Vidoni, 'The Cinematograph in the Field of Mental Illness and Criminality: Notes', included in this anthology; Rossi, 'Collective Psychology', included in this anthology; Ponzo, 'Cinema and Juvenile Delinquency', included in this anthology. Mondio, 'Cinematografo nell'etiologia'; Gemelli, 'Cause psicologiche', pp. 205–215; De Sanctis, 'Introduzione'; Pennacchi, 'Cinema e adolescenza', pp. 1084–1113.
12. Alovio, Mazzei, and Spinosa 'Reception Theories'.
13. Ponzo and Kiesow, *Corso di psicologia sperimentale*, p. 10.
14. Ponzo, 'Cinema and Juvenile Delinquency', included in this anthology.
15. Metz, *Signifiant imaginaire*.
16. Ponzo, 'Cinema and Juvenile Delinquency', included in this anthology.
17. Mucchi Faina, 'Scipio Sighele', pp. 207–208.
18. Plasseraud, *Art des foules*, 2011.
19. Cimino, Degni, (eds.), *Psicologia in Italia*, p. 65.
20. Rossi, 'Collective Psychology', included in this anthology.
21. Quaresima 'Introduzione', p. 48.
22. Valiaho, *Mapping the Moving Image*; Gordon, *Why the French*.
23. Alovio, 'Spettatrice muta'; d'Abundo, 'Alcuni particolari effetti', pp. 433–442.
24. Masini and Vidoni, 'The Cinematograph in the Field of Mental Illness and Criminality: Notes', included in this anthology; Ponzo, 'Cinema and Juvenile Delinquency', included in this anthology. Mondio 'Cinematografo nell'etiologia'; Pennacchi, 'Cinema e adolescenza'.
25. Ponzo, 'Cinema and Juvenile Delinquency', included in this anthology.
26. Masini and Vidoni, 'The Cinematograph in the Field of Mental Illness and Criminality: Notes', included in this anthology; Rossi, 'Collective Psychology',

- included in this anthology; Ponzio, 'Cinema and Juvenile Delinquency', included in this anthology. Mondio '*Cinematografo nell'etiologia*'; Pennacchi, 'Cinema e adolescenza.'
27. Väliaho, *Mapping the Moving Image*, p. 28.
  28. Gauchet, *Inconscient cerebral*; Freud, *Group Psychology*.
  29. Tamburini, '*Sulla genesi delle allucinazioni*', pp. 126–164.
  30. Metz, *Signifiant imaginaire*.
  31. Bellour, *Corps du cinéma*; Berton, *Corps nerveux*.
  32. Väliaho, *Mapping the Moving Image*, p. 68.
  33. Casetti, *Eye of the Century*.
  34. Moreli, '*Le Docteur Toulouse*'.
  35. Hoven, '*Influence du cinématographe*'; Killen, 'Psychiatry, Cinema'; Curtis, *Shape of Spectatorship*; Kaes, *Promise of Cinema*; Munsterberg, *Photoplay*.

# Collective Psychology

*Pasquale Rossi*

[The] tendency toward affective memory is born from the psychological reason of association, according to which what appears once together in the field of the psyche tends to reawaken. In the struggle for survival, this tendency has grown and has been strengthened by human beings. It is certain that by being able to guess the inner emotion of the soul from external signs, one can bring solace to oneself and to others. The empathy, which has a psycho-physiological basis, was developed in the struggle for life.

The great task of civilization lies in the perfecting of these external manifestations of emotion so as to awaken the inner sensational state with the pleasure or pain that accompanies it in people dispersed in time and space by way of language or art or writing. We would never have experienced Niobe's pain had a poet not sung it, had the song not been gathered in writing, had sculpture not modelled it for us in marble or bronze, had painting or photography not collected it and disseminated it in millions of exemplars

Science has attempted to make permanent these emotional and fleeting externalizations and express them in all their complexity. Phonographs and cinematographs, which both attempt to conserve fleeting particulars of figure and sound, were responses to this need. In other words, the external manifestations of emotions, which are sympathetic discharges through which we live in other people's affective worlds, attempt through art to become permanent and transmittable in their complexity to people who are distant from us in space and time [...].

But this state of reflection would achieve little if, inside every soul, there were not similar constitutions thanks to which phenomena are born, externalized, and reflected in the same way. For this reason, we say: the soul of the crowd is made possible by the similarity of the psyches that make it up, and thanks to the sympathetic discharges, reflect external states of excitement either in short or long temporal and spatial terms.

Several factors change this tendency of the collective soul. They are: the greater or lesser number of individual psyches that make up the collective soul; the degree of psychic sensitivity; the choice and use of the means of externalizing inner emotion [...] The latter factor, which interests us the most at this time, hinges on the choice and use of sympathetic discharges, and leads us to a discussion of the relationship between the senses and the collective psyche. The senses, in the narrow field of the individual psyche,

are not only the entry ways, the apparatuses, the collectors and condensers of the impressions of the external world, but are also our psyche's means of externalization. The more complex senses of smell, hearing, and sight, of which the latter is the most complex and of the greatest functional utility, all derive from the primitive and indistinct sense of touch. Subsequently, to collect and transmit the emotions of the soul, human beings have, first unknowingly, then knowingly, perfected language passed on through mimicry, exclamations, monosyllabic and radical language, before going on to complex modern idioms. Ultimately, with writing, art, and science, it has attempted to define the inner emotions of the soul and external nature so as to transmit not pale memory but living reality.

We can say that human beings, firstly unconsciously, then consciously, have developed and perfected the means of collecting, expressing, and conserving the inner emotions of the soul and external nature, combining in the struggle for survival, their own souls with those of others into a single psyche.

And such external manifestations of inner emotions of the soul do not have equal importance: there exists among them a functional and representative hierarchy. At the bottom are the so-called senses of attitude (mimicry, exclamation, language); higher up are the plastic arts in which the effect is less intense than the glimpsed or seen spectacle, but which is more permanent and expands further through space. So, whoever witnessed Niobe's torment felt it more than if they had seen it portrayed in marble or on a canvas; but this real torment would have been fleeting had it not been eternalized in the poet's song or in the cold purity of marble. Lastly, at the top of the pyramid are the sympathetic discharges represented by the gestures, the words, the acts of an eternalized reproduction: such is the theatrical representation in which the emotional discharges are similar to the natural ones that tell stories and can be reproduced either by the work of the artist or by machine (cinematographs). From here, the collective soul can easily come forth in the narrow or scattered crowd in time and space, the more the individual neuro-psychic wave communicates by way of complex, natural or artificial means.

Imagine we are faced with a dumb mute who is suffering and can only communicate their suffering by contracting their face and through passionate postures of their person. Pain, as it is reflected in the onlookers, immediately creates a psycho-collective state since one is in the presence of a crowd that is temporally and spatially defined.

It is certain, though, that if the sufferer could shout, discharging more powerfully and complexly the inner emotion of the soul, the effect on the

onlookers would be more vivid and would be felt beyond the location of the sufferer.

Now, if we imagine that the person could shout, and among the onlookers there were some blind and deaf people, these onlookers would be less aware of the pain than they would have been if they had more perfect organs to receive the psychic waves. And if this scene of pain was represented in marble or on a canvas, it would leave a lesser impression than if it was seen, but more than if it was read; and if, in the end, it was represented on stage accompanied by music and in the cinema it would have an effect as if it was alive, if not more alive, than if the scene was experienced in real life.

In conclusion, we can say: the temporally and spatially defined crowd the collective soul is formed by an exciting stimulus that invades individual psyches at the same time and with such great force that it leaves more than an isolated impression. This excitement, which arrives as a nervous wave in individual psyches, can come out in sympathetic discharges (expressions of the face, shouts, etc.), which combine and increase in each of us, bringing them together with the inner psychic emotion through which the collective phenomenon becomes stronger and more intense.

This is a static condition of the collective soul caused by a rapid and simultaneous invasion of excitement, by way of the common entry and exit of the nervous waves in the brain that combine together.

In the scattered crowd, the excitement is not rapid and simultaneous, it is successive; and, because the souls do not remain isolated, external excitement is projected among them giving each of them their own and personal excitement. The sympathetic discharges of the senses are prolonged and perpetuated in art, which tends toward complex and powerful representations. We are then faced with a dynamic form of the collective psyche. Lastly, just as in the crowds there is a tendency toward stability, passing, that is, from an undifferentiated to a differentiated state and to live for a longer or shorter time, psychology's static and dynamic phenomena follow one another. In fact, every static phenomenon attempts to unfold itself in time and become dynamic, wherein great emotion is not lost. Rather, it is relived as memory and as more or less faithful representations of truth that move other crowds or the same crowd at a later time and create in the future other identical psycho-collective emotions. In this way, a great artistic exposition, in a thousand ways, can be experienced again by other peoples and persons, it calls others to it, puts in the soul of distant people a part of that crowd's feelings where it happened and creates from it a psychic reflex: it does not lose, in a word, thanks to modern apparatus of

representation and transmission, the virtue of excitement, which is able to awaken psycho-collective facts. [...].

As we said in the opening chapters of this book, in the lower crowds, the collective soul is formed by way of simple sympathetic discharges, such as the voice, signs, mimicry, which do not transmit inner motions a great distance. This is why we have chosen to limit ourselves and work with a certain consistency in terms of space and time; this is also why there is such a real harmony between the image, the limited crowd and cerebral mass, between the sympathetic discharges and neurons.

These neurons, as we sleep, shorten and the unity of the brain fractures or breaks. In the same way, if an uncanny force isolates the individuals of a defined crowd, since the sympathetic discharges are no longer possible at a distance, the collective psyche stops since its basic material and its organs of transmission have been struck.

And the uncanny causes can be the affecting action of one crowd on another: for example, a line of soldiers at a demonstration by striking workers; like the atmospheric agents that rupture the unity of the crowd, such as falling rain; basins of water thrown on an outdoor meeting; like feelings that rise brusquely and have a strong dispersive power, such as the public's fear of a fire in a theatre.

Such affective movements, if they brusquely end the life of a defined crowd, have little value for the crowd scattered in time and space, which has its own way of composing the sympathetic discharges at a distance, since it is an un-doer of crowds and has its own means of dissolution.

That which, in fact, constitutes the essence of a scattered crowd is the possibility of sending the inner emotions of the soul through time and space by way of sympathetic discharges that are capable of being projected far. In the sympathetic discharges—as we said—there is a hierarchy among the forms of mimicry and interjection, according to one ascends from projecting inner emotions a short distance so that they last only an instant, to the word, to the plastic and representational arts, to phonographs and to cinematographs, which not only send a feeling through time and space, but attempt to reproduce it in all its complexity and make it evocable whenever one wants.

The scattered crowd rests, then, on the potential for great projections of an inner emotion, common to many people, and that forms the cement of the collective soul. And this cement is both material and ideal; it is, for example, a newspaper and the idea it disseminates; it is a series of books, pamphlets that have been inspired by a thought, and the thought itself that it sustains and propagates [...].



It seems from this that the dissolution of a crowd is tied to this central and coordinating theme, which is both material and ideal, both means of diffusion and nervous-psychic wave, thought or feeling, or the one and the other together. To break up a scattered crowd it makes no sense to undermine its material cohesion, which being minimal, is extremely resistant. Rather, it is necessary to operate on the apparatus of long range dissemination, which is the cement of the collective soul.

*Psicologia collettiva. Studi e ricerche* (Cosenza: Tipo-lit. di R. Riccio, 1899; repr. Milan: L. Battistelli, 1900). Translated by David Ward.

# About Some Psychological Observations Made During Film Screenings

*Mario Ponzo*

According to Wundt and his school of thought, the main principle in the perception of movement in stroboscopic discs and other similar equipment would lie in the intervention of reproduced elements of visual representations.<sup>1</sup> Even though I do not wish to enter the list of those who support this theory, I strongly believe that it is undeniable that associative processes do participate in this phenomenon and complete the impression, often inadequate, during motion picture screening. In fact, how could the perception of distance, size, direction, and speed of movement be acquired so rapidly, were it not for the help provided by previous experience?

These associative processes do not always remain in the same field as visual sensations, but often they also occur between different fields of sensations; and it is in reference to some of these complications that I have gathered together the comments included in this article. The complications in question can have two origins. In one case, and certainly the most frequent, the sensations associated with visual representations are not determined by external stimulus, but are produced by psychic elements. Therefore, it is not unusual to connect the acoustics associated with the images and the noises they represent, such as falling water, the movement of heavy machinery, car wheels running on pavement. In other words, they are part of multiple acoustic representations previously experienced in connection with similar visual representations, which help us in this case, and make even more vivid the true visual impression that is actually before our eyes. These reproduced elements belong to other fields of sensation, and when they are associated with the scenes from life that are presented to us in a visual image, they are far from small exponents of the interest provoked by the motion picture or film. Sometimes, for example, when we are watching a film, we feel the desire to applaud. This impulse would seem inexplicable if we were always very conscious of the fact that, even in these moments, we are sitting in front of a screen and not actually participating in the events that have inspired our desire to applaud.

However, there is no doubt that the fusion between true visual images and reproduced elements can never attain the clarity that we are able to observe in association between sensorial elements which all depend on direct impressions. For example, the fusion between the acoustic impressions from the film or motion picture theatre with the images on the screen is quite strong. These are the cases that surprise us most when we become conscious of the illusion itself. In this situation, the illusion depends on an error in localization. The sound impressions refer to a place which is totally different from their actual locality. In addition to this false reference and the association that is established with the visual image, there is also the need for a change in the interpretation of the causes that determine it. And in the successive analysis of this phenomenon, this often makes it difficult to retrace the true origin.

For example, the case is not unusual where we must search for the cause of these sound impressions among the sounds produced by the small orchestra that normally accompanies the film. I remember that during the screening of a film showing a pagoda in Burma, while two adolescents were striking some bells with a horn, I was surprised by the fact that little by little, I no longer noticed the sound, but the special vibration that normally follows the striking of a door knocker. By retracing back to the cause of this illusion I realized that this was caused by an association of the visual impression with some of the lowest notes played by the string instruments in the orchestra.

These fragments of acoustic representation blended with visual impressions have for the most part, characteristics of sound. A good example of the facility with which certain sounds can refer to scenes shown on the screen is this: the motion picture was about a car racing around an area of Rio de Janeiro. During this scene, while the car was driving from a point in the distance towards the viewer, I had the impression for a moment that I could feel the throbbing of the motor. Immediately afterwards, I realized that the effect had been caused by the noise of the electric fan in the theatre.

It has often happened that I was certain I could hear the noise of a mountain river or a waterfall, only to realize later that the sound was caused by a fan or the film projector. I remember a case where for the same reason, professor Kiesow and I had the distinct impression of a similar noise watching a film located in the valleys in the Savoy mountains.<sup>2</sup>

The shorter the acoustic impressions are, the more difficult it is to recognize their true origin and identify where they are coming from, because we tend to immediately blend it into the single total representation using the predominant conscious perception, which in the case of films, is of course, visual. During a film screening I saw not very long ago, there was a

scene where a son was being taken away from his mother: when the mother placed her lips on her son's forehead, a person among the public made a kissing noise, and for me, this was perfectly localized on the screen, as if it were made to order, and in this case, it was the association between two sensorial representations.

On the other hand, when one deliberately attempts to connect full representational experiences in two fields of sensations, it is rare that one is able to obtain the desired effect, at least in my personal experience. Everybody is aware of the attempts to combine filmed representations with acoustic equivalents using a phonograph. I have no idea whether results in the future will be more satisfactory than those obtained up to this point. In my opinion, even when it is possible to obtain perfect synchronicity between pieces of film and phonographic equipment to eliminate the most obvious problems with the most substantial difficulties, perhaps the most impossible problem will remain: the difference of locality of the origin of the sound in relation to the locality of the visual impression, which prevents perfect fusion in the two levels of impression.

Music, which in Italian motion picture theatres is played while the image or picture is screened, represents an aesthetic 'filler' of far greater value; I use the term 'filler' in the sense that, in spite of the meaning of the piece that is played, it also draws the ear into these silent films, and therefore the auditory impressions always remain in the peripheral zone and less clearly in the plane of consciousness. And when you have been used to hearing the musical filler, it is a sad feeling when it is totally missing. It almost seems that we notice the lack of music more than its presence when it is played.

To help the acoustic-visual association, certain direct sound effects are produced behind the screen to imitate the noise normally associated with the movement of certain objects, such as the sound of car wheels, etc., for example. Once, I experienced the perfect illusion of the imitation of pelting rain accompanying the screening of a scene from Dante's *L'Inferno*, and more to the point, the downpour tormenting the greedy in the third circle.<sup>3</sup>

If the associations between visual representation and direct acoustic impressions are the easiest to be observed, there are plenty of cases where visual representation blends with other field of sensations.

During the scene of Dante's *Inferno*, referred to previously, a person sitting close to me experienced a decided impression of damp and cold while watching the scene. This impression, so unconsciously referred to the visual representation was no doubt caused by the weather conditions that evening (27 March 1911), which was rainy, and the theatre was damp and cold.

In June of last year, I was watching a film of a group of tourists on a trip to Tunisia. While the ship was sailing across the Mediterranean on the screen, we could see the waves beating against the hull, and my mother said to me 'I seem to actually feel the fresh air and see that water.' Here again, the feeling of fresh air, that was attributed to the sight of sea waves did not depend entirely on the film, but was influenced to a certain extent by the draft from the fan attached to the ceiling, and when it turned on its vertical axis, it sent a flow of fresh air when it turned in our direction.

Impressions of this kind would not be noticed particularly, but for the fact that the visual representations made the effect seem more obvious.

A typical example of a complication that arose between visual and olfactory sensations was an illusion that professor Kiesow and I experienced at the same time, but in a completely separate manner. The scene showed a horse stable where hay was being roughly taken from a manger. Professor Kiesow turned and said to me at that moment, 'I seem to be able to smell that hay.' And I made the same comment at the same time. Objectively, as we discovered later, it was actually a smell inside the theatre, coming from a person who had come in a short time before and was sitting not very far from us. We were not able to establish exactly what the smell was; but we were able to absolutely exclude that it was the smell of hay. The visual impression was so predominant at that time that it induced us to associate the smell of hay with a smell of another nature from a totally different source.

Generally speaking, we can say that our whole complex sensorial organism takes part in a representational experience truly and uniquely linked with a given field of sensations. Even secondary factors that participate from a considerable distance, at the extreme limit of consciousness in a visual representation, are able to take advantage of complete perception, through visual association. If these secondary elements were not present, the illusion would seem less perfect.

So, it often happens that we see views filmed from a moving locomotive or from the window of a train. The objects that are photographed in this case, are rapidly enlarged on the screen; we interpret this as the objects moving closer to us, as we immediately recognize that it is the same impression we have experienced many times before as we watch a panorama from a moving train. However, there are certain aspects which weaken the illusion up to a certain point, among which, the imperfect vision of the contours and the fact that, because of the type of lighting in the theatre, the abrupt, dark edges of the illuminated screen are visible. We are able to eliminate these two disturbing elements almost completely by watching the screen as if through a pair of binoculars, our hands to form a tube so that the eyes

do not see the screen edges. In this way, the illusion becomes more perfect, but another secondary factor is still lacking, which removes part of the efficiency, and that is composed of the muscular and tactile sensations caused by the vibration of the train, which generally accompany the true vision of the objects when actually in a train.

Lastly, it is also worth noting the curious inhibiting effect on all these associative phenomena that occur in the plane of consciousness and the very fact that we decide to observe them. Every time I have been to the movie theatre with the precise intention to collect new data concerning visual-acoustic associations, I have never been able to identify a single one. Therefore, the examples described here have been observed by chance, at times when I was not actually concentrating on that aspect; once they have actually been perceived, then I am able to analyse them by focusing my attention on them.

I felt it was worth mentioning these observations, because although it is not yet clear in the field of associations, despite considerable study on the question, each contribution provides a new fact or the way to observe that can mean another step closer to deciphering these rather complicated psychic processes.

*'Di alcune osservazioni psicologiche fatte durante rappresentazioni cinematografiche', Atti della Reale accademia delle scienze di Torino 46/15a (1910–1911), pp. 943–948. Translated by National Museum of Cinema, Turin.*

## Notes

1. [Editors' note. The author is referring to a stroboscope, a patented device created in 1833 by Simon Ritter von Stampfer. A disc with painted figures is rotated on the same axis as a second disk of equal proportions with small holes, and these figures seem in motion when seen from a stationary perspective.]
2. [Editors' note. Friedrich Kiesow (1858–1940) was a German psychologist and professor at the University of Turin for almost 30 years. A student of Wilhem Wundt, he was one of the leading international experts in experimental psychology.]
3. [Editors' note. The author is referring to the 1911 film, *L'Inferno*, directed by Francesco Bertolini, Alfonso Padovan, and Giuseppe de Liguoro.]

# Concerning the Effects of Film Viewing on Neurotic Individuals

*Giuseppe d'Abundo*

Over the last few years, my attention has been drawn to certain nervous disorders that can arise in neurotic cases after watching particular cinematographic representations.

I have no doubts about the intellectual enjoyment that film shows can offer; they provide an appreciated distraction and may also be of educational value; consequently, audiences of every age group and walk of life, children and elderly alike, from the illiterate to the educated, go to the cinema willingly and enjoy it.

Undoubtedly, from the scientific point of view, cinema is of great importance in certain experimental and clinical research, to the extent that many laboratories are becoming equipped with one. My own clinic, I am pleased to say, has had one for several years for teaching purposes in order to record interesting symptomatology caused by experimentally inducing damage to the nervous system of animals.

The subjects tackled in films are increasing in number at a prodigious rate; competition between the different companies involved from a commercial point of view leads to selecting themes concerning topics that can awaken the audience's sentiments with wonder and the occult, stirring up sensational emotive states with tragic scenes of mental pathology.

In this article, I intend to demonstrate how, in cases with a hereditary nervous predisposition, certain film projections that, for the majority of people, are insignificant and do not excite particular emotional conditions, can prove to be disturbing and even lead to acute psychic disorder.

In the same way, I aim to contribute to the fight for a general agreement on how to proceed with a more selective choice of themes for films from the psychological point of view; these should ideally contribute to developing the more unselfish and ethical sentiments, not embracing the apotheosis of the sphere of selfishness through symptoms that actually reach pathological levels, or awaken and exhume ancient, ancestral superstitions in the subconscious of ignorant or under-developed or neuropathic minds.

My demonstration will be based on a series of pathological surveys of a neuropsychic nature, deduced from certain clinical observations which have come to my notice.

Certainly, the effect of a cinema representation on the audience is very varied; intelligence, culture, age, sex, social condition, and neuropathic constitution determine extraordinarily different emotive reactions.

The first to draw my attention to the problem were the many neurasthenics who suffered particularly unpleasant effects provoked by films in the cinema. In each case, insomnia was the predominant symptom. They would go to the cinema for distraction, but soon realized that they remained disturbed afterwards.

It was not the subject of the film that disturbed them profoundly, but the rapid vibratory movement of the action.

These vibrations stimulated in them, primarily, a sense of unease, then irritation to the point of forcing them to leave the cinema. Closing their eyes was no relief from the disturbance; since the auditory stimulus of the cinema projector re-evoked, through association, the previous vibrating visual images, they too ended up causing irritation. And at night, these individuals found that their insomnia was accompanied by disquiet produced by the unwelcome memory of the visual and acoustic vibratory perceptions. I must add that these people had all been accustomed to going to the cinema in the past: indeed, they had been enthusiasts.

After recovery from neurasthenia, there remained for some time the unpleasant impression of watching a film projection; but this gradually dispersed altogether.

There were also neurasthenics who were determined to overcome the discomfort described, but continued to go to the cinema in the evening; however, they were forced to come to terms with reality, since their nighttime agitation in these cases became so intense that they decided to abstain from watching films which they had until then enjoyed so much.

I came across similar complaints in two patients affected by neurasthenia in menopause, in which psychic depression and insomnia were the predominant symptoms. Usually, the disturbance was caused by a combination of visual and acoustic vibrations. So, while their reason for going to the cinema was for diversion, they ended up being upset by it, which led to fits of anxiety.

It is worth noting, too, the effects of hysteria in many women, caused certainly on some occasions by particular film projections, which produced symptoms of specific nervous disorders.

An example I remember, among others, was the case of a distinguished young lady who, since reaching puberty at the age of twelve, had experienced convulsions of a clearly hysterical nature, which were brought on from time to time by emotional stimuli. Of a highly impressionable nature, she went



one evening to see a film that told the story of a railway clerk working on postal accounts who fell asleep in his office and dreamt he was attacked by thieves; the scene of the dream was shown in the film: the clerk asleep, then the sudden appearance on the screen of many hands shaking him, and many alarming faces threatening him; hands and faces vanishing into a vaporous medium. The action ended with the clerk being startled awake to find that he really was being attacked by thieves who were intent on robbing the mail office.<sup>1</sup> Of course, the film had a happy ending, i.e. rescue and reward for the clerk, arrest for the thieves.

The young lady was surprised by the appearance of all those hands disappearing into space, and certainly was struck by it, because that night she began to have hypnagogic hallucinations reproducing the railway clerk's dream, with the vision of gigantic hands in extraordinary numbers; the hallucinations reappeared at intervals when she was awake. There followed fright and considerable worry, but without any progression into convulsive fits.

At first, the hallucinations appeared only at night and when she couldn't sleep, later they also appeared by day. The girl, who was fairly intelligent, was perfectly aware of the unreality of the hallucinatory phenomenon, but she still ended up being very disturbed, because she would see that group of gigantic evanescent hands so suddenly and in the most unexpected situations. These problems increased in intensity before and after her menstrual period; in fact, it was during one such period that she had a brief phase of confused consciousness, in which she believed the hallucinatory manifestations to be real, to the extent that the paraesthesia of her general sensitivity persuaded her that the hands actually dared touch her.

She went through a state of depression during that period which lasted about 20 days. These hallucinations accompanied by insomnia, headaches, multiple paraesthesia, and severe anorexia and weight-loss lasting for three months; then, little by little, they disappeared. The convulsions, which had earlier been a problem periodically, often during her menstrual cycle, were dormant during the three months of the hallucinations, and reappeared again when the latter stopped.

I believe that these hallucinations corresponded with their hysterical equivalent, provoked by an impression which proved highly evocative, so that the representation of the dream of the railway clerk, which was basically a hallucinatory sketch, was fixed photographically in the visual zone, and some of its detail could be easily recalled with exaggerated and dazzling imitative effects.

I believe that recovery was relatively slow because of that evocative influence of the setting, which created a real, involuntary psychosis.

When the young lady was cured, she did not return to the cinema until many months later, and, even then, with some trepidation the first few times.

Another couple of cases of hysteria come to mind (a married and an unmarried lady) in which the same visual hallucinatory symptoms developed after watching the same film, in which an Indian snake charmer was shown with a number of these creatures winding round his neck and arms, which brought on shivering and nausea in both women.

In both these cases of hysteria, the problem lasted for about two months, with tactile and especially thermal paraesthesia, a sensation of cold in the form of a band round the limbs and neck. In these areas there was otherwise general hyposensitivity.

The convulsive fits did not appear during the period in which these hallucinations were experienced. The latter came during the day when the patients were awake, and then frequently at night. Often they were simple illusions. The first lady would see her small dog that was in the house with her suddenly stretch out in the shape of an enormous snake. Her scream of fright caused the dog to bark, bringing the lady back to reality.

The other young lady, who had never had any contact with the first, went through a spell of about 40 days in which she slept at night on an armchair, because in her condition of tactile and thermal paraesthesia of the limbs, it seemed to her that the bed was infested with huge snakes.

Recovery came after two months. In the first lady, an intense shock provoked a convulsive fit, which led to the immediate disappearance of the hallucinatory disorder. The young woman on the other hand recovered gradually, particularly when she received appropriate psychotherapy, which could only be adopted towards the latter part of her condition.

Other cases of hysteria have been brought to me for advice, in which the clinical form is largely the same: hallucinations and visual illusions; but since many are from other regions, I have lost contact with them. They must certainly have recovered, or else they would have come back or further consultation.

In these cases, where the patient has already manifested hysteria, it would be unreasonable to presume the influence of film viewing as an ancillary cause. What should be noted however, is that generally speaking an intense and sudden fright frequently constituted a one-off cause for the appearance of certain hysterical symptoms, even in the cases I observed in which the cinema had not produced severe shock. It had simply been a detail of the film which had particularly struck the hysteria sufferer, leading to a disproportionate reaction. It is highly probable that the film was then

dreamt about through self-suggestion, and the hypnagogic hallucination magnified the impression from the evening viewing. And in individuals as impressionable as sufferers of hysteria, it became a form of coercion which would bring about small convulsions in the circuit of the visual cortical zone, causing hallucinations or illusions.

In these cases, it is certainly impossible to lay any blame on the subject of the film.

I remember having been consulted many times about young patients of between seven and ten years old, who displayed markedly nervous behaviour after having seen tragic or supernatural scenes at the cinema. These symptoms consisted of fits of fright at night, with real hallucinations, normally visual, so that they leaped in terror from their beds seized by unspeakable fright, and took refuge in their parents bed.

These children became terrorized by the approach of evening.

Insomnia was the rule, and weight-loss with anaemia was soon associated with this neurotic state.

The cases which were brought to my attention involved children of a fairly timid nature, but reasonably intelligent, and from a socially well-placed family. In each case, there was a marked hereditary neuropathy.

The following two examples were typical of the ones I examined.

An intelligent boy of eight years, P..., had seen a showing of a film which dwelt on the theme of Sardinian criminality: a thief who forced his son to keep quiet if ever he should be interrogated by the police about the hideout of a certain delinquent; the boy, however, was pressured by the police into giving geographic location which led to the arrest of the criminal.

The father then took the boy to the place of confession, forced him to kneel down, and after an unmitigated tongue-lashing, he shot him dead with his gun.

I do not intend to make any psychological comments on a film portraying such an example of human degeneration, which indirectly offended the sentimentality of a noble region of Italy; but the fact remains that the boy, P., must have been deeply affected by that sketch, because that same night he began to dream about the episode; waking up suddenly to see his own father rushing into the room, he believed he had seen a glimpse of a rifle in his father's hands. Thus, terrorized, he knelt down and pleaded for mercy, to be spared from death.

A neurasthenic state of followed with intense frontal headaches and visual hallucinations by night, insomnia and severe weight-loss.

The hallucinations were varied: visions of the shadows of dark figures, grimacing and threatening him with great blasts of gramophone.

Until he was five, P. had continued to wet his bed at night, after which the problem had stopped. It started to occur again at this time, in the hours in which he managed to sleep. His urine contained traces of glucose at a level of two per cent.

With appropriate therapy he recovered after about three months; regardless, I felt that it would be useful to get him out of his father's house from the very first days, by sending him to sleep with his grandmother of whom he was very fond. The hallucinations continued for some time, always at night, and then gradually faded in colour.

The bed-wetting and glucose also disappeared after 25 days.

In another case, the patient was an eight-year-old boy, L..., who had seen a film at the cinema in which there were vivid scenes of enchantment, with the appearance of flames, fairies, etc., all with intense colours. At the time, he showed no sign of being deeply affected. He retired to bed in a room closed off from his parents, but couldn't get to sleep.

Imperceptible noises made him jump with fright and call his parents; he was seeing flames and enormous luminous eyes.

He was harshly scolded and even threatened. But the vague noises were replaced by illusions and visual hallucinations, to the point where he fled for protection to his parents' bed, weeping desperately. He couldn't sleep. Only the light of day dispelled his fit of terror, which returned the following night during which the hallucinations were even more varied, because they conjured up all the fairy tales he had ever been told by his nanny, about ogres, devils, etc.; unfortunately, stories on these topics are very readily told to young children, and by evening they are full of fear and trepidation.

When questioned, he claimed to have seen real representations and was convinced that they had actually taken place.

He had almost continuous insomnia for the first eight nights. During the day, he could sleep as long as the shutters were closed and his mother sat up with him, holding his hand tightly.

A sedative-hypnotic drug and warm hydrotherapy resolved this problem; however, a severe weight-loss came about, and for over a month, the boy would wake suddenly due to hypnagogic hallucinations which continued even after he was awake, but which he could barely remember in the morning.

He recovered after a couple of months; but for a good six months he continued to sleep with his parents.

I have been consulted on other occasions for night terror and hallucinatory conditions, mostly in young children, and I was able to confirm

that fairly frequently in these cases the 'ancillary cause' had been a film involving some supernatural theme, which had sparked the problem.

The effects of any film viewing are considerable on paranoids, and are no different from those emerging as a result of all the latest scientific developments, like telegraph, dirigibles, aeroplanes, X-rays, etc.

If these new scientific conceptions lead to new, disturbed interpretations, then films shown in the cinema must be seen as severely unnerving for the paranoid, because they facilitate the problem source, or encourage hallucinations based on ideas of persecution.

My conclusion in this article is that films that dwell on subjects involving supernatural or tragic scenes can cause specific psychological disturbances in patients with neuroses. Similarly, the mere vibratory movement can be distressingly aggravating for neurasthenics. Of course, it is possible to put this effect down to any other ordinary cause, since those who tend to manifest particular psychic syndromes are always cases with a neuropathic predisposition. This is true. However, films in which the action involves tragic/criminal themes, or supernatural/magic ones, does not provoke a shock to the nervous system in the same way as an intense emotional cause, e.g. a severe fright, in which the height of intensity is immediate, right away. Cinema does quite the reverse: it proceeds silently exerting its influence, which then heightens very rapidly, causing the development of the psychopathic symptomology, not with the slow development of the beginning, but in a real explosion.

A contributing factor probably also comes from the fact that many spectators simply cannot comprehend how the triggering mechanism works, how it can be that the movements of actual living figures are displayed on a simple rectangle of white canvas. As a result, [cinema's] incomprehensible quality psychologically and tacitly awakens the feeling of wonder and of occult, which at night take on colossal proportions, particularly in children with hereditary predisposition, whose fear has been aroused in the past by stories of magic, etc.

What I have found to be characteristic of the cases I have examined is that only a few hours after the film has been seen, the hallucinatory framework is already fully developed. Probably the most appropriate psychological interpretation for someone who is not familiar with the production mechanisms of cinema action, is that these basically represent ready-made hallucinatory frameworks, which can be conjured up again at night either in complete form or just a detail, like a visual cortical projection.

It would seem from these considerations that it would be a good thing to abolish films on the subject of the occult, or which reproduce episodes

of mental pathology, since otherwise the effects of such cinema will act like the practices of spiritism, laying the way for many individuals with a hereditary predisposition to be susceptible to psychopathic conditions.

*‘Sopra alcuni particolari effetti delle proiezioni cinematografiche nei nevrotici’, Rivista italiana di neuropatologia, psichiatria ed elettroterapia 4/10 (October 1911), pp. 433–442. Translated by National Museum of Cinema, Turin.*

## Note

1. [Editors' note. The film d'Abundo's patient saw was almost certainly the 1911 film, *Aspettando il diretto di mezzanotte (Waiting for the Midnight Express)*.]

# The Ongoing Battle between Gesture and Word

*Mariano Luigi Patrizi*

There is a battle between cinema and the stage, between silent theatre and the loquacious mouth of opera: a duel observed by writers and impresarios, but one that is also of interest to physiologists and sociologists, who observe from a dark corner the workings and tendencies of the human psyche, as it functions alone or in a crowd.

Those who saw the cinematograph come into being in a scientific laboratory, who at its beginnings proclaimed it to be an advantageous device for allowing deaf-mutes to speak, certainly did not foresee that it would one day take speech away from or be placed in competition with men of letters, the artisans of the word.

It was indeed a physiologist, Marey—who still remembers him?—who while using chronophotography for the analysis of animal movement (the gait of a man or the trot of a horse, the flight of a heron or the undulations of a moray, the alternating beats of a tortoise's heart, or the flow of blood cells through an artery) had the idea of directing the lens of his camera towards the lips of a neighbour exclaiming '*C'est du chocolat!*' ('It's chocolate!'), and took physiognomic images so eloquent that by seeing them, deaf-mutes clearly understood the words that had been spoken.

This early and elegant attempt has by now been lost within the heap of miracles that the old physiological device managed to achieve, beyond the doctor's office and the aims of naturalists. Anyone today who would not marvel at the subsequent achievements in the reproduction of all sorts of movements without the articulation of sound, anyone with the slightest doubt that the cinematograph has become a prodigious giver of beauty and a large-scale, rapid disseminator of culture, would not be condemned merely with the mild title of a hater of the new, but rather subjected to a memorable corporal punishment; at most, to be indulgent, he might be sent to do penance in the company of those two superhuman spirits—only two in all of Italy!—that recently officially refused to admire Leonardo's rediscovered masterpiece.

We must, however, distance ourselves from such high praise when it is a question of evaluating the contribution the cinema has made to the collective mindset not in the area of silent motion, but in the representation of speech.

To compose a drama or a comedy while eliminating verbal signs, to stimulate the pleasure of the masses in the hasty and paleo-anthropological expression of the gesture, is one of the oddest mutilations to which the civilized brain could subject itself. Think of the brain's quadrantal speech centre, organized with patient work for thousands of years upon the four zones of the grey matter of the cortex, with its functions now dismissed, as an instrument no longer indispensable for meaning and the aesthetic communication of the affairs of our feelings and thoughts! Imagine the shining treasure of a mother's speech, the rich linguistic patrimony of an Annibal Caro or a Gabriele d'Annunzio, devalued overnight and at risk of failure in the international and interspecies market (cinema is the only sort of spectacle at which the four-legged friends of man are admitted for profit) of a purely visual and pantomimed art! It is a mistake to forget that the elements of language—voice and words—are not only signs of the advance of the species, not only the sacrosanct material of intellectual edifices, traditionally and universally venerated, but also devices of greater mechanical precision, the most subtle way of measuring the quantitative gradations of internal spiritual phenomena.

The genius of the race has now, it is true, overtaken itself through the artificial enhancement of the power of its own senses. It has succeeded in glimpsing with the microscope what the eyes could never have seen, unveiling with the microphone sounds unknown to the ear, feeling with the scale that tenth of a milligram that would have never weighed upon our tactile senses, and dividing time with the chronometer into thousandths of a second, which would never have been able to be analysed with the rhythm of the fastest bodily operations. But it has not, up to this point, been able to devise a machine that calculates the highly-variable intensity of a feeling through a more articulated scale than that of the elocutorial apparatus, one that responds to the changes, nuances, and combinations of feelings, ideas, or actions better than that vast keyboard, that infinite orchestra, that we possess in the entries in the dictionary, the phonetics of their pronunciations, and their combination.

The crude and base idiom of facial mimicry and gestures could never achieve such precision or fulfil such a complex task. It has at its disposal only a half-dozen terms or movements, made even more insufficient by the need to dispose of intermediate states and to exaggerate in order to effectively impact the sensitivity of the fleeting film strip and elicit the instantaneous comprehension of the spectators.

Joy and suffering, whatever their intensity in the drama, are always shown through the same arrangement of the muscles around the nose and



the mouth. In women, a rich variety of sorrowful emotions and passions are uniformly performed with the upward rolling of the eyeballs, as in the statue of Niobe, repeating the gaze obsessively fashioned by Guido Reni in his many Cleopatras, saints, and Madonnas. To these common stereotypes, others are added, typical of the performers who in their cinematic poses, because they are not absorbed in the action and the ordered rhymes of words, easily fall into their personal and habitual attitudes, as though into stock phrases. One notes that recently, in more than one artistic film, a refined, graceful actress has adopted the pose with the head thrown back, the neck supine, and the hair flowing down, and made use of it like a cliché in the most disparate conditions—for dancing, for kisses, and for death.

Not to mention the men who—with few exceptions—depict all spiritual states and portray the widest range of deep anxieties with the tic of putting their hands through their hair and extending and bending their arms like an umbrella opening and closing, or those marionettes who when pressed on their wooden chests alternate between centrifugal and centripetal movements of their rigid limbs.

Aside from the muscles in the face and limbs, other motor phenomena linked to psychological changes could enrich the sparse vocabulary of mute expression: the circulatory changes shown through pallor and redness, the modification of the breath, the changing size of the pupils, and so forth. But these are minute acts that cannot be grasped by the normal camera lens, and are only detected in the sincere emotional investment of great theatrical actors.

In any case, the cinema remains confined to the limited, humble territory of an exclusively emotive art, since it is a fact that through movements alone, without vocal articulation, the signification of ideas, thoughts, and affairs of a truly intellectual character is unachievable.

It is utopian, not to mention a scientific and psychological misconception (that of Valentine de Saint-Pont), to try to raise gesture and physiognomic gymnastics to the high level of mental symbols, to make oneself a prophetess of a 'dance of ideas' in which the movements of the body and the face function as no less than abstract and general ideas. These will never find better expression—that famous support of the mind of Condillac and the philosophes—than in word. Nothing more distinctly separates us from the brute and the savage than the general idea and its most appropriate form: the abstract word.

But perhaps this comparison between an emotional art and an art of ideas is a digression, given that the primary, avowed aim of cinematic representation is to move, not to make one think. And truth be told, crowds are

drawn to that modern arena of movement and silence, to enjoy that *volapuk* without an alphabet, not so much for reasons of money, time, or cultivation, but because of the voluminous emotional and passionate content of the productions.<sup>1</sup> This, sadly, offers an argument that should disillusion us about the possibility of the highly-evolved masses of today accepting the intellectualization of aesthetic forms, the bringing to the theatre of logical themes or the problems of the soul and of society, and the effort to masterfully express them. Words and style are seen as the legacy of decrepit old men. In our stenographic day, the beauty of words is too cerebral and not emotive enough, and has the flaw of lacking promptness, causing hurried artisans and merchants to lose precious hours.

Heartbeats and agitation, not ideas and thoughts, are the objective of the art of tomorrow: the frightening clamour of new music, aphrodisiac tango and...films even more horrifying than those of today.

*'Lotta ad oltranza tra il gesto e la parola'*, *La Stampa* (19 January 1914), p. 2; repr. in Mariano Luigi Patrizi, *Nuovi saggi di estetica e di scienza* (Recanati: Stamperia di Rinaldo Simboli, 1916), pp. 321–327. Translated by Michael Cramer.

## Note

1. [Editors' note. Volapuk was an artificial language, formulated between 1879 and 1880 by the German Catholic priest Johann Martin Schleyer and intended to be used internationally.]

# The Cinematograph in the Field of Mental Illness and Criminality: Notes

*Mario Umberto Masini, Giuseppe Vidoni*

[...] It is certain that among all of today's inventions, the cinematography takes the cake for having the most profound and intense impact on psychic life. Even the influence of the book, which has been a strong force as a vehicle of impression, pales in comparison to the cinema screen, especially because the organs make feelings more lively, more evident, more rapid. After reality, the cinematograph remains the most faithful and effective source of emotions. The optic nerve is the principle entryway and sight tends somehow to overwhelm all the other senses.

Above all, we are interested in studying the effects of the cinematograph in relationship to the pathologies of the mind: one part of the problem is the influence of films on the sexual lives of young people. Certainly, the sexual element lures crowds of adolescents into the theatres in a particular way. As sceptical as you may be in regard to the effectiveness and utility of sexual repression, especially by the way in which it has been preached for some time in Italy, you nevertheless have to recognize the not insignificant damage that sexual emotions are able to produce in young people during the period of adolescence and young adulthood. As much as any attempt to control the sexual tendencies and activities of a man who has reached full maturity seems useless to us, for those who have not yet reached this level of maturity it is useful and worthwhile to avoid and detach from the emotions and practices of sexuality. We consider it unjust and damaging to dictate a law equally for every temperament, since sexual energies are varied in a countless array. But this is not why we believe it is less appropriate to remove adolescents from every sexual stimulus, even if it tends to physically satisfy their appetite.

Normal young people experience a not insignificant harm from repeated sexual stimuli: youthful joy fades and a preoccupation with sex dominates the conscious, leading to depression and distracting them from their daily activities, which makes study and intellectual engagement painful.

For young people who have abnormal and precocious sexual tendencies, the cinematography is especially damaging; following the film, sexual arousal worsens, since the subject matter of the suggestive plot is only augmented by the darkness of the environment, the promiscuity between

the sexes, and the music that accompanies and enlivens the scene.<sup>1</sup> After all, we know that vision is considered the most effective means to bring sensations and sexual stimuli to the forefront and that the eye is the guiding pathway through which passes all of the sensations destined to arouse swelling and awaken sexual desire.

It is therefore necessary to underscore the danger that the cinematograph represents for all adolescents in regards to sexuality: we believe that the best means of prevention is to keep them away from the majority of films without exception. This will be a good prophylactic measure for all of those who have inherited or acquired disorders or diseases of the nervous system.

In fact, it is instructive to note how the cinematograph has recently taken a not insignificant place among the casual causes of nervous and mental disorders. We are able to observe with relative frequency how the relatives of the sick or the sick themselves come to denounce the emotions stirred by the cinematograph as the cause of their disorder, and more than once we have seen cases of convulsions, *pavor nocturnus*, neurotic nystagmus, etc. Our investigations have also confirmed the veracity of the reported cause, and we have also verified that some shocking scenes continue to cause a state of anxiety for a long time and give a potency to some hallucinations and delusional ideas and beliefs.<sup>2</sup>

However, in relation to mental illness, the cinematograph cannot be ascribed the same casual quality that all new things which catch the imagination of the crowd acquire. Someone said that, in certain cases, the cinematograph can provoke psychosis with unique characteristics. We don't have sufficient experience in this regard, but the claims of these authors seem premature to us. There is certainly something distinctive about the symptoms, such as the state of anxiety mentioned above, the intensity of delirious thoughts, the sensory disturbances that draw inspiration, so to speak, from the subject matter of the film's scenes. [Henri] Hoven, among others, recently took up the topic and draws on four case studies. His analysis doesn't require any modification in the conclusions we have come to on the basis of our own personal experience.<sup>3</sup>

Also from a therapeutic point of view, the attempts made in a few countries can only leave us doubtful of the effectiveness of the new method of therapy: indeed, if we must refer to our modest and limited experience, we should affirm that film representations, even with their simple and serene hues, provoke an outburst in some that are mentally ill, which is evident in their psychological symptoms, especially in the sensory field.

But where the influence of cinematographic entertainment reveals itself in the most obvious way is in the field of criminality. By now, the literature

references various cases in which the criminal act is closely related to the film plot. To give an example, [Albert] Hellwig demonstrated, through his analysis of a few cases, that films with very impressive robbery scenes can have such a persistent effect on predisposed individuals, that they are somehow, without realizing it, induced to commit crimes that they otherwise would never have committed.<sup>4</sup> [Francisco de] De Barbéns also remembers cases of deep depravity in which the influence of the cinematographic entertainment was blatant.<sup>5</sup> Semini—to cite yet another author—in a work on ‘Suicide in Switzerland’ assigns—in his turn—the important influence of cinematographic representations in upending a sense of morality.<sup>6</sup> [...]

But instead of expounding on that—based on what we can directly verify, either through a critical analysis of observations made by others or from facts in the newspaper—we can determine all the same, without pretence of absolutism, the various modalities through which the relationship between criminal action and cinematographic plots can be established. They can be summarized in three primary categories:<sup>7</sup>

1. The pathological element appears spontaneously during or right after the film screening and criminal action overtakes and influences the subject’s entire being.
2. The pathological element is the underlying and permanent foundation of the subject, which because of special circumstances, directly influences and augments a natural inclination toward crime.
3. The pathological element is completely lacking and the influence of suggestion and imitation only persists in criminal and amoral subjects.

A few crimes belong to this first category, which have a marked pathological characteristic: their mechanism almost always develops around sensory phenomenon. The primarily visual hallucinations, which are of an intense, clear, and precise quality, mark the beginning of the episode and are a product of an elective action that the cinematograph carries out on the nervous system of those predisposed to sensory disorders. It is evident that the rapid sequence of images on the screen represents a specific kind of stimulus for the sensory centre, provoking the hallucinatory phenomenon in an artificial way.

That fact that we observe in a few of our sick patients the intensification of the hallucinations following cinematographic entertainment is proof of this claim. The hallucinations replay the images seen on the screen, and the protagonist operates in reality by roughly following the action of the storyline, oftentimes under a kind of dangerous agitation of conscience.

These crimes in some ways remind us of epileptic criminality: the action happens in a flash, under the force of a hallucination of an aggressive nature. As we have already mentioned, there is even a disturbance in consciousness, which, however, is always less intense than the epileptic kind, and which disperses with exceeding quickness.

In the second category of criminals, the pathological strand is permanent: individuals with a wretched spirit or an inferior mentality, who are usually constant regulars at the cinematograph, end up suffering an artificial transformation in their state of consciousness; the ephemeral world that unfolds before their eyes weakens their sense of reality and their latent criminal tendencies find fertile ground for their enactment. In this category, there are also some suffering with paranoia whose delirium is predicated on a kind of cinematographic abuse.

The last set entails of all those criminals who use the cinematograph as a source of inspiration and imitation. Juvenile delinquents, for whom the cinematograph oftentimes reveals their criminal destiny and awakens in their consciousness to a tendency toward crime, are the most prominent. The role of the cinematograph in juvenile delinquency is certainly large and one cannot deny its harmful influence. Naturally, this is less easily perceived in the adult criminal, who has already begun a life of crime.

Given the widespread diffusion of cinematographic entertainments and their influence, not only educators and doctors (we should not forget the well-documented diseases that ophthalmologists have brought to our attention) are interested in the issue; it has also caught the attention of legislators who have had to intervene, somewhat willingly and with some degree of effectiveness. But we must honestly recognize that for a bit of time the Italian cinematograph—as [Lino] Ferriani has also noted—has put itself on a good pathway by following the example of England, North America, and especially Switzerland and offering films that are strong proponents of civil education and excellent popular culture.<sup>8</sup> The reason why—incidentally—the government is doing a bad thing by imposing a tax is that although it will certainly give the Treasury meagre resources, it will be detrimental to the impoverished. Given the low cost of a ticket and the short length of the film, the cinematograph constitutes the only entertainment where the child and the labourer are allowed a restorative reverie.<sup>9</sup>

The State should have been involved in all of this, since it has a responsibility to provide educational excellence. Even more, it should understand, as a number of writers (including some illustrious ones like [Gabriele] d'Annunzio) have already demonstrated with scholarly arguments, that

the cinematographic has a powerful ability to instruct the people, to refine their dress, to have them, for example, oppose alcoholism and other vices that generally corrode the lives of the impoverished, who in have not yet been given any educational opportunities.

In regard to the potential effectiveness of repressive laws on cinematographic entertainments, we do not delude ourselves. If there is an insistence on strict repression, in the sense of preventing the sexual excitement that the cinematograph stirs in adolescents, we do not believe, for obvious reasons, that many benefits can be gained by preventive measures. We say this because some are strongly misled about the merits of educational factors, whereas the criminal disposition, even if it was removed from external stimuli, the soul will always find in itself, in its own organic force, a way of carrying out and doing damage. But, the fact remains that, with the exception of some nervous and psychic disorders, the law and education can instead be a beneficial influence, as there would certainly be something to gain from preventive measures (which is clearly implicit in our conclusion stated above) against certain crimes and against corruption that pave the way to habitual criminality. And in this regard, the proof that [Enrico] Ferri provided on the influence of educational factors always comes to mind, which can provide very little in terms of results in converting an evil man of anti-social tendencies to good, but produces great results in the inverse situation, since 'a lack of education and the number of bad examples and corruption has the power to make a man evil, who otherwise, according to his natural tendencies, could have been good or less evil.'

They do not lack these kinds of regulations abroad, and we refer anyone who wants precise knowledge and details to [Albert] Hellwig's work, to the anonymous author at *Civiltà Cattolica* (*Catholic Civilization*), and to [Gaetano] Leto in [Luigi] Lucchini's *Rivista Penale* (*Penal Journal*).<sup>10</sup> [...]

In Italy as well—as we have already seen—something good has been done. The ministerial newsletters of 1907, 1908, and 1910 advising the Prefects on the supervision the movie theatres and regulations in the Luzzatti law against pornography were followed in 1913 by clear rules on the censorship of film and on the workings of that censorship, followed by related guidelines issued in 1914. According to this law, the 'Government of the King is authorized to supervise the production of films, regardless of whether they are produced in Italy or imported from abroad.'

There is much to say on how this supervision came to be carried out in practice, but as an idea, the regulations are certainly excellent and the experience (we hope) will soon benefit from the contributions of educators and doctors, who have today been completely substituted by the officials...

of Public Security. To tell the truth, there are some signs in this direction from the subcommittee in charge of studying juvenile delinquency, but for now we must unfortunately admit that the regulations in effect once again reveal the shortcomings of the laws, which, although inspired by noble goals, have turned out to be incomplete and ineffective when applied since they lack the astute work of those who, more than anyone, are able to insure a reliable result thanks to their experience and knowledge.

The bureaucratic powers exclusively entrusted with this highly delicate work have demonstrated their failure to do their job many times by now. Therefore, we hope that the need for broader participation of individuals with a technical background to draft social laws will make all the more urgent in the minds of the legislator so as to actually yield the most effective preventive measures possible and the suppression of crime.

Excerpts from *'Il cinematografo nel campo delle malattie mentali e della criminalità. Appunti'*, *Archivio di antropologia criminale, psichiatria e medicina legale*, 26, 5–6, 1915; repr. (Turin: Fratelli Bocca, 1915). Translated by Courtney Ritter.

## Notes

1. One measure imposes, in all respects, the strict separation of the sexes in movie theatres. The legal procedures for indecency committed under the cover of darkness multiply every day. The cinematograph is the cultural terrain where all kinds of sexual immorality are unleashed; it constitutes an open door to sexual arousal, even for normal people: by now, the cinematograph had become the modern galley for a crowd of people who find a happenstance reason for an accumulation of erotic expressions that otherwise would not have an outlet; adultery has certainly more frequently been committed since the establishment of movie theatres.
2. *Pavor nocturnus* is a childhood sleep disorder characters by sudden awakening, frequently accompanied by increased heart and breathing rate, muscle stiffness, screaming, excessive sweating, and dilated pupils. Neurotic nystagmus is a condition, which, according to cases of a physiological and pathological nature, manifests itself with oscillating movements, and involuntary movement of the eyes.
3. Hoven, *'Influence du cinématographe, Bulletin de la Société de Médecine Mentale de Belgique*, 174 (June 1914).
4. Albert Hellwig, *Schädliche Suggestivkraft Vorführungen, 'Ärztliche Sachverständigen-Zeitschrift'*, 20/6 (1914) pp. 119–124; *Quaderni di Psichiatria* (1915).



5. De Barbéns, *La moral en la calle, en el cinematògrafo y en el teatro* (Barcelona: Ed Luis Gili, 1914).
6. *Quaderni di Psichiatria* (1914).
7. Given the nature of circumstances, it seems appropriate not to refer to particular histories of the sick, especially considering that some cases will probably be the subject of a separate publication by one of us or our colleagues.
8. Ferriani and Prezzolini wrote, 'The cinematography put into action great ideas and great passion that was destined to take off. It would also be more artistic if the cinematographic studios would have the courage to open the door to attempts that make you think cinematographically, and if young artists were persuaded that art has always been art of one own time, and that if Aristophanes was alive today, he would make "films" for the cinematography and not comedies for the theatre.'
9. 'The maid, the small merchant, the family man, the clerk do not ask', Prezzolini continues to write, 'more than to be entertained, in the original sense of the word, that is, to be taken out of the usual course of their daily lives, closed in a house or in a store. The beneficial result of the cinematograph in these cases is undoubtable; it offers a bit of happiness and titillation, laughter and paradise. In a quarter of an hour of oblivion and dreams, the cinematograph consoles many misfortunes, and I have come to clearly understand how certain minor artists of the cinematograph, removed from many characteristics of the theatre, have come into enormous incomes. It is right that they are well compensated because they have brought so much happiness to so many people.'
10. Albert Hellwig, *Rechtsquellen des öffentlichen Kinematographenrechts* (Mönchengladbach: Volksvereins, 1913); '*Cinematografo e moralità pubblica*', *Civiltà Cattolica* 4 (13 November 1914); Gaetano Leto, *Cinematografi e moralità pubblica* (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice, 1915); 'A proposito di controversie tedesche', *Rivista Penale di dottrina, legislazione e giurisprudenza*, 81/1–2 (January–February 1915), pp. 56–61.

# Cinema and Juvenile Delinquency

*Mario Ponzio*

The same value that is acknowledged today regarding cinema as a didactic tool also demonstrates how much it should be feared as a means of perversion for the minds of the young and susceptible. And, if we turn our minds to reflect on the enormous disproportion that, at present, exists between films on educational subjects and those with supernatural, dramatic, or sensational themes, we come to the unhappy conclusion that, if we were to place on either side of a weighing scale the good and the bad that have been brought about up until now by this wonderful invention, the scale would plummet to the side of the bad.

The Italian legislator is not the last to have to appreciate intuitively the danger inherent in cinema and attempt to put forward a remedy; but censorship, which the State exercises, does not achieve the efficacy needed to render it innocuous; thus, it is necessary to repeat the cry of alarm again from time to time, repeating with the eloquence of previous cases the reasons for the social damage. I think it would be appropriate if the journals dedicated to corrective pedagogy periodically published the criminal acts committed by juveniles that have some connection with films. The usual pattern involves crimes which show, by the form they take or by certain details in the way they are carried out, the boggling influence of film viewing, though this may indeed have been clearly revealed in the results from the minutes of the trial. It often emerges from the latter how assiduously the young delinquents frequent entertainment of this kind, and have even in some cases taken part as extras in the occasional drama during the filming process.

The war has come and had the effect of distracting general attention from the reports of the courts, among which it is no particular challenge for the onlooker to pick out the crimes which are of interest here. I recall in the prewar period having already seen a few of such cases collected by the Belgian judge [Raymond] De Ryckère. One of these referred to two sixteen-year-olds who, influenced by films they had seen, had left their homes, disguised and armed themselves with daggers and pistols, and set themselves up as brigands, accosting the passers-by on country roads.

Another case, which appeared some time ago in *The Times*, involved a much more serious crime committed by a fifteen-year-old boy: and it clearly emerged from the way in which it had been carried out, the way in

which the accused defended himself and the witnesses' testimonies, that the idea had been taken from films in the cinema, where the boy spent a lot of his spare time. The young cinema-goer had attempted to withdraw some money from the drawer in a desk in his father's house, but on being gripped by the fear that he might have been seen by his little step-brother, he blindfolded him, tied him up and stabbed him to death with a knife. He fled from home, leaving a brief letter for his father in which he tried to justify his act, stating that he had behaved impulsively in a fit of madness; along with a number of other circumstances the letter only exacerbated the boy's position in the eyes of those who has to judge him.

In the near future, I intend to carry out a detailed analysis of some of these crimes elsewhere, stimulated by images seen in cinema, which we must regretfully assume will multiply in frequency, given the increased number of films based on criminal adventures, the spreading phenomenon of this kind of popular entertainment, and the continual improvements in technology for the cinema. Here it is sufficient to elucidate a few observations of a general nature.

It is true that censorship can curb within certain limits the freedom with which film themes are treated, but there must be considerable doubt that it can do much more than it has done till now, while the creators of cinema are constantly increasing their knowledge of the shortcuts for getting round the censor's scissors.

A film, when it is not of an educational task, must be of a distinctly emotive character if it is to keep a hold on the interest of the mass audience. It illustrates facts, rather than thoughts; and no fact excites our emotiveness more than one of passion and crime. We might be inclined to think at first that there can be no danger of social damage, considering that those who conceive the plots of films usually build up the drama so that the delinquent, who has had the upper hand for the main part of the drama and triumphed over the good, is always punished in the end. This is the conclusion that the censor realistically requires if he is to shut an eye about the earlier scenes in the action, and it is the one that most satisfies the audience. With this conclusion, the majority of films could be considered educational. Yet, this is not the case, for several reasons which I shall now point out.

Most of us have been to the cinema many times by now. Well, let the reader try to reconstruct the individual plots. Perhaps he will manage for a few; for most of them, no; what will come to mind instead in some cases will be a chaos of scenes with no connection between them. In other cases, it will become evident that these remembered scenes have undergone a special new ordering according to our own particular tendencies or interests. I

believe it can be considered a certainty that a minimal number of film plots are remembered in their entirety. The ones we recall are usually the most recent, or those from further in the past with special features that have caused them to escape the associative fusion which generally happens to our mnemonic images.

These examples of fully-remembered feature plots are like islands, far apart in the ocean of the images we store up, continuously transforming in permutations. It is true that cases are put forward that describe an immediate influence on an individual of a single film viewing, but these cases are very rare and happen only, in my opinion, where the percipient has a very specific constitution. [Albert] Hellwig, for example, in one of his studies on the effects of cinema refers to a boy's killing, that seems, with all the appearance of truth, to have been caused by the immediate effects of viewing a film that was being shown during the same period in the village where the crime took place.<sup>1</sup> Boath Parkington [*sic*], an English novelist, in a short story published in the January 1914 edition of *Nash's Magazine* with the title 'A Boy in the Air', illustrates with extraordinary realism the influence of a film, telling the odyssey of a man who has turned to alcohol, on a boy with a vivid constructive imagination.<sup>2</sup> To justify his absence from home for several hours and his evident lack of concentration at school, the boy introduced the events from film into his invented excuses, converting his uncle into a dangerous alcoholic in his story. This kind of fantastic pseudology is not by any means rare in children, and the story is so well constructed that I would not be surprised if it were a true story. Some time ago, in fact, a distinguished teacher in a special class for mentally deficient children in a large primary school told me how the children, under the influence of cinema, are capable of giving an impression of truthfulness, constructing and conveying complete falsehoods, which sometimes are genuinely dangerous for the others. In this way, she told me, some of the infants in her class managed on one occasion to take in a supply teacher, making her believe with all the precise detail that the mother of one of the pupils had been killed with a hammer, and that her body was lying hidden in some suburban green. The alarmed supply teacher passed this on to the regular teacher who, knowing the class as she did, soon figured out that the story was unfounded in every way and identified who was guilty of telling lies.

Generally speaking, however, I believe that the worst danger from cinema does not usually stem from the memory of particular representations, but from the frequency of habit in going to see this form of entertainment, as it leads to accumulating in the mind the disconnected traces of a multitude of

films. Given how easily one loses the exact reference in space and time for the scenes one remembers from films, these become associated with other memories and happenings, some fictional but others real. This implies that the borderline between cinema fiction and reality has become tenuous and tricks of the memory can be repeatedly observed, such as those described by Sully, among others, in his memorable book on the delusions of sense and spirit.<sup>3</sup>

He wrote,

Avid fiction readers will notice that they occasionally confuse what they recall from some passage in a novel with the traces left in their memory by a real event. The name of a person, a notable phrase, or some piece of news may seem familiar, and pop up like an impression from the past, because of its slight similarity to some analogous detail in the work of their favourite author. Furthermore, the written or verbal accounts of other peoples' adventures, if they catch our attention deeply or excite our imagination into reliving the described events, can easily start to build up an illusionary memory.

Young people, accustomed to absorbing avidly with their vigorous and devouring imaginations whatever is said or read to them, are particularly susceptible to this kind of mistake. But this is not the end of it; when they grow up and their own childhood memories have lost their sharpness, to the extent that they are reduced to a few fragments remaining from a dispersed past, it is almost guaranteed that the images that they have been able to retain of this kind of story will take the form of memories. And thus, I have often been surprised to find myself believing the illusion that I had actually visited the Great Exhibition in 1851; the reason for this stems from my recollection of the description my friends gave me and their enthusiasm about their visit to London. It may be added that repetition of the act of imagining tends to reinforce the belief even more, to the point of its assuming the form of a real memory.

The psychological mechanism of this fusion of reality and fantasy, and this adoption of others people's material as our own, can be explained in those facts of assimilation and associative complication of a fairly basic nature which happen during the viewing of a film. I have had occasion to describe them in another of my publications, where I think I showed in a general way that our whole complex sensorial organism contributes to an effective representational process, even if linked to a single, given area of

the senses. Even secondary factors participate from a considerable distance towards visual representation and contribute to this integration through association despite the extreme limitations of consciousness. Others have confirmed the importance of my observations, where, on the one hand, they demonstrate the evocative force of cinema and the social danger of certain films, and on the other, they show the efficacy that can be achieved using cinema as a didactic means.<sup>4</sup>

When the complete plot of a film has disappeared, the memory that remains becomes more personal: the facts we learned at school become separate from the memory of the time, place, and way in which we learned them, and this also happens with the beneficial or damaging knowledge we glean from cinema. Many films seem to pass through us without leaving a trace; yet we see them arise when least expected at some moment in our lives.

Two minor, personal experiences of my own illustrate this point. I had watched a film a while ago during which a burglar entered a house by breaking a window. My attention was caught by the way in which the burglar had broken the glass without making any noise. The scene only lasted an instant, but I was able to glimpse that the burglar held a glasscutter in one hand and a shapeless mass in the other, which he applied to the glass and then cut round it with the diamond knife. All this had completely gone from my mind until a few weeks ago when, having confiscated from my nephew a large piece of soft tar on the suspicion that he intended to make fun of one of his classmates. I was about to throw it out of the window: as I approached the glass I saw that the tar stuck to it strongly. The memory of the burglar came back to me, and I completed my film experience. Perhaps for some other spectator this would not have been a completely unfruitful piece of knowledge!

And again: a few days ago, a letter was left for me at home which had been taxed because it lacked a stamp. Now, while I was on the point of opening it, I reflected on the idea of rejecting it, and my mind was taken back to the image of a clerk in a scene of a film who fraudulently opened a letter by holding it in the steam of a pan of boiling water. The same clerk will certainly have been discovered and punished in the subsequent scenes of the film! But what does that ending matter, if all I remember in that precise moment is the illegal method he was using with impunity to open a sealed letter?

Each one of us has learned in this way, maybe with admiration, the various tricks of burglars or smugglers; how to saw through prison bars using the spring from a clock, how to take the imprint of a lock using wax, the precaution of using gloves to avoid leaving fingerprints and so many

other things that I prefer not to mention. Now, if in normal adults these fragments of films are already capable of leaving traces which might amount to criminal tendencies or actions, their effect must be increased out of proportion in children, for whom the concept of right and wrong is not yet completely clear or fully defined.

I would like to point out that, in this brief article, I am only dealing with a part of the damage that cinema may cause in young people; I therefore do not breach the issues of loss of health, which can develop in neurotic children as an effect of film viewing. The situation in this field is revealed very thoroughly by d'Abundo in the *Rivista italiana di Neuropatologia (Italian Review of Neuropathy)* from 1911, with many examples of cases, and he recalls

having been consulted many times about young patients of between seven and ten years old, who displayed markedly nervous behaviour after having seen tragic or fantastic scenes in the cinema. These symptoms consisted of fits of fright at night, with real hallucinations, normally visual, so that they leaped in terror from their beds seized by unspeakable fright, and took refuge in their parents' bed.

In the face of dangers threatening the young through the effects of cinema, there can be only one aim: that of limiting as much as possible how frequently they go to the local cinemas. In Dusseldorf, a commission for cinema reform carried out a statistical research some years ago on the frequency with which young people from the central neighbourhoods of the city go to the cinema. It emerged that out of 30,886 children from the age of six to fourteen, 18,292 (59 per cent) in the course of a year had been to the cinema once; 11,242 (34.5 per cent) had been several times during the same period; 2438 once a month; 1175 once a week; 57 every day; 2181 children had been to over 7400 evening film shows, despite the fact that in Dusseldorf there is a regulation that certain films thought to be undermining for children's education should not be shown before eight o'clock.

Statistical surveys based on the same criteria in other German cities gave results which largely coincided with these; we would probably obtain analogous data in many Italian cities.

Having identified not only risk of damage, but actual damage, produced by cinema-going, I would like briefly to refer to the means that might be employed to keep children away from the cinema: I can see no better solution than launching an initiative to establish cinemas specifically for the young. It could be an appropriate field for private enterprise. The latter

would tend to be provident, and it could well be that such an enterprise would even be blessed with economic success! The young should not be oppressed in special cinemas with programmes of exclusively educational films, or too serious, but should be encouraged to laugh—a healthy, honest kind of laughter. In forming judgement on the merits of a work of film, it is essential to focus attention not only on the ending, but also on the single scenes of the unfolding plot. It would not perhaps be difficult to involve the collaboration of the Italian cinema companies towards this aim, and consequently develop a rich repertory of circulating educational films, with continual renewal.

Until this intention is fulfilled, teachers should not tire of warning parents about the damage which films can cause in the moral health of their children. In this way, we may avoid witnessing parents unconsciously accompanying their young children to public lessons of corruption! For their part, the legislators must find a way to intensify controls imposed on movie theatres, by prohibiting access for unaccompanied youngsters or changing screening schedules in a way so that children are permitted only a few days a week, to watch special programs made for them.

*'Cinematografo e delinquenza giovanile', Vita e pensiero, 9/66 (20 June 1919).*  
Translated by National Museum of Cinema, Turin.

## Notes

1. [Editors' note. Albert Hellwig (1880–1950) was a German jurist, criminologist, and journalist who was the most influential theorist of the causal link between watching cinema and criminal behaviour, particularly among the young.]
2. [Editors' note. The author is referring to the American writer, Both Tarkington, whose story was published in the October 1913 edition of *Cosmopolitan Magazine*.]
3. [Editors' note. See Sully, *Illusions*.]
4. I refer those readers who would like to read my observations on the subject to the article which appeared in *Atti dell'Accademia delle Scienze di Torino* ('Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences in Turin') under the title, '*Di alcune osservazioni psicologiche fatte durante rappresentazioni cinematografiche*' ('Some Psychological Observations Made during Film Screenings'). In addition, I can briefly outline two recent cases of an associative complication I have observed. One is a case of an auditory issue. When someone in the film *Il prezzo del riscatto* (*The Cost of Ransom*) threw himself into the water,



I believed I heard his shout. The shout was also heard by a person next to me, so together we partially watched the next screening of the film to figure out the cause of the phenomenon: seeing the scene again we found there was no according acoustic element. Most likely it had been provoked the first time by a noise of some other kind in the cinema and fused by us with the images projected on the screen. In the second case, the complication involved the sense of smell. At one point while watching one evening the Ambrosio Company's interesting, 1913 patriotic film *La lampada della nonna* (*Grandmother's Lamp*), the grandmother of the film's title lights the lamp on the church tower to warn our soldiers that the Austrian troops were leaving the village. I had the sudden sensation of the characteristic smell of an oil lamp. Thinking about this afterwards I realised that I had been resting my cheek on my left hand at the time, and that my fingers smelt of oil, having handled the light on my bicycle a little earlier on my way home. It is strange that until that moment I had not noticed the smell, but did so only when I could associate it with the lamp on the screen.]

## Section 6



# The Aesthetic Side

*Silvio Alovio and Luca Mazzei*

Early film theories approach cinema holistically, not just as an aesthetic phenomenon. However, it's also true that the question of whether or not film was an art or how it could become one emerged almost immediately. These discussions were carried out in a number of different contexts throughout the 1920s, not just within the aesthetic debates. For those interested in cinema as a pedagogic tool, for example, cinema was an important point of intersection between pedagogy and aesthetics (Orlando and Orestano, both of which contributed to this field, are included in this anthology).<sup>2</sup> For Catholics, cinema was important in the relationship between morality and art.<sup>3</sup> For positivist psychologists, the developmental dynamic that transformed brute sensations into aesthetics feelings was fundamental.<sup>4</sup> Most of all, the diffuse presence of discourses on aesthetics reflect the degree to which art was a fundamental aspect of 'tradition' in Italian cultural history of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. The theoretical context of this cultural history is characterized by a deep and complex intersection of different philosophical, scientific, artistic, and literary currents, all of which are interested, despite their different methods and objectives, in the question of art. The texts gathered in this section, even if they do not fully reflect the broadness of Italian discussions on cinema and aesthetics, nonetheless demonstrate the extensive influence this period's discourses had in defining the principal terms of the debate.

## The Positivist Position

Positivism was hegemonic in Italian culture between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and was a major influence on Corrado Ricci's 1898 essay, *Problemi d'arte. L'espressione e il movimento nella scultura* ('Problems of Art: Expression and Movement in Sculpture').<sup>5</sup> According to Ricci, everything is subject to scientific laws, even art 'is under the direct laws of nature.'<sup>6</sup> For Ricci, this meant that even photography and cinema had to be analysed as cognitive processes. Therefore, Ricci analysed the temporal dimension of perception, which his contemporary, Henri Bergson, called the 'pure duration' in his 1896 book, *Matière et mémoire (Matter and Memory)*.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the sensations generated by visual stimuli do not manifest themselves as

isolated instances, but rather blend to create a continuous dimension: every single sensation is wholly inseparable from the preceding and succeeding moments. The mind, by gathering this continuous overlap of impressions, operates over the course of time in a selective and hierarchical manner. For example, upon seeing a body in movement, the mind selects only the most regular processes; that is, those most responsive to the aesthetic canon of the classical tradition, forgetting all of the others. Thus, it goes from involuntary sensations to an effective perception, and then to reflection, through the phases that found the basis of aesthetic experience. In a film, the shot does not go through this process: the camera unpredictably extracts an isolated sensation from the temporal flow without arriving at any real perception or reflection.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, according to Ricci, the shot is the anti-aesthetic. Cinema may seem like a step forward because it is based on a series of shots taken together at regular intervals. The movement of the film may, in fact, help the spectator to forget the ugliness of the shot, but it is ready to remerge when the projection gets stuck on a single image because of a technical problem. However, recognizing this meant that cinema stopped short of being art. Cinema gets close to sensation, but it moves at a pace that is much faster than what the human mind needs to produce perception, and it seems to block any possibility of conceptual and aesthetic realization (i.e. 'the reflection'). The cinema spectator does not have enough time to organize sensation. So, while cinema offers a way to perfectly reconstruct movement, it shows itself to be a defective system, unable to offer aesthetic guarantees.

The distinction between sensation, perception, and conceptual reflection proposed by Ricci is typical of positivist experimental psychology, which was highly active in Italy throughout the first twenty years of the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> Within this epistemological context, cinema is seen—like Ricci's theoretical perspective—as an experiment so completely immersed in the rapid vortex of sensation that it precludes any aesthetic reflection.<sup>10</sup> In some of the psychological and aesthetic discourses of the era, the possibility of cinematic aesthetics eventually becoming legitimized seemed almost to depend on the ability of the new medium to overcome the sense of immediacy that defined modern life. Not everyone was convinced that cinema would be able to transform the flow of sensations into controlled and contemplative manner, open to aesthetic sentiment. For example, according to Mariano Luigi Patrizi (who was not only a psychophysicist but also an art critic and a researcher in aesthetics), the cinematic experience was based on 'palpitations and shock', or physiological reactions and raw emotion.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, according to him, cinema can never completely and

fully be art. In 1922, Adelchi Baratono, the first experimental psychologist and philosopher, offered a perspective that was in diametric opposition. According to Baratono, artistic creation enables—even in the case of cinema—sensation to be aestheticized and tempered. Art mediates sensation so that it goes beyond physiological immediacy to orientate itself toward the beautiful.<sup>12</sup>

### Late Impressionist Scenes

Even more different is the thought of Sebastiano Arturo Luciani, who, in the 1910s and post-World War One period, was perhaps the most prolific Italian theorist of cinema, if not the most cited by his contemporaries. Already in a 1913 article entitled *'Il cinematografo e l'arte'* ('The Cinema and Art'), Luciani considers cinema not an art, but entertainment, and he compares it to pantomime, an ancient type of performance that Luciani considered to be in a state of decline.<sup>13</sup> Yet, even though Luciani denies film the validity of being an art, he argued that cinema had strong potential. What struck him most was the 'rapid succession of different frames'; in other words, it was that same sense of speed that had attracted Ricci fifteen years earlier, in 1898, and then Canudo, in 1908.<sup>14</sup> In international scientific literature of the early twentieth century, there was a widespread belief that the quick succession of cinematographic images easily surpassed the ability of the mind to capture visual and narrative information. However, according to Luciani, if this characteristic is exploited in an intelligent way, the filmmaker will be able to 'realize a kind of impressionistic scene.'<sup>15</sup> Three years later, in an article entitled *'Impressionismo scenico'* ('Scenic Impressionism'), which has been republished in this anthology, Luciani clarifies the issue.<sup>16</sup> What interests him are not films 'from reality', but fiction films, or what we could call films of 'invention'. At the heart of his discussion is the possibility that the film, with its fluidity and almost musical rhythm, could forever change the dramatic theatre, since it could potentially extend the work already started by a few innovative theatrical experiments that had, notably, already integrated painting and music. Starting in 1917, after meeting Gordon Craig in Florence (with whom he kept up an interesting correspondence), Luciani began to conceive of cinema as a way to renew theatrical performance.<sup>17</sup>

The reflections on cinema carried out by the Futurists, which we will discuss shortly, brought Luciani to new reflections on the role of cinema and dynamism itself.<sup>18</sup> Gradually, Luciani became convinced that cinema could even be superior to theatre: a position that was exceedingly rare in

the far-reaching and intense Italian debate on the relationship between cinema and theatre in the early years of the twentieth century.<sup>19</sup> Luciani's perspective was therefore teleological: according to his hypothesis, cinema was not only destined to become an art, but a more perfect art. It is easy to see why in *Poetica del cinematografo* ('The Poetics of Cinema') and his successive article on *Impressionismo scenico*, Luciani moved the discussion from evaluative judgements (is it possible to say that cinema is an art?) to normative judgements ('according to what logic can cinema become an art?').<sup>20</sup>

### The Encounter with Neo-idealism: The Futurists and Gramsci

Passionately anti-positivist, the Futurists drew their inspiration from different sources. They shared with Henri Bergson the idea of dynamism as a fundamental element of reality. Drawing on the fringes of European philosophical Irrationalism, they became interested in the demiurgic relationship of the artist with the world.<sup>21</sup> Their relationship to Impressionism, however, was more problematic. Umberto Boccioni considered the final iterations of this movement as one of the most important antecedents to Futurism.<sup>22</sup> By contrast, Carlo Carrà maintained that the continued existence of the Impressionist tradition in Italian culture was Futurism's greatest enemy.<sup>23</sup> In this light, the cinema initially appeared to the Futurist as one of the many turbulent and dynamic phenomenon emerging as a result of modernity. To use the terminology that was in vogue in the period, it was about a distinction between the social concept of 'taste' (in their case, the awareness with which you perceive modern life) and the aesthetics of the 'beautiful' (meaning classical art). This did seem like negative development. As conceived by the Futurists, social (and political) dimensions had an enormous importance on the project of modernization, much more so than Art in and of itself, which, for that matter, had been decisively repudiated, at least when art was defined traditionally in terms of 'beauty.'<sup>24</sup> It is no coincidence that in 1912, Boccioni added cinema to a list that included 'cabarets, the gramophone, lighted signs, mechanical architecture, night life, the life of stones and crystals, occultism, magnetism, velocity.'<sup>25</sup> In his 1916 *Pittura e scultura futuriste. Dinamismo plastico* ('Futurist Painting and Sculpture: Plastic Dynamism'), Boccioni is attracted to newsreels, which he adds to a new and more provocative series, ranging from 'the popular American dance, known as the Cake-Walk' to sparkling 'English water closets,' all of which were, according to Boccioni, valuable tools with which to fight the

'old aesthetic.'<sup>26</sup> The painter Carlo Carrà, in two essays from 1914 and 1915, entitled '*Cineamore*' ('Cine-love') and '*Parole in libertà*' ('Words in Freedom'), recounts a sexual encounter in the darkness of a movie theatre, re-reading the cinema experience in terms of a melange of sounds, noise, and odours, which are not only present during the show, but are also capable of defining it.<sup>27</sup> This attention to the medium as a social phenomenon of modernity appears in the very first text in which the Futurists confront the question of cinema as an art, the September 1916 manifesto, '*La Cinematografia futurista*' ('The Futurist Cinema').<sup>28</sup> In it, cinema is seen, above all, as a disruptive phenomenon, constantly threatened by artistic tradition. According to the Futurists, the greatest danger comes from a forced analogy with theatre. To understand cinema as a form of 'theatre without words' (which was the classical definition in use by the Symbolists) was to assign it a 'refined' nature that was extraneous to it. In response to this anachronistic interpretation, the Futurists conceptualized cinema as a 'medium of expression', which was more connected to literary-pictorial communicative forms than to theatre. In particular, the visual-literary sign for the Futurists was not only like an analogon of the real, but was also part of reality itself. To their mind, the cinema was therefore no longer 'a spiritual world, reduced to the bare bones, made with ethereal and angelic material,' as Giovanni Papini described it, but instead was indivisible from the spiritual, an instrument with which to open up matter in order to touch the spirit, breaking down and reconstructing the world according to the paradigm of their own 'marvellous whims.'<sup>29</sup>

Antonio Gramsci's 1916 '*Teatro e cinematografo*' (*Theatre and Cinema*) was closer to the neo-idealist aesthetics of Benedetto Croce.<sup>30</sup> The socialist and future founder of the Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian Communist Party) was then theatre critic at *Avanti!*, and had not yet written the innovative theoretical construct for which he became famous with the posthumous publication of the *Quaderni del carcere* (*Prison Notebooks*) at the end of the Second World War.<sup>31</sup> In his article, he reaffirms the need, expressed in Crocean aesthetics, to distinguish between art and non-art. Although cinema had an important social function by providing cheap entertainment and a guaranteed distraction for the worker, it did not have the quality of art because of its intrinsic characteristics. First, its exaggerated acting made cinema seem like puppet theatre. At the same time, it allows theatre to concentrate on the development of psychological drama, which is its true function and fundamental to its growth. In this sense, cinema 'leads the theatre back to its true nature.' The second reason is that cinema like second-rate theatre, only produces an illusion of reality, without being able to capture the exemplarity of individual existences. The third reason, which



Gramsci clearly explains in his text on the actress Lyda Borelli, is that cinema expresses a sensuality and a primitive and seductive sexuality that contradicts the way in which these qualities have been culturally developed.<sup>32</sup> With these three reasons, Gramsci distances himself from cinema and at the same time demonstrates that he understands its basic characteristics.

## The Symbolist Hypothesis

Symbolism's influence was long and wide-ranging, and continued to be very influential in Italy and France into the twentieth century. Until the end of the 1920s, there was an extremely heterogeneous group of artists and philosophers that made reference to the movement, even if the authors were only weakly connected. One of them was Ricciotto Canudo, who, by the time he published '*Trionfo del cinematografo*' (*Triumph of Cinema*) in 1908, had already been living in Paris for a number of years, where the influence of Symbolism was stronger.<sup>33</sup> There was also Fausto Maria Martini, Enrico Thovez, who was known primarily for his art criticism, and finally and most famously, Gabriele d'Annunzio, who was perhaps the most famous writer and intellectual in Italy at the time.<sup>34</sup> These four authors warned that cinema demanded new expressive forms and evaluative criteria for modern aesthetics; at the same time, they maintain a trans-historical concept of art, which found points of reference in the past. They legitimized cinema as an art through examples that ranged from Greco-Roman Classicism to more contemporary artistic experimentations (such as those by Léon Bakst, Sergej Djagilev, and Gordon Craig). In these cases, the future was seen as a new golden age in which the cinema, in the hands of the demiurge, would bring back the splendour of art of the past (Canudo) or, if there was no artistic inspiration, a new period of decline in which cinema would become the primary symbol of cultural decay (Thovez, Martini).

Symbolism's influence on reflections about the cinema became stronger, beginning in 1916, the exact moment when an era of artistic film journals started in Italy. These journals, although they are generalist publications, use Symbolist aesthetics as their hallmark. Figures with extensive contact with cinema, such as Lucio d'Ambra, Goffredo Bellonci, Anton Giulio Bragaglia, Emanuele Toddi, intervene. At the centre of the debate was the relationship between nature (or reality) and art, which, according to these writings, meant a dialectic between habit and innovation, the imitation of reality and expressive interpretation, classicism, and modernity.<sup>35</sup> One of the characteristics of Symbolism is the love for 'the unfinished, the unspoken, the indefinite—

the indefinable.<sup>36</sup> As a result of these discussions, cinema was interpreted as an ideal, but incomplete art, a bit like, as Canudo had already imagined, projecting on the screen a future that has only been imagined.<sup>37</sup> These themes also emerge in Lucio d'Ambra's article, 'My Views on the Cinematograph', which presents the aesthetics of cinema in terms of a duality. On the one hand, cinema's influence will be absolute and totalizing, probably destined to change the entire aesthetic panorama. On the other hand, it would be defined more by the way in which it calls attention to the limits of previous forms of art than by its own autonomous and original contributions.

Lucio d'Ambra and Emanuele Toddi, who were connected to Symbolist aesthetics, reflected on the role of the frame in particular, which they considered a poetic fragment of the real. The concept of the fragment is fundamental to Symbolist theory: it is only through the completely torn up fragment that the poet can depict the larger reality that he so desperately craves. In January 1915, d'Ambra reviewed what was the most important war film in Italy at that time, *Il sopravvissuto* (*The Survivor*) by Augusto Genina, writing that

Happily, Augusto Genina figured out a way to take the immense context of the war in all of its limitlessness, immediacy, and intensity and break into small pieces, glimpses, particularities, visions of light and shadow, the finished and indefinite, which disappear immediately after they appear, which do not ever pretend to give a complete view, but always suggests that there is more than what appears on the screen, and which overlap, intersect, reverberate, integrate, and add to the unanimity of the representation, through which the small things give the impression of being large, in which the framed image of the screen expresses the immensity of the battlefield.<sup>38</sup>

The same theoretical framework drives the essay by Toddi entitled '*Retangolo Film (25x19)*' ('Rectangle Film (25 x 19)'), which operates between concepts of *gestalt* and magical-esoteric influences. Toddi was interested in the way in which cinema is able to dispel any tension in the spectator by the very way in which it presents itself as the art of the fragment. Anticipating Eisenstein's famous reflections by twelve years, Toddi imagines an original use for the frame.<sup>39</sup> Toddi argues that the 'perimeter' given to a scene, even though it limits the visual field, opens up enormous expressive possibilities. While the viewer wants to go beyond the limits of the visual field to have a sort of absolute vision, the artificial limits of the frame can create the sensation of unlimited space. To the great surprise of the viewer, the camera, which does all it can to render the image more 'defined', instead helps to reveal the infinite.

Even Anton Giulio Bragaglia saw the revelatory potentials of cinema, but in terms different than those proposed by Toddi. In his 1916 text, *'L'arcoscenico del mio cinematografo'* ('The Proscenium Arch of My Cinema'), he argues that cinema, in order to render man's inner ideals visible, must 'transform reality' instead of reproducing it. 'Our aesthetic,' he writes, 'must be our reality.' In order to realize this goal, Bragaglia argued that the role of set design is key, since it is the only way to renew the evocative power that the grand cathedrals once had. To demonstrate this last point, Bragaglia published an image from the film *Thais* alongside his text. The film, which he had just made, featured the experimental set design of Enrico Prampolini, which was more Symbolist than Futurist.

Another central aspect Symbolist imagery, metamorphosis, it is at the core of Goffredo Bellonci's 1916 essay.<sup>40</sup> Just like Ricci, Canudo, Luciani and many other authors, Bellonci thought that the dynamism of moving image makes metamorphosis the very essence of cinema. The argument was not entirely new, and—among the others—even Gabriele d'Annunzio argued a partially analogous concept in 1914, when he suggested making a film based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.<sup>41</sup> Bellonci, however, expanded the argument in an original way. To him, cinema was an extraordinary succession of appearances and disappearances, an incessant, rhythmic transfiguration of gestures, forms, and physiognomy. The comedic film was better than the film of a movie star because the kinetic transformations of the former is more artistic than the static nature of the latter. Films of movie stars were not truly films because they relied on statuesque poses of the actors (Gotthold Ephraim-Lessing's 'pregnant moment'), while the film must be like a 'river that flows without stopping or forming an eddy.'<sup>42</sup> Even more radical is the essay written four years later by art critic Michele Biancale. He argued that cinema, even before it transforms objects, faces, or narrative relations, is a transformation of temporal moments, and above all, pure light. Biancale's text is provocative because he establishes the artistry of cinema on its abstraction of form. In fact, the referential and narrative contents of the images in a film are, according to Biancale, less important for its aesthetic legitimization than the 'rapid occurrence of moments that are and then are no longer' and the incessant dynamism of 'pure, luminous impressions.'

## Conclusion

From 1896 until 1919, cinema seemed like a battleground and, at times, a meeting point between the many aesthetic tendencies inspired by the

primary cultural currents of the twentieth century. The way in which aesthetic reflections played out, as we already mentioned in the opening, is rather different than what happened in the following decades. The dominant trends investigating cinematic aesthetics were spread across different disciplinary contexts. But that does not mean that the theoretical context was disorganized or dispersed. Instead, the plurality and the diffusion of aesthetic discourses on cinema can be condensed into a few convergent themes. For example, cinema's lack of words is criticized by Gramsci, but also by the poet and journalist, Fausto Maria Martini (who was part of the late Symbolist perspective) and the positivist psychologist Mariano Luigi Patrizi (who came from evolutionary science). The exact same crossover happens with regards to the centrality of gesture (Gramsci, Bragaglia, Patrizi), the distinction between the arts in terms of their mediality (d'Ambra, Luciani, Canudo), cinema's sense of dynamism (Ricci, Bellonci, Luciani, the Futurists), and the relationship between the body and objects (Bragaglia, the Futurists, Luciani).

The publication of Luciani's *Il cinematografo. Verso una nuova arte* ('Cinema: Towards a New Art') in 1920, which gathered many of the author's writings on cinema published between 1916 and 1919, helped create a gradual change in paradigm.<sup>43</sup> If the previous period was defined by writings diffused across different disciplines, a specialized aesthetic theoretical discourse began to emerge, which is today even more intense and institutionalized. This phase, documented in artistic film journals, went from the first signs of the production crisis in Italian cinema until 1923 when it was almost completely dissolved. The following ten years were defined by the emergence of a cinephilic culture, even in Italy. Cultural experiences, such as the cine-clubs founded by Antonello Gerbi in Milan, or like the journals founded by Alessandro Blasetti, including *Il Mondo a lo schermo* (*The World on Screen*), *Lo Schermo* (*The Screen*), *Cinematografo* (*Cinema*), all of which were formed after 1926, characterized a period, driven by new theoretical venues and an almost absolute lack of Italian films. For the history of Italian theory, a new era began.

## Notes

1. This essay was discussed, planned, and organized collectively by the two authors. Silvio Alovio wrote the first, second, and fifth sections; Luca Mazzei wrote the third, fourth and sixth sections.
2. See contributions by Orlando and Orestano, included in this anthology

3. 'Cinematografo e moralità pubblica', pp. 421–440.
4. See Patrizi, 'Ongoing Battle', included in this anthology; Baratonno, 'Maledizione del cinematografo', p. 3.
5. Ricci, 'Problems of art', included in this anthology.
6. Ricci, 'Problems of art', p. 59, this passage of the essay is not included in this anthology.
7. Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*.
8. Bergson, *Évolution créatrice*. It could be said that the camera gathers *any* moment instead of the *pregnant* moment, which, for Lessing (as cited by Ricci), is a condition of aesthetic perception. Also see Lessing, *Laokoon oder über die Grenzen*.
9. Also see the Introduction to Section 5.
10. Berton, *Dialectique entre image*.
11. Patrizi, 'Ongoing Battle', included in this anthology.
12. Baratonno, 'Maledizione del cinematografo', p. 3.
13. Luciani, 'Cinematografo e l'arte', pp. 6–8.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 6.; Canudo, 'Triumph of the Cinema', included in this anthology.
15. Luciani, 'Cinematografo e l'arte', p. 6.
16. Luciani, 'Scenic Impressionism', included in this anthology.
17. Attolini, 'Craig e Luciani', pp. 131–150.
18. Luciani, 'Futurismo al cinematografo', pp. 45–46.
19. Luciani, 'Idealità del cinematografo', p. 3. Also see Farassino, 'Dibattito su teatro'; Bernardini, 'Interazioni cineteteatrali'; Angelini, 'Dal teatro muto all'antiteatro'.
20. Luciani, 'The Poetics of Cinema', included in this anthology.
21. Cigliana, *Futurismo esoterico*, pp. 233–234.
22. Boccioni, 'Prefazione al Catalogo', p.14 and *Pittura e scultura futuriste*, p. 118.
23. Carrà, 'Cézanne a noi futuristi' and 'Pittura dei suoni'.
24. Boccioni, *Fondamento plastico*, p. 40.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
26. Boccioni, *Pittura e scultura futuriste*, pp. 87–88.
27. See Carrà, *Tutti gli scritti*, pp. 32, 42–48. *Parole in libertà*, or literally 'words-in-freedom', were Futurist texts that emphasized word play by combining elements of poetry and narrative prose with unconventional grammar, syntax, word choice, and typography.
28. Marinetti *et al.*, 'Manifesto for Futurist Cinematography', included in this anthology.
29. Papini, 'The Philosophy of Cinematograph', included in this anthology.
30. De Castris, *Estetica e politica*.
31. Bellingeri, *Dall'intellettuale al politico*; Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*.
32. Gramsci, 'In principio'.
33. Canudo, 'Triumph of the Cinema', included in this anthology.
34. Crainquebille, 'Art of the Celluloid', included in this anthology; Martini, 'Death of the Word', included in this anthology; d'Annunzio, 'Cinematografo come strumento', pp. 115–122.

35. Porzia, *'Decima Musa'*, pp. 1–2.
36. d'Acquara and d'Ambra, *'Inchiesta tra gli scrittori'*.
37. Canudo, 'Triumph of the Cinema', included in this anthology.
38. D'Ambra, *'Sopravvissuto al Modernissimo'*, p. 3.
39. Ejzenštejn, 'Dynamic Square', pp. 184–194.
40. Bellonci, 'Aesthetics of Cinema' and 'Manifesto for a Cinematic Revolution', both included in this anthology.
41. Mazzei, *'Amor de terra loindana'*, pp. 427–438; d'Annunzio, *'Cinematografo come strumento'*, pp. 115–122
42. Bellonci, *'Manifesto per una rivoluzione'*, p. 293.
43. Luciani, *Verso una nuova arte*.

# Problems of Art: Expression and Movement in Sculpture

*Corrado Ricci*

Photography, and especially instantaneous photography, are far from being the least of the odd elements that contribute today to promoting, but also disturbing, artistic sense. Insofar as photography can be and actually is damaging, it's now time to speak about it.

There is no longer any doubt that the eye and the mind of certain artists have been influenced by all those strange and never before seen poses that human and animal bodies take in motion. Designers and painters (mostly French) are already overdoing it; sculptors, who are more dependent on matter, nevertheless do not pull back from representing certain movements which they would never have attempted in the past. For example, many equestrian monuments being put on display now show the horse falling to the ground.

Such pathetic ambition can hardly be justified when compared to the reality that we see with the click of the camera; it is far from being the reality that the human eye, and as a consequence, the eye of the artist sees.

We must not forget that every impression leaves a certain and lasting mark on the retina. During that permanence, more and more impressions are superimposed (as long as the eye contemplates them), supporting each another and attuning themselves into a continuity from which the major, and inevitably most regular actions most responsive to statics, emerge.

Instantaneous photography, on the other hand, captures an isolated act that has neither a before nor an after. All of us have seen the cinematograph. The speed with which each scene happens is such that the spectator is prevented from capturing isolated poses. When once in a Milan theatre, due to a malfunction, a film being projected stopped, spectators saw the figures in such ridiculous poses that they gave themselves over to merriment and a barrage of deafening whistles. In conclusion, what happens to the ear, where harmony and melody develop in a continual fusion, with the persistence of acoustic impressions, also happens to the eye. If you listen to a piece of music while raising and lowering the palms of your hands over your ears, you will hear rapid sounds, but without any musical effect. Often, things seen in intermittent instants are similarly devoid of artistic effects. We should, then, invert Faust's exclamation made in the fleeting moment

of delight—‘Stop, you are beautiful.’ Rather, to the strange, isolated, rapid, fleeting perception of a movement, we are prompted to exclaim: ‘Don’t stop, you are ugly.’ The artist who creates a work that must be looked at over a long period of time must avoid those poses that cannot last, or at least only those poses on which a figure persists for a few minutes.

That is why we should not overlook the other phenomenon, that of time, which separates impression from perception; or rather, the time that the physical impression made by a seen object or by a heard sound takes to become a conscious impression. Moleschott, who attempted to calculate this, realized that it was much slower than what was generally believed.<sup>1</sup> He deduced that even when the distance between the parts of the body was very short, the speed with which the impression became reflection was that of... a freight train. [...]

As you see, my aim is to carry on with my rigid system for judging the facts that can determine artistic impressions. I know full well that the *aesthetes* are of the opinion that I am a pedant who doesn’t know how to read the human *psyche* and who considers art as if it were greenery. But none of this pains me because I am unable to carry art outside the realm of natural phenomena, regardless of which natural phenomenon is the most splendid, the most wonderful.

Everything, even art, is part of the direct forces of nature; and the human brain is nothing other than the means and substance by which it is realized. Just like some kinds of vegetation need a specific terrain to take root or only grow if they are deep down in the sea or on mountain pastures, the plant called *art* will only sprout up or blossom in the substance that forms the human brain. The brain is a honing and idealizing process of luminous and artistic impressions. Hence the iron-clad laws of rhythm and harmony. Just as the harmonic combinations are rigorously fixed, and changing them leads to wrong notes, so too must the plastic combinations be if they are not to provoke disgust.

The methodical and regular elaboration of the old schools are the revelation of this postulate. Goethe once said stupendously that architecture is nothing if not a crystallized harmony. [...]

The conclusions to everything I have said seem to me clear: the aesthetic necessities of sculptors prevent an excess of motion, which also prevents an excess of sentiment. In this way, we go back to the theories of Lessing opposed to those of Winckelmann. The latter, as is well-known, said that the main character of Greek sculpture was its tranquil grandiosity and noble simplicity. So, if we take as an example the *Laocoön and His Sons* sculpture, he said that the expression of its pain had been limited because



the artists had wanted to show a strong and dignified soul in the figure. Winckelmann's misinterpretation did not last long since Lessing, in his important reflections on the limits of the plastic arts in comparison to poetry, stated that [the figures in] *Laocoön and His Sons* do not shout or wiggle around like snakes because the artists understood the reasons of art; they understood, that is, that the excessive motion and agitation of the faces would have diminished the beauty of the figures.

But can today's criteria be strictly those of the Greeks and the Renaissance?—No, not at all.

To be sure, there are permanent laws, but the diversity of needs and the procedures of art demand and produce new formulas. Permanent laws are those that govern the logical stability of the figures and the origin of truth. As a representation, sculpture enjoys but a single moment in space, but since its admirers persist in their contemplation that moment must not be chosen without regard for the possibility of a certain permanence.

*'Problemi d'arte. L'espressione e il movimento nella scultura', Rivista politica e letteraria, 2/1 (January 1898), pp. 48–64. Translated by David Ward.*

## Note

1. [Editors' note. Jakob Moleschott (1822–1893) was a Dutch physician who pioneered the study of the relationship between physiology and psychology. Beginning in 1861, he lived in Italy, teaching in Turin and then in Rome.]

# Scenic Impressionism

*Sebastiano Arturo Luciani*

At the time of the Caesars, a kind of spectacle, which was imported from Alexandria a few years after the battle of Azio, was extraordinarily in vogue in Rome. This kind of spectacle, which slowly replaced classical theatre, and which survived the ruin of pagan society more than any other kind, is *pantomime*; and it consists of the silent representation of a scenic action, in which the expressive gesturing of the actor attempts to take the place of words. The stories of pantomime were always noble and serious, if not tragic. The subjects were taken from the mythic canon known to all peoples or referred at least to classical theatre. And the action, represented by a troupe of mimes, actors, and dancers all at the same time, was explained by songs performed by a chorus and accompanied by orchestral music played on wind and percussion instruments.

From such indications as those passed down to us by writers of that time, it is easy to see the affinity between this kind of spectacle and the *Ballet de cour*, a hybrid form made up of singing, poetry, and dancing, which flourished in France under Louis XIII. But even more than with this last similarity, the analogy is profound with another form of representation, which is very modern: the cinema.

Don't let this comparison seem strange. And don't worry about the different means that are used. The fundamental resemblance persists all the same.

The cinema is in the same position, with respect to modern theatre, that pantomime was with respect to classical tragedy. As we see every day, most plots of modern plays go on to the cinema. And the plots of pantomime, as Lucian attests, only differed from those of tragedy—and this comparison is noteworthy—in that they were more rich and more complex, and that they had countless improvised changes. The action of the pantomime was explained by the songs of the chorus; at the cinema, it is explained instead by the titles inserted between one scene and the next. The same diffusion and popularity of the cinema for us (in our time), never attained by any other kind of spectacle, is comparable only to that attained by pantomime with the Romans. And the fame of certain movie actors, is comparable only to that of Pilades, Cilicia, or Batillus of Alexandria, a freedman of Maecenas. *Multa renascerunt quae jam cecidere...* ('Many words that are used now will be rekindled...')

One must recognize, however, pointing out this return, that the cinema, like pantomime, only represents the dissolution of the theatre of poetry. In other words, that it, like pantomime, is an art of decadence, in so far as the gestures—which by themselves, like a pure dance, can only represent the dynamic side of feeling—attempt instead to invade the borders of poetry by replacing the words.

In the same way that poetry tries to become music, as in the French symbolist movement, or that sculpture, like that of Medardo Rosso, tries to achieve pictorial effects instead of plastic ones, they are also arts of decadence.<sup>2</sup>

Only in a certain sense—and without wanting to—the cinema is superior to pantomime. That is, because the gestures of the actor do not attempt so much to replace the words as much as they naturally accompany the words, which one does not hear but which are nonetheless uttered by the actor.

In the occasional instances when words are absent, the cinema does not lack a phonic element of another kind: because silent viewing is physiologically unbearable. This makes musical accompaniment necessary, even if at the end of the day it has no other virtue than that of satisfying this physiological need. This explains how any sort of music can become tolerable at the cinema, and how even when music is commissioned expressly for this purpose, it always remains a secondary thing.

Rather, music is precisely the element that can revitalize the cinema and can make it become, out of a form which we have called decadence, the ultimate expression of gestural, musical, modern theatre.

For many people, pantomime and gestural theatre are the same thing. In spite of their similarities, the difference between the two forms is fairly substantial. In the first form, music accompanies and tries to follow the gestures of the actor. In the second, it is the music that determines the gestures. The distinction might seem tenuous, but as we were saying, it is substantial. In modern pantomime, the musician writes the music for a libretto that he is trying to follow in all of its details. And in this way he does that which a poet would do if he were trying to put into words an action that has already been conceived scenically in all its details. At the theatre, it is the words, instead, which determine the gestures and the details of the action. And in our case, it is the music which ought to do likewise. Because otherwise a strange phenomenon occurs: the music, which is the most immaterial art, tries to mechanically determine the gestures; and the musician, preoccupied by the action, ends up writing music that is empty and unnatural. This is what happened, for example, in the recent *La leggenda di Giuseppe* (*Legend of Joseph*) by Richard Strauss.

Now, so that the musician doesn't limit himself to imagining the various scenes, or inspiring himself with the general content of each scene, he must give himself over to his own imagination, without any restrictions and without worrying about the details. With regards to the choreographer—who in this case must be a poet, a creator—he must interpret and produce scenically the evocative vision of the music. This is what the Russians did in creating their early *Ballets* from symphonic music; this is what Igor Stravinsky did, who, in his three ballets *Luccello di fuoco* (*The Firebird*), *Petruška* (*Petrouchka*), and *La sagra della primavera* (*The Rites of Spring*), achieved an even greater freedom and emancipation from the choreographic outline.

Having established the kind of spectacle that the cinema should represent, now, we ought to examine the superiority that it offers with respect to the theatre in producing marvellous transformations, and thus fantastical, mythological, and fairy tale-like subjects which would be irreproducible on any stage, no matter how modern. And further elements that make the cinema superior: the characteristic of producing a rapid succession of frames—a fact that creates a sort of scenic impressionism; and finally, the possibility of being able to move the scenery itself.

The sets of modern musical theatre—through an evolution that is analogous to that of the landscape in the field of painting—tends no longer to constitute a decorative element, but rather an essential element of the show. And such an evolution is parallel to that of the play, which, by being sung, becomes purely musical.

In some of the most beautiful and most noted pages of Wagnerian theatre—in the first drama, *Loro del Reno* (*Das Rheingold*), in *La Valchiria* (*The Ride of the Valkyries*), in *Il crepuscolo degli dei* (*Twilight of the Gods*)—it is the music, and no longer the word, which is the essential element of the drama. And the set, not the actor, is the essential visual element. So that if in the first scene of *Das Rheingold* we could not see the Rhine maidens, the greenish transparencies of the water would be enough to represent for us the deep life of the river which we hear flowing in the orchestra. And if, in the scene of the Ride we were not able to see the Valkyries, and we were to listen to the music with a cloudy and flashing sky before us, the chaste and savage virgins would better appear to us '*sovra i nembi natanti, l'erte criniere al cielo*' ('floating above the clouds, their steep manes to heaven').<sup>3</sup> So, these marvellous scenes, which are difficult and always defective at the theatre, become very easy to execute at the cinema. Indeed, one imagines all that could be attained in this field.

But Wagner, who early in these pages of his aforementioned works gave wonderful examples of theatre that we could call musical-scenic, went even

further, trying to attain at the theatre—with an almost crazy *furore*, but which is an ingenious divination—the movement of the scene: movement from an art that is fundamentally, and up until now has been, static.

Do you remember? At the end of the first act of *Parsifal*, Gurnemanz leads Parsifal from the forest to the temple of the Grail. While the two of them are slowly walking, the trees move in the opposite direction, the rocks move and pile up. Vaulted passages appear. Finally, the rocks break apart, and the inside of a Christian temple appears—dark at first, then progressively brighter.

Meanwhile the music, which is the art of movement *par excellence*, with a solemn rhythm that is beaten out with the heavy rumbling of bells, sets this marvellous transformation in motion.

Here is certainly an ideal cinematographic concept. And here is the direction through which the cinema could develop in an original way, producing *beyond the theatre*, musical-scenic drama. Which is to say, a performance in which the visual element is not so much constituted by the gestures of the actors as much as by real or fantastic scenery, by harmonies of light and colour, which alone can gracefully render—like music can—states of mind and feelings. We would therefore have a very new form of performance, in which musical impressionism would be fully integrated into a scenic one: in a word, we would have the impressionist drama.

'*Impressionismo scenico*', *Apollon*, 1/3 (April 1916), pp. 3–4. Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.

## Notes

1. [Editors' note. The author is citing the poem by Horace entitled *Ars poetica* or 'The Art of Poetry'.]
2. [Editors' note. Medardo Rosso (1858–1928) was an innovative sculptor influenced by French impressionism.]
3. [Editors' note. See Carducci, '*Alle Valchirie*'.]

# The Aesthetics of Cinema

*Goffredo Bellonci*

Is cinema an art? And being an art, in what way and in what manner does it distinguish itself from the other arts: from poetry, from music, from painting?

What is, therefore, its nature? What are its limitations? And do the screenwriters and movie actors take these limitations, take this nature, into consideration? Must we, however, say that the artists of the cinema have a complete experience of their means of expression, or not? In these questions, I think I have summarized all, or nearly all, the problems of the cinema. In the brief notes that follow, I do not presume to resolve these, or even make them as clear as day: it is enough for me to describe them well among ourselves, so that then, after the conversation, one might linger at debating them, each one on its own.

1. The cinema is without a doubt an art. With the continuous improvement in mechanical apparatus, every trace of materiality is disappearing. The time when one was a slave to the camera and had no freedom beyond the choice of the scenery or the people to capture on the photographic plate now seems prehistoric. And, moreover, even this choice, was a manifestation of art. It revealed a creativity, a singular and ineffable spirituality in the photographer that allowed experts to distinguish the photographs of one photographer from those of another. But, in the end, having chosen and framed a scene that in this light corresponds to your *état d'âme*, it was impossible, in the early days of photographic art, to eliminate extraneous parts of it from your fantastical world: to take away awkward details, to shade what you were seeing in the background, and to give prominence to what, in your mind, should be in the foreground. Photography never corresponded to your vision: it converted the scene that you had in your mental image and made it far too material. It captured on the light-sensitive paper details that you hadn't seen when you picked up the camera, precisely because the scene, in your imagination, had lived from another life: from the life of the spirit. The variety of sensitive paper, retouching tools, graduated lens strengths, the different ways of 'developing' the plates allowed, after a long time, for photography to have that *chiaroscuro* [technique], those lights and shadows, which have manifested our artistic originality. And we had photographs that were comparable to etchings and dry point engraving.

The cinema goes beyond. That world which for photographers was by necessity inorganic—because they had to make representations as they were, from outside, by illuminating them with their own spirituality—becomes organic, very organic, even. Indeed, think of it: the photographer is by nature an ‘impressionist’. He has to stop himself in front of individual events and to retrace those that stir up some feeling in his mind. But he cannot compose these individual events together into a fantastical sequence. He is forced to accept nature in its material changeability without being able to attack it, to dominate it, and to recreate it with his own spirit. The cinematographer, instead, moves from his spirit—from his creativity and his imagination—and submits nature to himself. He has a way, if you will, of capturing unreal things on the screen—the monsters, fairies, and gnomes of fairy tales, for example—showing two images contemporaneously that, in natural reality, would be subsequent to one another; giving life to the changeable phantoms of a dream; representing metamorphoses more audacious than any Homer and Ovid ever thought up. How, then, could we deny the name of ‘art’ to cinematography, if, by virtue of the wonderful instruments designed by mechanics, it has all the most subtle means of expression? But here’s the point: this expression is not and cannot be anything but cinematographic. Cinema lacks that lyrical element that painting finds in colour; that dramatic element that poetry finds in the word: its ‘relationships’ are not pictorial; its contrasts are not ‘dramatic’. And just as the painter betrays his own art when, instead of his own chromatic world, he shows his own literary ideals through symbols—when, in short, he makes literature instead of painting—so, too, does the screenwriter pervert his own art when he forces on it expressions that are not cinematographic, but pictorial, dramatic, musical. Take notice: the first characteristic of art is expressive coherence, in which the part is equal to the whole. Let me explain: that particular mode of expression that makes Giacomo Leopardi different from Dante Alighieri, Michelangelo different from Donatello, Manet different from El Greco—it is not necessary to search for it in their entire *oeuvre*, but you can find it in one of their verses, in a fragment of their sculptures, in one of their brushstrokes. The accents and the pauses, the voluminous parts and the flat ones, and the chromatic relationships are enough and make each artist ineffable. If cinematographic art had reached the fullness of these others, we could distinguish one artist from another from a few centimetres of a film because the spiritual world of the cinematographer is made up of transformations and metamorphoses. The one who has a

unique way of transforming things, who has his own unique imagination capable of seeing the whole world in terms of metamorphoses, he is an accomplished cinematographer. And this particular way of changing one form into another, or one form from another, is seen in an entire film just as it is seen in a few centimetres. It is the distinguishing feature, the connection, the rhythm of cinematographic art.

2. It is superfluous to add that contemporary cinema is off track: besides, it is practiced by transplants from other arts—painters and playwrights—who wear themselves out trying to bend it to significations that are foreign to its nature. If filmmakers had really thought about the nature of filmmaking, they would have easily arrived at my conclusions. Why do comical scenes end up being a lot more expressive than tragic ones? Why does farce find in the cinema an artistic fullness that drama never finds? It is clear: because comical scenes—as primitive and vulgar as they may be—are metamorphoses. That is, they all consist of ‘connections’ of gestures [and] changes of forms. Drama does not. Drama is intimate, spiritual, and reveals itself through words: you can perform it, like the tragedies of Shakespeare, with a bare set, and it will fully retain its own unique expressive power. Even the gestures are superfluous. It is a mistake to think that a great dramatic actress is she who has, as they say, a changeable ‘mask’: rather, it is she who knows how to bring this ‘mask’ to life with words, with the accent. Try listening to Eleonora Duse in the last act of *Hedda Gabler* with your eyes closed: you will be as equally moved as if you had watched her. Filmmakers instinctively feel the truth of what I am saying. And when they cannot rely on the gestures of the actors—who will never know how to manifest the innermost conflicts—they rely on the plot: they increase the number of captions and bundle together material incidents: the explosions, falls, chases, derailments, and so on. And very often, instead of a dramatic emotion, they provoke laughter; and they always enthrall the spectators with physical catastrophes rather than with drama. Here we are, at the beginning again: in cinema, artists and spectators are searching for a transformation.

The defect of this new art, therefore, is, if I am not mistaken, the scant awareness of its own nature and its own limitations. People want to do in cinema what is done in theatre. They impoverish cinema with Verism and Naturalism. They are still at the early beginnings of composing scenes that really give the impression of reality or weaving together great big dramas that awaken the viewer’s interest in physical catastrophes, which really seem real. A bridge that is falling; two trains that crash: it seems



impossible that after years and years of moviemaking, we have not moved away from this narrow mechanism, while the cinema has the means of lifting itself to fantastical heights which no Indian storyteller, no Ariosto, no Hoffmann ever reached. All of its failings stem from this first one. It has been observed that movie actors never achieve the expressive fullness that even these same actors display at the theatre. And it is said that this happens because movie scenes do not allow for a continuous performance because they are not made all at once, and sometimes are made out of order— from one scene to another many days or even, very often, months pass. This observation is correct, but the explanation is mistaken: in the cinema, knowledge of the scene that comes next is useless for the actress or the actor, because every scene has a life of its own, each dramatic feeling must reveal itself in a gesture, without the possibility of ascending step by step to the climax of the drama, as one does with words that translate the impulses of the mind from the *pianissimo* to *fortissimo*. The cause of the defect is instead something else: it is precisely this strange persistence of movie artists in perverting their own art. And I will give you proof: comic actors, who put all their expressive virtuosity into physical changes and gestures achieve a marvellous fullness of art.

A dear, cultured, and very clever friend of mine, Sebastiano Arturo Luciani, in an article on the cinema, which is, perhaps, the only serious thing that has been written about the art of filmmaking, highlighted the similarities between this art and Russian ballets, which is to say with the musical, miming drama.<sup>1</sup> And he had outlined a kind of fusion of music with the cinema that would have the power to miraculously renew moviemaking. But even he didn't know how to formulate the crucial point of the question. If I'm not mistaken, I have raised this issue in this article. Now, having put ourselves on equal footing with aesthetics, we can investigate the connections between cinematographic art and the other contemporary arts, the technical necessities of moviemaking, and the importance of cinema in our society. We'll see.

'*Estetica cinematografica*', *Apollon*, 1/3 (April 1916), pp. 1–2. Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.

## Note

1. [Editors' note. See Luciani, 'The Poetics of Cinema', included in this section of the anthology.]

# The Poetics of Cinema

*Sebastiano Arturo Luciani*

In the most recent issue of this journal, in an article entitled 'Scenic Impressionism', after I demonstrated the similarity between cine-drama and Roman pantomime and defined it by analogy as an art of decadence, I considered the cinema in particular as a new means of expression that more than the theatre, achieves an extreme form of gestural, or rather, musical-scenic drama. But, in this way, as is it easy to comprehend, by considering the cinema beyond, and not on par with theatre, I displaced the question—almost coming to the point of denying it the possibility of being an art form in other ways. Now, this would not be correct. Because if the cinema is not yet an art form, this does not mean that it does not have all the chances of becoming one. Goffredo Bellonci claims that photography is art when we can recognize the personality of the photographer through his choices; with even greater reason, one must call the cinema art when another important factor of the artwork can be seen: the composition.

Only the fact that the cine-drama, like the pantomime, is always an art of decadence remained undeniable, since in it, the gestures attempt to express that which is in the domain of poetry. In any case, one must recognize that, if the gesture on its own can poorly render the lyric moments of the scenic representation—which are interior and thus static (indeed, the drama that is more lyrical, less is done to the scene)—it can on the other hand perfectly render the dramatic, or rather theatrical, moments, which are dynamic (because 'drama', as you'll recall, means 'action'). In other words, the comic and the tragic in their strict sense, and above all, both of them in their extreme forms, that is, when they create grotesque or terrifying effects. In fact, in these moments—which in typical plays are also naturally silent—the silent gesture achieves an expressive power that is perfect and complete in and of itself.

One can say, therefore, that a subject matter is naturally cinematic if it contains grotesque or terrifying effects.

But that is not enough. The cinema has two other characteristics that are no less important: transformation and movement. The first—as it has been observed on various occasions—makes it possible to represent some subject matters that would be impossible to depict in the theatre, and it makes it so that the topics of the most tenuous dreams become more representable. The other, the movement of the scenery—constitutes the essential characteristic

of cinema because it establishes a rhythm in the succession of individual scenes—thus making of the cine-drama an art form *sui generis* that is the opposite of drama. Because drama, which is essentially static, generated as it is by poetry, tends toward an exterior movement (that which constitutes theatricality); the cine-drama, which is essentially dynamic, tends towards establishing through a rapid succession of scenes a lyricism that we could call visual, which, like every form of lyricism, is an interior movement.

In short, one goes from inside to outside, the other goes from outside to inside. The same law of rhythm, nevertheless, governs these two opposite forms: that of musical rhythm—the theatre, that of the scenic and visual rhythm—the cinema. And this visual rhythm must be the rudimentary norm of the entire poetics of the new art.

Until now, this has not been understood. The cinema has done nothing but try to replace the theatre, repeating not only the same subjects, but also imitating its techniques. These techniques—as it is easy to imagine—have to be absolutely different.

In a play, the action can be entirely interior (indeed, one thinks of a play like *Edipo Re* (*Oedipus Rex*) or like *Edipo a Colono* (*Oedipus at Colonus*), in which, physically, nothing happens at all); in cine-drama, however, the action has to be entirely exterior and therefore, visible. In a play, there can be—indeed there nearly always is—a backstory. In a cine-drama, the action has to be learned chronologically by the viewers. Having to yield to this requirement, all of those who adapt theatre plays for the cinema precede the play with a direct viewing of the backstory. But on the other hand, one considers only that an episode has a very different importance if it is evoked in few words or is represented on the stage. In this way, any harmony and law of perspective in the original work is destroyed.

Consider—even just to cite a recent example—that is it useless to comment on the reduction to a cine-drama of Bataille's *La marcia nuziale* (*The Wedding March*), in which we see the heroine's life at boarding school.

Nor can a film adaptation of a novel in which the backstory does not immediately precede the main plot create a better result.

Because—this is another point that we must clearly establish—the cinema is a form that, while it enjoys an unlimited freedom of place compared to the theatre, it is more constrained than the theatre within the stronger limits of time and action. In short, it is a purely visual story whose artistic precedents can be traced back to the series of frescoes with which ancient painters illustrated the lives of the saints—and whose episodes had to be chosen so that they would not only be significant, but they would also be intelligible just by looking at them in order, without any explanations.

Don't say that that is impossible. It is impossible for certain subjects which are not cinematic. By this point, the technological aspects of filmmaking have improved so much that one can achieve this goal very well. Just as the drama first frees itself from the narrative form—which still survives in *oratory*—and then from the monologue and *from asides*, so, too, can the cine-drama free itself from explanatory captions. But that is not enough. Because the different episodes are in motion, it is necessary that they be governed, as I was saying, by a visual rhythm that unfolds in space and determines the proportional length of each episode.

It is necessary that individual scenes and groups of scenes are governed by the same law that in poetry determines the meter of the verses and the makeup of the stanzas. And because this deals with things that are seen, it is necessary that the importance of an episode or of some detail be determined—with a visual sensibility that is hard to define—by the lesser or greater length that the episode or the detail has with respect to the others [in the film], passing thus—because a law of perspective *sui generis*—into the foreground or the background.

Because it usually happens that either excessive importance is given to secondary episodes that harm the overall economy of the work (episodes developed to enrich with cinematic effects subjects that are not cinematic at all); or that some episodes are barely developed simply because they appear to be secondary and negligible—and they would be secondary and negligible if they were to be thought about according to the techniques of theatre. An example: one of the most common procedures of the cinema is showing the viewer a person who is leaving the house to go to a particular place. We see the person put on a coat, put a hat on his or her head (details which, when dealing with a woman, are established for the sole purpose of making us admire a pretty hat or a pretty fur), and then we see the person get into an automobile. The automobile departs, disappears, and often, in the frame that follows, we immediately see the automobile arrive at its destination and the person exiting from it.

So, here is a case in which the episode is strangled by disturbing that law of proportion which then gives rise to verisimilitude. With regard to this, people will say: the same happens in theatre, where things take place in a few minutes that in real life would take hours. But that does not annoy, only because a certain proportion between the various episodes is preserved. Returning to the example already cited, it is sufficient that between the departure and the arrival, either in the portrayal of the trip, or some other episode, a pause be inserted in order for it to become verisimilar.

This, in my opinion, should be the principle concern of the person who *frames* the subject, but people don't pay attention to these things because up until now, cine-drama has never been conceived pictorially, in its overall structure, with a law of perspective *sui generis* that would determine, as in painting, what was in the foreground and what was in the background. But simply as a succession of stitched-together episodes and whose respective proportions are determined only by chance and by whim.

Now, so that this does not happen, it is necessary in the first place that the person of the poet or the person who has the idea for the film identify himself as much as possible with the person who creates the *mise-en-scène*. But I will deal specifically with the issue of *mise-en-scène*, of actors, of other technical and practical issues—not the least of which being the musical accompaniment—another time.

'*Poetica del cinematografo*', *Apollon*, 1/4 (May 1916), pp. 1–2. Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.

# Manifesto for a Cinematic Revolution

*Goffredo Bellonci*

The cinema, in order to be an art, must acknowledge its own modes of expression and its own limitations; it must, above all, free itself from its enslavement to dramatic art, which needs words—only words and intonation—and can do without gestures and scenery. I have already shown that the fantastic world of the cinema is made up of transformations, metamorphoses, and that an artist is such when through his imagination is able to look at life as a metamorphosis.<sup>1</sup> In short, it is about changing one form into another, or one form from another. How many of the numerous armies of writers, of directors, and of actors can boast of a cinematic soul? Very few, and this will be clear to you if you will take into consideration most of the films that unfold before you in movie theatres; in hardly two or three do the signs of the ‘techniques’—those artifices, those tricks (as they say) which are the best means of expression in the cinema—show themselves. The others show scenes from any old play, so much so that for each one, you have to imagine the words and refer yourselves to theatre: they are the mask, the shadow, the ghost of dramatic art. The closed circle of photography has not yet been overcome: they make films as if they had to be a well-organized series of photographs, in which each one would be complete in itself, and the representations carried out from begin to end with a rigorous continuity were not yet organic. The most adaptable art, the most ‘dynamic’ art, it gives you instead, by the fault of its creator’s artistic consciousness, a static impression: you feel that it looked for the ‘frame’ and that it was carefully constructed to give you a beautiful succession of ‘frames’ gathered together: the tumultuous comical or dramatic events prepare that scene—where the protagonists appear in close up, often with only their head and shoulders in a circle of light—to show you the joyous or mournful, comic or tragic facial expression. In reality, these films are composed of many photographs in just as many cinematic parentheses.

But the cinema has to be something rather different: a river that flows without pauses and without eddies, and which twinkles in the varied lights of the sun, the moon, and of the stars. Go back for a moment to the origins of this art—when it stupefied and enraptured us. Think back to those honest films which showed you a busy street, an attended countryside, a sky, and a sea filled with life. And tell me if in their innocence they do not seem to you rather more artistic than these others

which capture in a few expressionless acts the vanities of our actresses. Expressionless! In the theatre, the actors acquire their own style, giving the words of comedy or of drama a flair which transforms them: they whisper some of them, they mumble others, and some they stress, and some others they scream: this is how they interpret, this is how they play the characters. The gestures and the facial expressions add colour to the acting, but in themselves, they are poor. Think of how many different tones—of joy, anger, desperation, death—that actors, which you have seen in your life, knew how to express. And then compare this abundance to the scarcity of the mimicking ‘jokes’. Oftentimes in photographs, very original actresses look equal to one another—not in the beauty of their faces and their person, which is a natural thing and not an artifice, but in their poses. And I challenge the idea that there are not many ways one can turn down one’s face out of shame or bashfulness, lift the eyes to heaven in desperation or laugh or cry in pleading. From one person to the next, for each feeling, the words change, but the lines of the body have a small range for each movement of the spirit. The cinema gives you further proof of this: in the essential gestural moments, when the projector places in front of you only the protagonists so that you can admire them better, our actresses—who look so different on the stage, so different in these same films when they are shown in a quotidian kind of spontaneity—look identical. A Francesca Bertini type or a Lyda Borelli type: there are no other possibilities. And if we do not allow any other possibility, it is because we like those actresses for their beauty. A display of beautiful women and beautiful, stylish costumes is not art: beauty and clothing, yes, they can be instruments of the art of cinema, but it is necessary that they not be ends in themselves. The actors and actresses of the silent theatre must convince themselves that being dressed by top designers, driving around in cars, and carrying oneself with confidence, with grace and with elegance are not enough for them to be hailed as artists. They must, above all, feel that they are part of a changeable organism, which is the cinematic representation: changeable in its continuity just like everyday life in the streets. They must make the lines of their bodies, the gesturing of their faces, the shape of their clothing, and the colour of their person agree with the lines, the movements, the forms, the colour of their person, with the lines, the colours of a fantastic scene which is continuously transforming itself. To be the note of a symphony, the word of a poem, a tone in a painting: that is what is necessary. The rest, even servant girls know how to do when, on Sundays, they go into the photo booths for 50 cents to pose for a portrait to give to their boyfriends.

You have understood, I hope, that I would like to wage a small revolution in the cinema: I would like for them to no longer write stories and make films specifically for the lead actor or actress. Instead, I would like the actors and actresses to interpret stories that were created with a free and rich cinematic imagination. In this way, we will see who deserves to be the best of silent theatre actor and who is the worst. Today, dramatic theatre actors and opera singers, impoverished noblemen, the young men of the *beau monde*, and the young women of the ugly world are all rushing into silent film. The actors are distributed parts, and they force the writers, the operators, the directors—everyone—to make films where they can appear in the theatre just as they were or are in society. It happens, however, that the lead parts are still entrusted to men and women who often have no idea about the cinematic art and who almost always lack the aptitude for becoming film actors. The stars are fixed points around which film companies whirl—from the shareholders to the props master. And in order to please them, to not force them to study the new art of the cinema, they continue to translate, impoverish, and degrade into fantastical film plots the dramas and melodramas that the actors have performed and continue to perform in the theatre. When by chance you happen to see a film that is wholly or partially worthy of that name—*Cabiria*, for example, or *Avatar*, or even *Fluffy Ruffles*, are among those films that display nobility and novelty of invention; and many of those comic films, made with an imagination of the third order are very vulgar, but take advantage of cinematic means of expression, by which I mean the transformations—you will understand right away what this art could become, if the impresarios can convince themselves that they can make money, and more than they are making now, by obeying the artistic laws of the cinema and not the styles and whims of the theatre and of society.<sup>2</sup>

I dream of a cinema that is very different from that of today. I think of writers as no longer constrained by the patterns of dramas and of comedies, but instead free to create with an imagination that would surpass Ovid, Aristotle, and Hoffmann, marvellous fictions in which heaven and earth, reality and the supernatural would be mixed together. Cinematic techniques allow for the expression of the most strange, fantastical worlds which the word and the paintbrush could not signify or would express in an incomplete way. Think of it—it would be possible to show the transformation of Io into a cow or of Daphne into a laurel tree; it would be possible to give real life, for example, to the monsters of Italian and Celtic epics, to the island of Alcina, to the gardens of Armida; and even Hoffmann's *Il vaso d'oro* (*The Golden Pot*) would be translated into film.<sup>3</sup> The imagination no longer has limits. Would



you like to make the gods descend from heaven onto the earth? Would you like to show it, this earth, in a sudden, marvellous passage from barren to blooming? Would you like to mix bodies, free souls, insert the past into the present with an unexpected parenthesis, make creatures ascend from the purgatory of material to the paradise of the spirit? You can do it all: the cinema is a magical art which in its studios changes one form from another, and one form into another. Today, now that filmmaking is encroaching into photographic realism, magic is called, with disdain, 'tricks': tomorrow, when the public will have solemnly made it understood with whistling that they are fed up with this exhibition of beautiful faces and beautiful bodies, it will be the last of the lady of silent theatre. The writer must therefore capture on the film screen a sparkle, a dance, a tumult of forms which harmonize and which oppose, like the solid masses, the lines and colours of contemporary Impressionist and Syntheticist sculpture and painting. Changeability is its great law. The scenic fictions of Egorov, Appia, and Bakst can be its models: a poet and painter together, or a poet who takes advantage of a painter in order to depict better his own phantasms, he can in the cinema lead to completeness an art which is barely at its beginnings. But, it is necessary that the organizer of the scene be something rather different than what he is today. Look at them, these organizers who pompously call themselves '*metteurs en scene*': theatre authors or actors, they don't even know how to imagine something other than moving masses of people or individuals over a stage that is static, very static, the most static in its master-lines. They have remained men of the theatre, with their static conception of art; and they imagine the entire scene—even in the countryside, even if the characters are moving—as though it had curtains and backdrops: they are very happy when they succeed—that's it!—in making an extraordinary dramatic pause with a close up of the protagonists looking into one another's eyes with passionate love or passionate hatred. They offer two things to the art of cinema, one of which is absurd, and the other is extraneous: they want to express with gesturing spiritual contrasts and to imprint on film, as a background to the drama or comedy, the reality of nature. They are excellent actors and excellent photographers: not filmmakers. The bad thing is that while they are not educating themselves in the art of cinema, they are not even educating the actors and actresses, whose desires they always indulge instead. Imagine that the writers and directors were different, that they were more like that ideal type I have described for you, that they did with cinema what Bakst has done with Russian ballets. It is clear that the arsenal of the *comicaroli* of the silent theatre would disappear into thin air.<sup>4</sup> Our actors and our actresses must first learn to move. May they understand that

they have an ignorance of movements that elicit compassion, and no sense of rhythm and no idea about scenic ‘complementarity’.<sup>5</sup> It’s useless: until they convince themselves that they should especially take the example of Fokine or Karsavina, if not of Duse or Zacconi, they will not succeed in doing anything. Why is it that Russian ballets are judged as one of the highest manifestations of contemporary art and the cinema is instead so disdained that even the people who practice it deny it the name of ‘art’? Of the many, many things that they should understand, our actors have understood only one, although rather badly: the importance of clothing. But each person thinks of himself, dresses himself as if he had to appear in a *salon*, very content if, by virtue of money, tailoring, and also of his own good taste, he manages to set the style for a city or for a season. Try to convince them that should all go along with one another on film in an artistic continuity; and that an ugly costume can become very beautiful in a particular place, in that particular moment of a scene, where and when a costume of the best cut would stand out and clash. Ah! Yes: they want to show expensive clothing and they would be ready to put together 1793 tailors and stylists against the bold man who would dare to energetically call them back to the reasons of cinematic art.<sup>6</sup> And the actresses, they want to show their faces, so that everyone can see how beautiful they are; you will never make them understand that in certain Russian ballets where Karsavina erases her own face into a diffuse pallor in order to accentuate the changing lines of her body, she is artistically more beautiful than all the actresses of the cinema put together. In short, beauty is an element, an instrument of the cinematic art; but it is not a fixed endpoint. If actors were to convince themselves of this, they would hasten the advent of a cinematic art and they would finally merit the name of ‘artists’, which today—with few exceptions—they are usurping. They usurp it for their use and consumption; because the public thinks about and judges them in a completely different way.

*‘Manifesto per una rivoluzione cinematografica’, Apollon, 2/2 (September 1916). Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.*

## Notes

1. [Editors’ note. See Bellonci, ‘The Aesthetics of Cinema’, included in this section of the anthology.]
2. [Editors’ note. *Cabiria* (1914) was directed by Giovanni Pastrone and produced by dall’Italia Film. *Avatar* (1916) was directed by Carmine Gallone

- and produced by Cines. Fluffy Ruffles is the name of the protagonist in the film, *La signorina Ciclone* (1916), directed by Augusto Genina, written by Lucio d'Ambra, and produced by Medusa Film.]
3. [Editors' note. Alcina e Armida are characters from, Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (*The Frenzy of Orlando*) and Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* (*Jerusalem Delivered*), respectively.]
  4. [Translator's note. The word *comicaroli* cannot be translated into English. It is a derogatory term for those actors who only perform comic scenes.]
  5. [Editors' note. The author is referring to the sense of unity among all the elements of a painting, which for him must inspire the creation of the film.]
  6. [Editors' note. The author intends to reference 1793, the year of the Reign of Terror, the bloodiest period of the French Revolution.]

# Theatre and the Cinema

*Antonio Gramsci*

They say that cinema is killing theatre. They say that, in Turin, theatre companies have kept their theatres closed during the summer months because the audience has deserted the theatre to crowd together at the cinema. In Turin, the new film industry has arisen and has established itself, luxurious movie theatres have opened up, the likes of which there are not many in Europe, and all of the places of this sort are always very crowded.

It would seem, therefore, that there was at least a basis of truth in the sad statement that the audience's taste has degenerated and that for the theatre, some ugly times are approaching.

Instead, we are most convinced that these complaints are founded on a decayed aestheticism and that one can easily show that they depend on a false conceit. The reason for the fortune of the cinema and the way it absorbs the audience, which previously frequented theatres, is purely economic. The cinema offers the same, the very same sensations that, in the best circumstances, the common theatre does, without the choreographic apparatus of false intellectualism; the productions that are most commonly performed are nothing but a weaving together of exterior facts, devoid of any human content, in which some talking marionettes move around in different ways without ever reaching a psychological truth, without ever succeeding in giving the creative imagination of the listener a character of truly felt and adequately expressed passions. Psychological insincerity and inflated artistic expression has reduced the theatre to the same level as pantomime. They are only trying to create for the audience the illusion of a life which is only different on the outside from everyone else's typical life, in which only the geographical location, social environment of the characters changes, everything in life that is the subject of an illustrated postcard, a visual curiosity—not of artistic, imaginative curiosity—and no one can deny that in this regard, film has a crushing superiority over the stage. It is more complete, more varied, it is silent. That is, it reduces the role of the artists to simple movement, to a simple machine with no soul, to what, in reality, they also are in the theatre. To get angry with the cinema is simply ridiculous. To speak of vulgarity, of banality etc., is inflated rhetoric. Those who truly believe in the theatre's artistic function, they should instead be happy about this competition. Because it serves to make things happen, to lead the theatre back to this true nature. There is no doubt that a large part

of the audience needs to entertain itself (that is, to rest itself by changing the focus of their attention) with a pure and simple visual distraction: the theatre, by industrializing itself, has sought in recent times to satisfy only this need. It became above all a business, it became a variety store of inexpensive junk. Only by chance do they now make productions that have a timeless universal value. The cinema, which can fulfil this function more easily and inexpensively, surpasses it in success and tends to replace it. The businesses and companies will end up convincing themselves that it is necessary to change course if they want to continue to exist. It is not true that the audience is deserting the theatres: we have seen theatres that were empty for a long series of performances fill up and suddenly get crowded for an extraordinary evening in which they exhumed a masterpiece, or even more modestly, a typical work that is of some old-fashioned style but which now has a certain cachet. It's necessary that what the theatre now presents as extraordinary should instead become the norm. Shakespeare, Goldoni, Beaumarchais, if they require work and activity to be performed properly, are also beyond any banal competition. D'Annunzio, Bernstein, Bataille will always have greater success at the cinema; the facial expressions, the physical contortions find in film a material that is more suited to their expression. And the useless, boring, insincere rhetorical tirades will return to being literature, nothing but literature, dead and buried in books and in libraries.

*'Teatro e cinematografo', Avanti!, (26 August 1916). Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.*

# The Futurist Cinematography

*F.T. Marinetti, Bruno Corra, Emilio Settemelli, Arnaldo Ginna,  
Giacomo Balla, Remo Chiti*

The book, the ultimate *passé* medium for preserving and communicating thought, has, for a long time, been destined to disappear like cathedrals, towers, battlements, museums, and the pacifist ideal. The book, static companion of the sedentary, the infirmed, the nostalgic, the conscientious objector, can neither entertain nor glorify the new futurist generations, which are intoxicated with revolutionary and bellicose dynamism.

The war is steadily enlivening the European sensibility. Our great sanitized war, which should satisfy all our national aspirations, centuples the renewing power of the Italian race. The futurist cinematograph that we are preparing, a joyful deformation of the universe, an illogical and fleeting synthesis of global life, will become the best school for the young: a school of joy, speed, force, courage, and heroism.

The futurist cinematograph will sharpen and strengthen perception, quicken the creative imagination, it will produce a prodigious sense of simultaneity and omnipresence in the mind. The futurist cinematograph will therefore contribute to the general renewal by taking the place of the literary review (always pedantic), the drama (always predictable), and by killing the book (always tedious and oppressive). The necessities of propaganda will force us to publish a book once in a while. But we prefer to express ourselves through the cinematograph, through great *parole in libertà tableaux* and portable illuminated signs.<sup>1</sup>

With our manifesto, 'The Synthetic Futurist Theatre', with theatre companies' triumphant tours, Gualtiero Tumiati, Ettore Berti, Annibale Ninchi, Luigi Zoncada, with the two volumes of 'Synthetic Futurist Theatre' containing 80 theatrical summaries, we have begun the revolution in Italian dramatic theatre. An earlier futurist Manifesto had rehabilitated, glorified, and perfected the 'variety show'.

Therefore, it is logical that today we carry refreshing energies into another form of theatre: the 'cinematograph'. At first look, the cinematograph, which is just a few years old, may already seem futurist since it lacks a past and is free from traditions: it seems like a 'theatre without words', but in reality, it has inherited all the most traditional trappings of traditional theatre.

Consequently, we can, without a doubt, apply to cinematography everything that we have said and done for dramatic theatre. Our action

is legitimate and necessary in as much as the cinematography 'has been until now and continues to be profoundly *passé*.' Meanwhile, we see in it the possibility of an exceedingly futurist art 'and the most apt expressive medium for the pluri-perception sensibility of a futurist artist.'

Except for interesting films dealing with travel, hunting, wars, and so on, the film-makers have done nothing more than inflict the most backward looking dramas, great and small. The same script whose brevity and variety may make it seem advanced, is instead more often than not the most trite and pitiful 'analysis'. All of cinema's immense 'artistic' possibilities are still totally unexplored.

The cinematograph is an art in and of itself. The cinematograph must therefore never copy the stage. The cinematograph, being essentially visual, must above all forward the development of painting: to detach itself from photographic reality, from the graceful and refined. It must become clumsy, deforming, impressionistic, synthetic, dynamic, *parolibero*.<sup>2</sup>

ONE MUST FREE THE CINEMATOGRAPH AS AN EXPRESSIVE MEDIUM in order to make it the ideal instrument for A NEW ART, immensely more vast and lively than all the existing arts. We are convinced that only in this way to reach that poly-expressiveness towards which all the most modern artistic movements are going.

The futurist cinematograph attempts today the exact poly-expressive symphony that just a year ago we announced in our manifesto: the importance, measure, and price of artistic genius. In the futurist film, the most varied elements will come into play as means of expression: from the slice of real life to the splotch of colour, from the assembly line to free-form poetry lines, from chromatic and plastic music to the music of objects. In other words, it will be painting, architecture, sculpture, *parole in libertà*, music of colours, lines, and forms, a jumble of objects and reality thrown together at random. We will offer new inspiration to the explorations of painters, who break the boundaries of literature by marching towards painting, the art of noise, and by building a marvellous bridge between the word and the real object.

Our films will be:

#### 1. CINEMATOGRAPHIC ANALOGIES

Using reality directly as one of the two elements of the analogy. Example: If we want to express the anguished state of our protagonist, instead of describing him in all his various phases of suffering, we will create the same impression by showing a jagged and cavernous mountain.

Mountains, seas, woods, cities, crowds, armies, squadrons, and planes will often be our formidably expressive words: the universe will be our vocabulary. Example: If we want to give a sensation of strange cheerfulness: we show a chair cover flying comically around an enormous coat stand until they decide to stick to one another.

If we want to produce a feeling of anger: we shatter the angry man into a whirlwind of little yellow balls. If we want to express the anguish of a Hero who loses his faith in a defunct, neutral scepticism: we show the Hero in the act of making an inspired speech to a big crowd: we let out a caricature of Giovanni Giolitti, who suddenly stuffs in his mouth a big forkful of macaroni, drowning his inspiring words in the tomato sauce. We will add colour to the dialogue by showing quickly and simultaneously every image that passes through the characters' minds.

Example: showing a man who will say to his woman: 'You're as lovely as a gazelle,' and we will show the gazelle. Example: If a character says, 'I muse upon your fresh and luminous smile just as a traveller contemplates the sea from high on a mountain.' We will show the traveller, the sea, and the mountain. In this way, our characters will be perfectly comprehensible as if they were talking.

2. POEMS, SPEECHES, AND POETRY, FILMED. We will put across the screen all of the images that make up the poem. Example: '*Canto dell'amore*' ('Song of Love') by Giosuè Carducci:<sup>3</sup>

From the German strongholds perched  
Like falcons meditating the hunt...

We will show the strongholds, the falcons in ambush.

From the churches that reach as far as the sky  
Marble arms praying to God [...]  
From the convents between villages and towns  
Ominously crouching to the sound of bells,  
Like cuckoos between the sparse trees  
Singing of boredom and unexpected joys...

We will show churches transformed little by little into female beggars, God beaming down from on high, we will show the convents, the cuckoos, and so on. Example: '*Sogno d'Estate*' ('Summer's Dream') by Giosuè Carducci:



Through the battles, Homer, your solemn poems are always sung,  
as the heat now overcomes me: bowing my head lethargically between  
the banks of the Scamander [River], my heart flees to the Tyrrhenian Sea.

We will show Carducci wandering amid the tumult of the Achaeans, deftly avoiding the galloping horses, paying his respects to Homer, going for a drink with Ajax at The Red Scamander *osteria*, and with the third glass of wine, we should see the palpitations of his heart pop out of his jacket like a huge red balloon over the Gulf of Rapallo. In this way, we will film the most secret movements of genius. We will ridicule in this way the works of *passé* poets, by transforming for the great benefit of the public, the most nostalgically monotonous and weepy poetry into violent, exciting, and highly exhilarating spectacles.

3. SIMULTANEITY AND COMPENETRATION of different times and places FILMED. We will show in the same instant-frame two or three different images, one next to the other.
4. MUSICAL EXPERIMENTS, FILMED. (dissonances, harmonies, synchronies of performed gestures, colours, lines, etc.).
5. DRAMATIZED AND FILMED STATES OF MIND.
6. DAILY EXERCISES TO FREE OURSELVES FROM LOGIC, FILMED.
7. DRAMAS OF OBJECTS, FILMED. (objects animated, humanized, made-up, dressed up, impassioned, civilized, dancing). Objects removed from their normal surroundings and put in abnormal circumstances that, by contrast, puts into perspective their amazing construction and non-human life.
8. SHOWCASES OF IDEAS, EVENTS, TYPES, OBJECTS, ETC., FILMED.
9. CONGRESSES, FLIRTS, MELEES, AND MARRIAGES OF FUNNY FACES, MIMICRY, ETC., FILMED. Example: a big nose silences a thousand fingers in a congress by ringing an ear, while two policemen's moustaches arrest a tooth.
10. ABSURD RECONSTRUCTIONS OF THE HUMAN BODY, FILMED.
11. DRAMAS OF DISPROPORTION, FILMED. (a thirsty man who pulls out a tiny drinking straw that he lengthens from his umbilical cord to the lake and dries it up in a single gulp).
12. POTENTIAL DRAMAS AND STRATEGIC PLANS OF FEELINGS, FILMED.
13. LINEAR, PLASTIC, AND CHROMATIC BINARIES of men, women, events, thoughts, music, feelings, weights, smells, noises, FILMED (with white lines on black, we will show the internal, physical rhythm of a

husband who discovers his wife cheating and chases the lover, rhythm of soul and rhythm of legs).

14. *PAROLE IN LIBERTÀ*, FILMED. (summary tables of poetic values – dramas of humanized or animated literature – orthographic dramas – typographical dramas – geometric dramas – numeric sensibility, etc.). Painting + sculpture + plastic dynamism + *parole in libertà* + *intonarumori* + architecture + synthetic theatre = futurist Cinematography.<sup>4</sup> THIS IS HOW WE DECONSTRUCT AND RECONSTRUCT THE UNIVERSE ACCORDING TO OUR MARVELLOUS WHIMS, in order to centuple the power of Italian creative genius and its absolute pre-eminence in the world.

'*La cinematografia futurista*' (Milan: Direzione del Movimento Furista, 1916); then as '*Cinematografia futurista. Manifesto*', in *L'Italia Futurista*, 1, 10 (October, 1916): 1. Translated by Courtney Ritter.

## Notes

1. [Translator's note. *Parole in libertà*, or literally 'words-in-freedom', were Futurist texts that emphasized word play by combining elements of poetry and narrative prose with unconventional grammar, syntax, word choice, and typography. Words-in-freedom *tableaux* refer to Futurist works that incorporated graphic and visual elements alongside the text.]
2. [Translator's note. *Parolibero*, or literally 'free-word', refers to the free-form style and word associations of Futurist poems.]
3. [Editors' note. Giosuè Carducci (1835–1907) was one of the most important poets of the second half of the nineteenth century. He won the Nobel prize for literature in 1906.]
4. [Translator's note. *Intonarumori*, or literally 'noise makers', are experimental Futurist musical instruments with a cone-shaped metal speaker attached to a wooden box that were intended to generate the sounds of modern life.]

# In the Beginning Was Sex...

*Antonio Gramsci*

In the beginning was the word ... No, in the beginning was sex.<sup>1</sup>

Facing certain expressions of public spirit, you, who have logical needs, will remain astounded at the start. If you presuppose a certain fact, you expect that any additional one will follow the logical outcome. Instead, you see that this not does prove the logical order, and that it verifies other, non-logical outcomes in its place; you will see that new forces, elementary, instinctive, elusive forces come into play in the calculating the odds.

Go attend a performance by [Lyda] Borelli. Your ears will still be ringing with the praise for Borelli, by the criticisms of Borelli's audacious elegance, for Borelli's incredible dramatic effectiveness. Now, go and observe a film featuring Borelli. By some strange chance, you don't fall for the trap that has been unconsciously laid for you. You remain your own master. You are able to stay in the role of observer. You watch. You are floored. It seems incredible to you. You shrug your shoulders, and you remember that someone once asserted: in the beginning was the word, substituted the other: in the beginning was sex.

Let's be clear. Sex is like a spiritual force, with its purity, not like a base expression of barbarity. As a result, we must study the case of Borelli as a case of sexuality. There is no other way to understand or explain it or to liberate ourselves from it. I don't mean to say that the example of Borelli is so dangerous that it demands the intervention of the famous surgical instrument. However, it's not pretty and it weakens a number of people who could otherwise help achieve a more perfect humanity.

Dante proposed the question of sexuality in elevated terms. In the encounter with Francesca da Rimini, he says that the highest form of sexuality comes from the fact the love between the two is necessary, unavoidable. There are two halves of the whole: they look for each other and once they find each other they merge into a single thing. However, this is what happens now. There exists a half which instead of having only one half has two, three. Some could be half for all the men. The 'sexual' element has totally overpowered all of the other attributes, all the other possibilities become a sort of fascinating magic.

All the men find themselves someone complimentary to them, and they are influenced by them. It is a kind of Orphic cult that is unconsciously created.

Orpheus with the sound of his lyre can get even the plants and the animals behind him. The myth symbolizes the music's absolute power of attraction, like a force that can lure everything by setting it to music. The phenomenon has given rise to some literary creations. Guy de Maupassant wrote a short poem in which a woman, 'sex', attracts lively creatures, which follow her unconsciously, as if they are following a saint or an apostle who knew how to shake the soul to its core with the simplest word.

With the necessary limitations, this is what happens with the actress Lyda Borelli. This woman is an example of prehistoric, primordial humanity. It is said that she is admired for her art. It is not true. No one knows how to explain what Borelli's art is because it does not exist. Borelli does not know how to interpret any character but herself. She speaks the lines, but she does not act. For this reason, she selects works in verse, and preferably those of Sem Benelli, who writes words for the music, more than for the represented meaning. So, Borelli is a film artist *par excellence*, in which the only language is the human body in all its modernizing fluidity.

On the stage, the 'sex' element found a modern method of connecting with the public. It has robbed its intelligence. It can be fantastic for those who it arouses, but in the case of Borelli, it is hardly comforting for those who get carried away. Man has laboured enormously to reduce the 'sex' element to its absolute limits. To yet again allow it expand at the expense of intelligence is proof of depravity, and certainly not of spiritual elevation.

*'In principio era il sesso...'*, *Avanti!*, (16 February 1917). Translated by Courtney Ritter.

## Note

1. [Editor's note. The author is referring to the first verse of the Gospel of John, which reads, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.']

# Rectangle-Film (25 x 19)

*Emanuele Toddi*

I have made an observation that almost has the importance of a discovery.

It is this: the blind man does not go to the movies.

This is an observation of the greatest importance because it has never been made up until now—as far as I know—when it should be the fundamental axiom for the technical and artistic evolution of cinema.

Thomas Alva Edison, a deaf man, was able to bring the gramophone to the highest perfection: if Thomas Alva Edison had been blind, he could not have devised even the most rudimentary cinematic device.

It is not possible, then, for filmmaking to leave out of consideration the organ of the visual sense: the eye. The human eye to be more exact.

When, through a new scientific miracle, the blind can see and their vision will be mechanical, then—at least for them—the friction which today exists between the human eye and the cinematic eye will disappear.

In producing this friction, all the film studios have an agreement amongst themselves that is miraculous in the very quarrelsome world of film.

So miraculous that it would even be possible to include all the countless film studios under a single name: RECTANGLE-FILM.

Differing greatly from one another in program, business name, and legal constitution, money spent—from amounts that are as modest as a pygmy, to those that are more dazzlingly Rothschildian—in commercial or artistic purpose, they are all in agreement on the format of the frame: the rectangle.

So, back when there was no war, and there was no agreement between the parties, and there was no *pane unico* ('unified bread'), there was already the standard format: 25 x 19.<sup>1</sup>

And yet, no pupil, not even in the world of films, could be rectangular, not one is 25 x 19 or any dimensions that are proportional to these: all eyes, along the entire colour spectrum, from the most Karenne-ly pale to the most Bertini-ly dark, they have round vision—only round.<sup>2</sup>

This geometrical difference is of a certain importance for an instrument that must strictly be considered an emissary for the eye. The lens goes where the gaze of the viewer cannot directly go. So that, like an emissary, or as it was called in the volumes of dusty university memory, the *longa manus* ('long arm') of the law, the cinema can call itself the *longus oculus* ('long eye') of the viewer.

The maker of the first movie camera kept this firmly in mind, since he was trying to repeat, with more rigid material, that which the Creator *par excellence* had already done in Eden: creating the first pair of eyes, for the late Father, Adam.

In this way, the lens, a perfect imitation of the 'crystalline lens' was formed out of actual crystal; the 'iris', which was so accurately recreated in metal that it achieved the variable diameter of aperture—just like in a real pupil—became the lens aperture.

For the 'retina', the process was altogether more complicated. The aforementioned Adam had received from the Creator such a capacity for the 'negative' that it left him and his descendants free from concerns about any eventual crisis of celluloid.

It was useless to think of an imitation of this kind because, if this continuous 'development' and continuous renewal of the 'negative' is providential in the human eye, its benefits go to the exclusive advantage of the owner and they are placed outside of any possibility of commerce. Immediately after the slaughter of some animals, images of the last objects that they had seen were observed on their retinas. But the cruel scientists who carried out these experiments did not know how to draw particularly important conclusions from them about the role that this interesting phenomenon would have on vision.

Therefore, there remained no other means than to substitute for the fixed retina a retina that is always renewed: and then we have film, with all its problems, which are only too well known today.

As much as the human eye is imitated as perfectly as possible in the movie camera, a heterogeneous element is unexpectedly introduced: the rectangular shape of the frame: 25 mm x 19 mm.

Everything is constructed according to a curved line in the human eye, and it is known fact that nothing is more annoying than having something in your eye.

Practical demands?

Surely. But are they really that draconian?

In any market, one can only find film that is 35 mm wide...when you can find it at all. The perforations, which are indispensable for the gears, require their own part: exactly one centimetre: so that, only a width of 25 mm of usable space remains. And that's fine. Still other practical demands (the frame, the turn, the gripping, alternating darkening) determine also the maximum height for each frame: 19 mm.

And that's fine too. It is pythagorically fundamental for each operator that the maximum usable space for each frame is, for technical reasons, 25 x 19.

To go beyond one of these dimensions, even by just a millimetre, is not possible, unless you want to radically change all the cameras, the developing, the printing, the projection, and even the movie screens.

This last measure would have some, let's say, 'hygienic' advantages, but all of the others would be so grave that the censors would oppose to begin with a campaign that was as damaging as the Bolsheviks to national industry.

Nor would it be worth the trouble anyway. The *ukase* ('rule') that for technical reasons severely prohibits going outside of this rigidly fixed rectangle does not, however, force you to use the entire thing.

Monsignor della Casa and home economists recommend not placing more food onto one's plate than its circumference can hold. But it is not said that one must then fill up the whole thing: and the part that is used varies...depending on the food.<sup>3</sup>

In a film, there is generally more variety among the various scenes than among the various courses on a menu, especially in a time of war.

Therefore, it is not good manners to force the viewer to dine equally on each course: always, always 25 x 19.

That is boring, never mind that such a format—as has been shown in the above discussion of the physiology of film—is absolutely irrational.

Even a circular projection would be boring: and the circle is, despite that fact, the perfect geometric shape in itself, in addition to being the natural shape of the visual field.

The gaze embraces everything that is included in a cone that has for its centre what physiologists call 'the centre of the eye' and which has the pupil as its director. At a cinematic spectacle, this visual field is mutilated into a rectangular pyramid, into as many rectangular pyramids as there are frames in the projected film: and they are all equal, equal, equal (25 x 19).

Even in the far away times of faraway Egypt, they built rather fewer: only 80 of these pyramids remain, but of those, we typically only admire three, which are all of different sizes. Providentially, sometimes a particular light effect intervenes that eliminates a big part of the frame. An American production company has recently found a device of a certain cleverness. Called a 'mobile aperture' this external 'matte' is hazy at the edges, has an adjustable diameter—which confines the image to only one part of the screen.

And the rest?

Naturally, it remains black.

And isn't the rest of the hall black? And then, does the colour of what you are not seeing matter? Right now, what colour is what is behind your back? It doesn't have a colour: and the absence of all colour is, indeed, black.

This limitation of the visual field also has a physiological justification: we 'gaze' at an object: and it is the only thing perfectly in focus and perfectly seen. Even a close object can disappear, even if it is included in the visual field.

Schematic experiment: close your left eye, keep your right eye fixed on point A and gradually move it further away from the sheet of paper; at a certain distance, point B disappears in spite of the fact that even though it's a bit out of focus, you can still see all of the page from *In semi-darkness*. Physiologists explain this with the 'blind spot' where the optic nerve enters the eyeball. They cite Mariotte and some [of his] colleagues.<sup>4</sup> And all of that doesn't mean anything. In reality, there is also some area of our visual field that does not interest us optically.

The cinema, the *longus oculus*, must keep this in mind.

And to keep in mind all that bizarre geometry which the eye constructs. The visual field is round, but it moves: and in these movements it outlines strange geometrical shapes which are not always modelled after Euclidean forms.

For the gaze that follows a car racing through a winding street, only the road itself, and the space immediately around it exist: all the rest is in negative. And is it worth taking away even a fraction of that attention—which is also aesthetic—to scatter it onto a rigid rectangular (25 x 19) panorama?

In a film, a proper outline of a frame can reveal the *metteur en scène* to be a sharp psychologist; the perimeter that he gives to a particular scene can essentially be an interpretation of it.

Each of the regular geometrical shapes has its own physiognomy, and therefore, a meaning all its own.

Perhaps a close link exists between psychology and geometry, and with theorems and axioms (more axioms than theorems) it could be revealed that to each state of mind corresponds a special geometric shape: joy is a polygon, astonishment is round, envy is [an] isosceles [triangle]...

The rectangle? Who knows. Perhaps only laziness corresponds to it: the base is larger than the height.

But, psycho-geometry aside, the rectangle is certainly not the most flexible of frames, at least in the role that it serves in the film. Sometimes an upright rectangle could frame a scene well; and indeed, to me it seems the only thing that could frame the sight of a ladder, a delicate tower, a flame, or feminine slenderness well...

To imprison the eye between two rigid frames of 25 x 19 is, therefore, a crime against aesthetics, logic, and physiology.

The camera, the tyrannical camera determines the boundaries in a draconian way: if [making it] contraband is not possible, why not at least



try to create the illusion—and the eye is the sense that most is most readily deceived—that such a prison doesn't exist: and to do this, all it takes is to not always go all the way to the edge of the frame.

And to set up camp freely, and above all aesthetically, on the left, on the right, up high, and down low, expressing oneself, too, with various framed polygons.

There are frames for which the entire screen has a desolate, Saharan vastness, while for others it is narrow: the first want to be enclosed in a small, intimate frame, the others want to be projected beyond the walls of the theatre or to descend, down to the viewers' feet.

They would stop when they reached the orchestra pit.

'Rettangolo-film (25 x 19)', *In Penombra*, 1/3 (August 1918), pp. 121–123. Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.

## Notes

1. [*Translator's note.* *Pane unico* or 'unified bread' was a ration of bread made during the First World War.]
2. [*Translator's note.* The adverbs *karenneamente* and *bertinianly* or 'Karenne-ly' and 'Bertini-ly' refer to the film stars Diana Karenne and Francesca Bertini.]
3. [*Editors' note.* The author is referring to della Casa, *Galateo*.]
4. [*Editor's note.* The author is referring to Edme Mariotte (1620–1684), considered on the founders of French experimental physics.]

# The Proscenium Arch of My Cinema

*Anton Giulio Bragaglia*

I think that a great path through which the cinema can be led to art is still hiding in the artifices of scenography.

Infinite and astonishing are the tools that the cinema can possess in this field of wonders.

The creation of impossible visions and views shot at night and made fantastical by artificial light, for example, open up infinite horizons for the genius of a modern set designer.

For the cinema, the question of 'art' is often raised. But for the creation of certain effects, aimed at exteriorizing interiority—a manageable task even at the cinema—certain tools are necessary. Could a little café orchestra play the *La morte di Åse* (*Death of Haase*) or *La danza di Anitra* (*Anitra's Dance*)?<sup>1</sup>

To create a work of art—which is a perfect thing—the complexity, the integrated totality of the methods is necessary, so much so that the work of art can be damaged by even the slightest disturbance of an additional feature that is less than perfect. Today, the cinema claims to reach art —[but] with the systems, the criteria, the intellectual possibilities, and the quality of methods sought out up until now, is certainly a reckless phenomenon. It is well known, then, what theatrical sets are. What have Wagner and Reinhardt, Bakst and Fokine, Gordon Craig and [Alexandre] de Salzmann, Djagilev and Wilkinson created or brought about that is like our architect [Gian Giuseppe] Mancini and the futurists themselves, such as Giacomo Balla's attempts at illuminated sets, which are better than *Schauspielhaus's* sets made of light, and with Fortunato Depero's plastic dances, which will be one of our strongest decorative energies?<sup>2</sup>

Maeterlinck's marionettes, like the dances of Isadora Duncan; the psalms of Paul Claudel, like the visions of Andreieff; the sets of Larionov, Golovine, Gončarova, like—let's add as well—the clothing of Loïe Fuller and the artificial smiles of Lyda Borelli, these and other even more unimportant phenomena, have created a pretension of having achieved something new in the minds of modern aesthetes, [even though] there are no longer simple and easy paths that have not yet been explored and known.

No other means of theatrical representation can achieve the rapid, kaleidoscopic synthesis of 100 consecutive scenes better than the cinema.

This is the basis of its primary reason for being. And similarly, no other means can create the happily unreal (and therefore artistic) vision that is just like the one that appears in the mind of each creative artist.

For this reason, too, cinema can become an art—because of the possible unreality, the artificiality that can triumph within it.

The scenic apparatus is a formidable contributing factor to that effect—a provocateur of suggestion, that is all the more irresistible when it is the least expected. If the great Christian cathedrals didn't have the imposing aspect of their walls and columns, and the echo of their towering domes, and the lights of a thousand candles around the altar, where the priest is dressed like an ancient king, the church would not be animated by the sacred terror of a looming divinity, and the faithful would not feel the fear of so much mystery and such superhuman power.

Today, it takes something other than a simple tragic event to captivate and intoxicate the hearts and mind of a refined modern audience. Once upon a time, a tragedy of Sophocles recited on a street corner, or a scene of Shakespeare in front of a black backdrop was interesting. Today, I saw Djagilev's *Balletti russi* (*Ballets Russes*) in front of a black background, but what colours don't light up the choreographic costumes created by Léon Bakst? That black canvas was nothing but the best background for the triumph of those rainbow-colored flames, dancing before a nocturnal horizon: demented, fleeting flames contained by the proscenium arch as if it were in a gigantic chimney.<sup>3</sup>

Whoever thinks that the sublime work of art is independent of the scenography demonstrates to have not understood the theatre's means, the goals of its effects, or its mission.

Even today, certain tendencies of contemporary painting lead the rational artist to represent reality in a way that is daring in its brutality (and exclusively pictorial) through studies of material sensitivity, having abandoned colours and the old spiritual and sentimental qualities of artistic emotion.

But these are inane heroisms.

To want to impose on the theatrical work what doesn't have in its own nature, which is the suggestive means of descriptive sights and sentiments that we know abound in the literary work: to want to impose, stripped of any backdrops, what you find in the script, because certainly the interpretation of the scenery counts more than the contents of the drama—just as poetry depends on the meter and the sound, architecture depends on harmonious rhythm, [and] music depends on harmony—it is a misguided and barren effort, that while it adds nothing to the work of art, even depletes it of its secondary, and most essential qualities.

In the world of the cinema, people shout a lot, preaching and predicting the coming—finally!—of the *cinematic work*: a work written specifically for the cinema. When one realizes that it is often the *mise-en-scène* that spoils, deforms, and often destroys theatrical and literary works, which would have been better off translated into cinema, then it's the priests of the new glass temples, who declare themselves victims of the absence of a truly cinematic literature. But it's not the feathers—it's the entire nest that is missing, not the nightingale!

If one could see the potentials of scenography distinctly, as much as cinema's photo-scenographic technique, the very new and wondrous qualities of this new art would provide, almost on their own, the structure of the cinematic artwork.

The cinema, when it is a substitute and travesty of the theatre, is only able to create some noteworthy idea—but always a superficial one—of a psychological situation.

The totality of the film as a whole always ends up being a caricature, in spite of the efforts of the most intelligent *metteurs en scène*, who are a little dumb for pursuing a utopia of psychological theatre for the cinema. In saying this, I don't want to claim that the psychological drama of the cinema is absolutely a dead end. I mean that the elimination of the unified set has an advantage in that the settings can be psychologically enhanced. This aspect can significantly facilitate the exteriorization of interiority. However, the sets must not limit themselves to being the decorator and the property designer's vulgar collection of knick-knacks; but it must be an interpretation, which through a refined and sensitive creation of settings, we call psychological.

I do not claim, then, that all that has been dedicated up till now to the art of the screen—even worthy efforts—has been a pointless and ineffective endeavour. I only claim that the true, great path of the cinema is not this: that it is still unknown, because it has only just been explored here and there, and that it is directing itself creatively towards the bright and triumphal backgrounds of imagination, with spectacles that are more or less unreal and imaginary.

This claim is not at all Futurist, I sometimes say, in the rather ridiculous sense of the definition. Because to bring theatrical representation back to the scenography of the imagination and to an almost pure aesthetics, means bringing it to its origins, which touch on the religious ceremony in all of its most lofty theatrical pageantry.

So—and I'm not alone in this—we want to get as far away as possible from the true. We want to affirm the dream, make it real, bring it to life, and to complete it in minute detail.

At the theatre, like on the screen, we will seek out the details of in every beautiful folly with the heart of a poet and with the certainty and faith of a prophet.

Our eyes are brimming with our orgiastic visions, with which (let it be said without exaggeration) we will burn every dismal synthetic tent and every cold, Nordic oversimplification, just like at the cinema [we will burn] every antiquated and wretched reconstruction of luxury apartments.

We want to transform reality: to dazzle the most triumphal reality with the dream of an even more clever and triumphal vision of artifice. The exuberant creativity of our southern temperament must triumph on the screen in the bursting of lights, like in the theatre, in the pageantry of the bright colours and the flaming efflorescence of idealized landscapes, springing forth from the sweltering spectacle of our Mediterranean countries.

Plato thought that reality resides in the forms of man and not in the reality of things. The closer the material thing is to IDEA a form, the more perfect it is.

The more our visions are artificial and cerebral, they will be all the more close to beauty—like perfection and like a unique truth.

So, we want to make aesthetic truth ourselves; in such a way that whatever will be our aesthetic will have to be reality, and that which will be our vision will have to be the truth.

Therefore, we want to overdo it: to proudly overdo it. The simplification will come later.

If we don't first make it complicated, what will we need to or be able to simplify tomorrow?

In the meantime, we have to be and we are savage and primitive. We have to put our orgiastic instincts about scenography out there. We will think about training and restraining these instincts after we will have left them out in the open for a while.

The few shaky attempts that I have already made at filmmaking, with an absolute lack of resources, did not turn out to be, nor could they be, anything truly noteworthy. The modern methods of scenography are so magnificent and varied that my work in the cinema almost became something of a joke.

Moreover, my work in the cinema, which was about three years ago now, was a rather heroic. When Mario Caserini's film *Ma l'amor mio non muore* (*Love Everlasting*) was shown, it was like a wonderfully new language.<sup>4</sup> This film was noted for its modern *editing*, its *close ups*, and for its settings that for the first time came quickly, one after the other, with various backdrops.

Without knowing anything about the cinematic profession, my friend Emidio de Medio and I latched onto this project with the imprudence

and enthusiasm that are the most happy gifts of being 24 years old. I was publishing the *Cronache d'attualità* (*Chronicle of Current Events*), which was financed by my friend, and I shut down this journal. We started a film production company instead, and we chose an *actress* for it; that is to say, an artist who acted, naively, without counting on or worrying about the beauty of her own face: Thais Galizky.<sup>5</sup>

When my first film was shown to the distributors, it was immediately stamped with the futurist label because it was not common.<sup>6</sup> Because of this, people took us as carefree jokers who cared primarily about playing around and crazy eccentricities. However, we sold it nonetheless, and I had a lot of fun letting myself be the butt of jokes. The only bad part, which I was obsessed with, was playing the part of the misunderstood genius!

Another one of my films, which was noted for its scenery, was decimated by the censors. It was a novel of modern magic. The censors simply eliminated...the magic.

These events can be recalled even after such a short while because the birth of the cinema is so recent that our actions have an importance that I would almost call historic. For this reason, it is not in bad taste to talk about ourselves in terms that for many people are rather delicate.

For my part, then, it is necessary to bring to light certain details—now that I have agreed to write about some of my films—because in comparison to old productions they have an enormous importance, yet they are purely primitive and minute, pale seeds of another cinema when compared to the great future of scenery on the screen: of the true cinema of modern art, which I see as a phenomenon completely in the future.

'*L'arcoscenico del mio cinematografo*', *In Penombra*, 2/1 (January 1919), pp. 21–24. Translated by Siobhan Quinlan.

## Notes

1. [Editors' note. *The Death of Haase* and *Anitra's Dance* are two musical passages from Suite no. 1, Op. 46, composed by Edvard Grieg in 1888 for the play *Peer Gynt* ('Grieg').]
2. [Editors' note. Gian Giuseppe Mancini (1881–1954) was an Italian architect, scenographer, painter, and sculptor. Fortunato Depero (1892–1960) was an Italian painter, sculptor, and designer. He was among the signatories of the *Manifesto dell'aeropittura futurista* in 1929 and was part of the second wave of futurism.]

3. [*Translator's note.* The original uses the term *fuochi fatui* 'willo-the-wisps' These are flames that spontaneously appear in swampy areas as result, it is thought, of the combustion of gases released from the swamp.]
4. [*Editors' note.* 1913 film with Lyda Borelli as the protagonist, produced by the Turinese production company, Film Artistica Gloria.]
5. [*Editors' note.* The name of the production company was Novissima Film.]
6. [*Editors' note.* The author is referring to his film *Thais* (1917) produced by his production company, Novissima Film.]

# My Views on the Cinematograph<sup>1</sup>

*Lucio d'Ambra*

A novelist, a dramatic author, a sculptor, and an architect, a musician and a poet, after dinner over coffee and cigarettes, speaking of the cinematograph.

The novelist speaks:

I see in the cinematograph the possibility of narrating, narrating with pictures instead of with words.

What is the real meaning of the art of narrating?

It is the secret of finding in one's own imagination and in the reality which surrounds us a circumstance, and to cleverly develop that circumstance in a plot, *peripizia* [*sic*], and a solution.<sup>2</sup>

I think that a designer, gathering together the different points of the circumstance that I have imagined, could narrate by means of drawings that which I narrate in written words.

Imagine one of my novels cleverly illustrated, page by page, each scene accurately. Imagine this book in an edition in a language unknown to you. Now think of yourself having to wait in the salon of an hotel where you have only that book at your disposal to pass the time.

Do you think that turning over the leaves methodically from the first to the last page, unheeding the text, which is illegible to you, looking at the drawings which have the universal language of signs, do you think that reaching the end you would not know all of the circumstances that I have narrated?

Do you think that it is not possible by the aid of illustrations in an illustrated edition to trace the story of Manon Lescaut or of Margherita Gautier?

Certainly, it is necessary that he should know how to catch expressively all the essential points of my story, all of the characteristic traits of my characters.

Assuredly, it is necessary that he should be able to arrange his drawings as I have been able to decorate all the narrative elements of my story.

In other words, he should not abandon himself to the caprice of his pencil, nor have I allowed myself to yield to the fancy of the pen.

He must construct as I have constructed.

What is the cinematographic picture if not a design composed of real figures and reproduced in movement by a special photographic process?



It is evident that not all novelists can find a means of being interpreted by the cinema; neither can all novels be satisfactorily illustrated.

It is surely not by means of the cinema that Xavier de Maistre describe the events in his *Voyage autour de ma chambre* (*Voyage Around My Room*) or Benjamin Constant could give expression to the psychological anxieties of Adolphe. But, from this one must not conclude that only those novels consisting of external events, movement of persons, hazardous situations, lend themselves to a cinematographic interpretation: for example, pious [Jules] Verne, *Dumas père*.

The pictures, the surroundings, the facial expressions, the short text which accompanies the cinema picture allow us to go further than mere exterior movement, they permit us to reach the farthest depths of sensibility and consciousness. I would not have you misunderstand me. I should deny all my art as a novelist. I should do away with the small amount of talent I may possess if I were to affirm that a novelist can equally well write and place on the cinema: *Madame Bovary*.

I well know the meaning of the novelist's art, the art of narrating if it be only a work of purely descriptive scenes.

When you have by the aid of the great *metteur en scène* reproduced on the cinema, the characters and the vicissitudes of *The Three Musketeers*, you will still be far from finding the artistic enjoyment derived from the reading of the book.

There is simply wanting in your interpretation the narrator's art and his style.

I do not say therefore a heresy, or worse than heresy, anything cruel. I do not say that those works proper to literary narrative, maintaining equal value, can be transferred lightly from the book to the stage.

But I do say that the imagination of a novelist can find also on the cinema a means of narrating a theme by pictures.

I affirm that today, if *Dumas père* lived, he would not write *The Three Musketeers* for the cinema, but he would certainly be able to narrate by means of the cinema a theme, either lively or sad, that would please the play of his imagination.

In fact, for me, the cinema is another manner of narrating.

The dramatic author speaks:

I do not know of a more foolish sacrilege than to give a version of the opera on the cinema.

Tempted by a small profit, I have relinquished the right of reproduction of my dramas and comedies.

I am red with shame and black with remorse.

I am an unnatural father who for a slight gain has permitted his offspring to be assassinated. Do you know of anything more grotesque than those reproductions of theatrical works on the cinema, where a comedy is faithfully followed, reducing a scene of twenty pages to five or six pictures, intermixed with four or five episodes taken at hazard from the play without sequence, and thus bereft of all its strength, introducing between one scene and another some exterior effect, some contemporary action, some small particular, all of which the very construction of representative art does not admit on the theatrical stage.

They say in so doing, they follow scrupulously the work of the cinema dramatist; that is to say, massacred.

As a fact, if they were artists, if they were not inflated with presumption, these producers of reductions should, in order to follow art scrupulously, act in quite a different manner: they should, that is, live again the work of art, remould it, reconstruct it in another form of artistic expression.

The only method of treating faithfully the work of art to be reproduced is to seem unfaithful to it.

It would be necessary to be an artist, as much of an artist as the writer one is going to reproduce. I have therefore sworn upon my dignity, also I were to be covered with gold, never again consent to the reproduction of my dramatic works on the cinema.

I believe it an error to confuse cinema and theatre just because for each scenery and actors are required. It is like confusing the *Orlando Furioso* (*The Frenzy of Orlando*) and the *Ninth Symphony*, simply because Ariosto and Beethoven have in each instance needed ink and paper and a sense of rhythm. I think that cinema offers to a man addicted to the theatre a new mode of representing a scene.

For one thing, cinema does not need consecutive words. How many acts in life are made up without words, how many so-called principal scenes in life take place with few words and long silences!

At the theatre, we are obliged to fill in that blank so caused, to give speech, even when a look, a gesture, and a long silence suffice to say all. But there is more besides.

At the theatre our scene is closed in by the imprisoning bounds of the three artificial walls unchanged for three quarters of an hour.

How much dramatic poetry, that life holds, is lost in this inexorable servitude?

How many dramatic situations are made up of contradictions and contrasts, with references to other situations, and with other persons, which the theatre does not permit us to have present contemporaneously?

The betrayal of Brutus, would it not perhaps be more potently dramatic if, as a contrast, we could represent contemporaneously the calm security of Caesar before entering the Senate?

The cinema gives breadth to the scene with powerful representations of the leading artists and all those concerned, it allows collecting together all the near and distant elements, both contradictory and complementary.

And how many visions of dramatic poetry find in the cinema a means of expression which the theatre does not provide?

When in Shakespeare the army advances covered entirely with branches of trees, and the poet says that it appears a 'walking forest', only the cinema gives opportunity for this marvellous reproduction.

Do not mistake me. I do not mean by this to say that Shakespeare, if alive today, would be the author of films for Francesca Bertini: I mean only to infer that the dramatic author can for his play of the situation and dramatic positions, find in cinema a very new form of expression.

In fact, for me, the cinema is another method of representation.

And in his turn the painter speaks:

It is incontestable that the cinema is a picture.

I follow with much interest the great progress that authentic artists have made in this branch of art.

How many photographs are more beautiful than our paintings, how many photographs give the soul of a model more than our portraits?

Why therefore is not the great photographer an artist as much as the painter?

Because photography is like art on the borders of the divine kingdom, why does it remain banished in the realm of good intentions?

It is because photography does not create the image, but seizes it, does not prepare it, but fixes it, so it can never be fantasy, but can only at most be ability and good taste.

Photographers are admirable artificers, but not artists: executors, but not creators.

The cinema picture, instead, which is photography in movement, is a new photographic art, is in face the art of photography, that is creation and execution combined, the artificer and the artist in one. Could not Michetti in a cinema picture have found and composed the lines of *The Daughter of Jorio*?<sup>3</sup> Could not Watteau, 'scenemaker', compose the scene of *Embarkation of Cythère*?

The artist's art would it not be equally revealed in the composition of an oil painting and a cinema picture of the suggestive poem of Beethoven by Lionello Balestrrieri?<sup>4</sup>

I know what objection you will make—the colouring—but colour will come.

That is the unquestionable conquest of tomorrow for the cinema. And when by means of colour you can fix the sky you have selected, the shades you have chosen for a dress or a piece of stuff, the harmony of the tones you have created as a whole, or in a surrounding, will you tell me why the painter, tempted by the idea of a picture, cannot create it there in front of the lens, in the living spontaneity, in the simple and great reality, rather than upon two yards square of canvas placed upon his easel in his study? I smile to think of an exhibition of pictures by illustrations painters, taken directly from that which is the most vital, most real that nature and humanity can offer them; paintings created and imagined, fixed, recorded in their vibrations and movements by the cinematographic apparatus.

How much more life, how much more geniality, how much more novelty you would find then in the ordinary 'salon'? Colour—I know I have already said so. In the meantime, until we have colour, many artistic combinations can be derived from black and white. I wish to try something in this form.

Understand me, I do not repudiate painting, and I do not ask you to bring back Leonardo and compel him to put a scene on the cinema.

But I tell you simply that this new cinematographic art interests me because it seems to me that the cinema without brushes, without pastels, without pencils can be for artists a new mode of painting and drawing.

And in his turn the sculptor:

You are right. I thoroughly underline all you say; I would paraphrase your words for sculpture. I have seen in certain films groups of human beings of an incomparable beauty of art and attractiveness of form.

A short time before our war, a German film appeared *Bug, the Man of Clay*.<sup>5</sup> What else was it, you remember, than a sequence of sculpture and engravings. Rodin and Félicien Rops would have seen it with the greatest interest.

A beautiful woman, a strong man with mother and child, sorrowful parents and pitying daughter. Given these, how many groups an artist can create, how many varied forms of beauty he can suggest by moving, grouping, disposing in one way or another, two or more persons? Cannot I perhaps, sculptor, give to human material, as I do with marble, the pity of Antigone stooping over the city of Edipo [*sic*]; or the desolation of King Lear receiving in his arms the body of Cordelia?<sup>6</sup>

The stereoscope will, and one day must, give to flat photographic images the effect of being raised, the more complete sense of form, that plastic sense, that is, which belongs rightly to sculpture. But also without having

found the means of applying the stereoscope to cinematographic photos, or to the projections of the cinematographic photographs, the ability of some operators is already successful in giving to some cinema pictures a perfect illusion of raised and complete images.

When a fresh technical discovery shall render these isolated effects universal, the sculptured line can be executed in human groups photographed either in masses of plaster or marble.

Already there are actors and actresses who wisely directed have been able to give to the cinema admirable examples of plastic beauty. I have not the time to do it or even attempt it: but how many times on seeing a film I think that a sculptor could group two personas in sufferance, give the embrace of two beings who love, the opposition of two who hate each other, with a line, in an attitude of supreme plastic beauty, that is, the same form of beauty that I pursue, seek, and attempt in the silence of my studio, in the mobility of the clay under my febrile thumb... But, yes, yes, think of it, ponder well, my friends. It is not a paradox if I tell you that, for me, a sculptor, the cinema, at root, could be a new form of sculpture.

And the architect said:

If I attempt originality, all the academics rush at me to crucify me. In general, it is always necessary to follow the limited world of ideas which past beauty has consecrated, I should almost say, authorized.

I remember that at the academy, my illustrations Master, praised my fantasy when I was studying.

But since I have opened the window to my fantasy, no one has answered to its appeal.

It is easily understood.

Where does the flower of fantasy grow if not in the garden of the imagination? Now where is the fantastic element of our life of today to be found? In the edifices to our cities, in the construction and the furnishing of our houses?

With the cinematograph is born an art where the fantastic reigns, where fantasy can freely play all its divine caprices.

This fantasy has its architecture and should have its fantastic architecture.

Since the cinema opens the world on the unreal to our reality, here architecture can find there an entirely new inspiration, an entirely new and wondrous freedom of fantasy.

Temples, palaces, fountains, buildings, halls, gardens, all can be revealed by the cinema.

The fantasy of the architect could create on the cinematographic scene a new world, an entirely fresh beauty.

If tomorrow a poet's caprice for a cinematographic vision could take me to the moon; if an architect could create a style which shall not be either Greek or Roman, or Renaissance, or Baroque, neither future nor past, which shall be only and ultimately be something not seen before, and therefore impossible, which shall be the style of the 'moon', and mine alone; if, tomorrow another poet by means of another fantastic cinematographic vision should take me to the bed of the ocean, what a yet unknown architecture I would discover amongst the seaweeds, and the sea green rocks where the Sirens live! Ah! Give me money, time, and a poet's imagination, give me liberty and novelty, give me the thing not yet seen, something not yet conceived in the realm of fancy, of all that which does not exist; give me the fantastic, give me the cinema in fact, and you will see that with cardboard and canvas, and transparent paper, there will flower [*sic*] in the sky, at the bottom of the sea, an entirely new beauty, and I, architect hemmed in by the ordinary forms, the ordinary conventions, could perhaps finally find in the cinema the means of giving you, a new architecture.

And in his turn the musician speaks:

I confess that I am tempted for some time by the idea of setting a film to music, a film, be it understood, that shall be the work of an artist's, a poet's fancy.

Not *The Iron Claw* nor *The Murder of Lyon's Courier*.

Between the melodrama and the symphony, this musical accompaniment to a series of pictures that narrate a story lyrically seems to me a new, a varied, genial, and light form of musical composition. Today, the projected film is accompanied by a potpourri of musical fragments, taken casually here and there by the indolent hand of an insignificant orchestral conductor from amongst the old pieces of music composing a well-used repertory. It happens, moreover, accidentally, that occasionally a piece of music applies so perfectly to the dramatic situation, to the poetry of a picture, to the fantasy of a dream, to be able to tie the impression of having been expressly written for the circumstance, inspired by that poetry, by that particular fantasy. You will each have observed that when this happens, the cinematographic representation arouses in us a profound feeling, envelopes us in an irresistibly suggestive atmosphere.

Think, then, what value the cinematographic reproduction can acquire by musical collaboration, artistically understood. Observe further that music associated with the cinema finds a new form, other than the defined, precise, and rigid accompaniment of the melodramatic melody, and is not merely the vague, indefinite, mysterious atmosphere of the purely symphonic composition. In its immense variety of pictures, of motives, of

surroundings, of persons, the cinema can offer to the musician a marvellous variety of rhythm, of style, of accents, and the most varied and contrasting tones of the musical keyboard.

I repeat that I am attracted by the idea of making this experiment. It is said that the musician will be forcedly suffocated in his poetic sentiment by the demands of necessity of synchronism, by the limitation of pictures, etc.

I do not think that the musician will be in greater slavery in that case than he would be when confronted by the verses, and strophes of a libretto, or by the scenic demands of a theatrical work. I know well that the truly free form of music is symphonic composition and that only with unlimited freedom Beethoven could write the *Ninth Symphony*.

But I who am not Beethoven can only appear to you at most – by your good will – a graceful musician with a little polish and a little talent, I find for my part that the cinema can be a new manner of composing music.

Speaks finally the poet:

Do you know where I think it most possible to freely express the lyricism that lives in my spirit?

In verse and in a cinema film.

I have made a film; I have written a drama.

Do not be scandalized if I dare to say that more than in music, more than in the limits of the theatre, more than in the iron bound laws of drama, it has been possible for me to be a poet, to be lyrically and purely poetic in the free, fanciful, fantastic dreams that the cinema in its infinite possibilities can offer to my most ardent lyric fervour.

If all this appears to you exaggerated, it is because you look at the cinema such as it has been so far.

Only let us remember that notwithstanding its prodigious technical development, also commercially and artistically, the cinema is scarcely out of infancy.

The first teachers had reduced the pupil to the suffocating enslavement of their bad taste, of their niggardly industrial spirit, and of their absolute artistic sanctimony. By the help of some artists today in America, in Italy, in France, aided by some far-seeing commercial persons, who second [*sic*] their desires, the cinema reproduction is making various efforts in search of art and is finding poetry. And today it becomes art only because poetry is joined to it, since there is no art possible without poetry.

Fantasy and imagination, the fantastic and the real woven in harmony, lead the cinema toward art: then to poetry.

As for me, I think that a film can be at the same in observance of the laws of moment and action which despotically govern all forms of representation.

I think that a film can be a picture, rhythm, music, poetry, as much as any other form of art.

Thus, across a series of pictures lyrically seen and expressed, as across a series of lyrical thoughts verbally expressed, the fantasy of a poet can sing freely and without limit.

The cinema picture and the action accompanying the picture are I think for those who know how to seek in its depth, an inexhaustible mine of fantasy and poetry.

The poet's fancy that by verbal expression suggest the idea to our imagination is here free to represent it directly to our eyes and our spirit.

Call all poets to the cinema, call all artists, but exclude the blunderers, the calumniators, the evil-speakers, the money-grubbers.

You will so give to the cinema that artistic nobility which belongs to it, you will so create for me a new method of poetry.

Thus, they spoke in my hearing, I being silent—a novelist, a dramatic author, an architect, a musician, and a poet. But they did not prevent me, on my return home, from finding upon my writing desk, printed in a cinematographic review, once more the same question: 'Do you think, Sir, that it is possible for the cinema to become art'?

'My Views on the Cinematograph', *Apollon*, 4/7 (30 July 1919): pp. 169–174.

## Notes

1. [Editors' note. The original essay was published in English and contained a number of minor typographic and grammatical errors which have been corrected by the editor.]
2. [Editors' note. This is a misspelling of the Italian word *peripezia*, meaning 'adventures' in English.]
3. [Editors' note. The author is referring to Francesco Paolo Michetti (1851–1929) who designed the original sets for Gabriele d'Annunzio's *Daughter of Jorio*. Michetti was one of the main proponents of the School of Resina, who sought to bring the school's images of Italian landscapes and contemporary life into the mainstream of European painting.]
4. [Editors' note *Beethoven* (1899) was shown at the 1900 Universal Exposition in Paris and is one of Lionello Balestrieri's most famous paintings.]
5. [Editors' note The author is referring to the 1915 film *Der Golem* by Henrik Galeen.]
6. [Editors' note. In all likelihood, the author intended Thebes, where according to Greek mythology, Antigone is imprisoned and commits suicide.]



# Meditations in the Dark

*Michele Biancale*

The audience in the shadows is repose; the eye still possesses a streak of light, left outside, in the late afternoon, when the gold of the sun becomes a purple red and one recovers little by little the dazzling phosphorus of the screen. Rest: and as with insomnia, your gaze wanders over the darkness of the ceiling, finding slices of light projected from the street, and so you grab on to those two strips of light that spring from the projectionist's cabin and like two bridles guide the action on that short and immense phantom canvas sheet that does not betray, like the Shroud of Turin, the marks of sweaty passion, agony, and death. You wander, because the film is not good; its action, casting masks of distress on the shadowy faces of people sitting in the underground chamber, with such solemn attention that it is as if they are glimpsing the final moments of a man condemned to death, doesn't make your heart leap. And then, in the silence, the drumming of the little motor that automatically produces the narrow and long arch of vision is like that aery signal, which reaches us uninterruptedly on the sea beaches like the shafts of torpedoes at night, in a still sea, and which seems like the message of millions of cicadas that have just finished chirping and dying, and you are on the bench waiting for the wind to close all its banners up there, far away in the calmed sea.

Insensitively, around that continuous click that ties together and gathers vague and slow images, thoughts are gathered about the primordial essence of Cinema, that consists entirely in those lightning fast passages of moments that are and then are no longer and that oscillate around the immanence of gestures that continually annul themselves, like patterns on water that tend with every click towards a form that is always in a state of deformation and that lives on successive developments, the one coming out of the other like waves, like veils, like everything that tends toward repose. Is this not the principle of Cinema?

And is not to return to its origin to interpret its essence, to grasp the reason for its appearance in the world, to insert an artistic spirit in its agile scientific organism that is generated by that organism and is not in contrast with its essential nature? Have you noticed how those insensitive erosions or corrosions of images appear in their primitive cinematographic element when the one is born of the other leaving residues of wandering smokiness, scattered by the light that vibrates, settles, consumes itself to

generate other, ever-changing and ungraspable images? Yet, one can calmly state that everything made out of such material is beyond the scientific reason of Cinema and any artistic application is beyond the current that gave birth to that invention. The deepest emotions that the cinematograph has given us are not found in the actions, types, scenes, or in any of the schemes that come from theatre. Rather, they come in the form of pure luminous impressions, those in which the fixity of the image is abolished and we can glimpse at the dissolution of the image, the sense of the unreal, the fleeting moment in the luminous element. I do not say it is only this: because cinema is able to give us certain works of light and shade, of black and white that no Rembrandt would be able to dispense because in those broad expanses of white and in those enormous blocks of black there is a feverish, teeming, pulsating life, seemingly of material that knows no settled state, in continual transformative activity. You experience the shudder when the naked walls, the desolate deserted spaces are in the process of becoming fantastic apparitions; when a brilliant white table cloth levitates with abandoned in a room in which no one expects it, when you perceive certain very sharp sutures of sheets of light and shade, when all of life is tangential, made of edges, powerful shapes; when everything is black and a sharp hiss of excruciating light comes from afar and enters, expands, spreads, and occupies the entire visual field. Then you feel it is there that drama exists, but it is the drama created by the light, not by people, not by the subject; then you feel that the restlessness of the human soul is the continuous action of luminous matter that can no longer be borne by the forms on the screen but tends to vanish and that the accents of light are much more powerful than those of the human throat and the term *teatro muto* ('silent theatre') is the proof that cinema is no longer in tune with and we believe has never been in tune with the artistic element that was inherent in its scientific principle. Is there a human drama that is in tune with the drama of light? We don't believe so: nevertheless, one could attempt to bring the figurations back in such a way that they take into consideration the most genuine characteristics of the Cinematograph and not create or seek literary transpositions or equivalents of elements that belong to the pure field of vision and light. One can hardly imagine what the Cinematograph would become; and to embark on such a fantasy would be like trusting Rimbaud's poem, the '*Bateau ivre*' ('Drunken Boat'), to navigate on unknown waters. What does this matter? Once you have decided that the future of cinema does not lie in the development of literary drama, but in the ever deeper extraction of luminous characteristics from the cinematographic principle's womb, one has stated a truth on which reality will never smile.

But, leaving meditation behind us, we must go back to contemplating the Divas!!

*'Meditazioni al buio', La Decima musa, 2 (May 1920), pp. 13–14. Translated by David Ward.*

## Section 7



# Theory in a Narrative Form

*Luca Mazzei*

One of the aspects likely to strike any scholar who studies Italian film theory of the silent era is the enormous role played by narrative. In fact, in Italy there were many short stories, novels, and even rhymes focused on the cinema during the silent era. This kind of text has been the object of growing interest in the field of film studies since the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> In parallel, Italian Studies has invested in this same era.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, we would be remiss not to offer adequate space in this anthology to narrative form. But why reserve an entire section exclusively for narrative texts? The question is particularly pertinent because two of the most important anthologies dedicated to the theory of the silent era over last few years did not include a section for this kind of text.<sup>3</sup> Instead, they opted to integrate narrative works into the same categories as all the other texts. Our choice to give fictional texts their own section comes out of the conviction that the narrative form plays a specific role. When these texts appeared rather preciously beginning in 1897,<sup>4</sup> they were originally cine-phobic, but in a historical era that spans from 1896 to 1922, they came to become fully dedicated to bringing cinema to the heart of national cultural discourse in the Kingdom of Italy.<sup>5</sup>

## Making Fiction to Share

The core arguments that these texts revolve around are quite straightforward. In these stories, there are three main themes that persistently recur: the power of the cinema to transform the habits of the individual's life; the degradation of physical experience when compared to the image onscreen; and the destabilization of gender roles that the movie theatre seems to provoke.<sup>6</sup> At times, these themes even emerge together in these stories, as they do, for example, in eight of the ten stories in this anthology, which demonstrate an exemplary amount of thematic density in their narratives.<sup>7</sup> Two of the three themes described above—the impact of the cinema on the social life of the individual, and the dematerialization of the object's physical identity as a result of the film experience—function as decisive elements in two remaining stories.<sup>8</sup>

Literary articles, scientific reports, and essays on aesthetics never attempt to provoke the hidden fears of their readers with the same intensity

and efficiency. They never aspired to create that same thematic density. If anything, in the culture of the time, the task of literary texts was to offer the reader a 'clean', localized analysis or a practical solution (we could even say 'normative' model) that was immediately usable. It is the same as with the non-fiction essay and the scientific report. Instead, in the era of silent cinema, narrative form, heir to the *conte philosophique*, was offered to its reader primarily as an interpretative tool: an object that was perhaps not immediately able to offer satisfying answers, but that enabled the reader to forge a hypothesis of their own and provide all the cultural tools necessary to obtain the necessary answers in the future. Indeed, it is not a coincidence that beginning in 1922, and for the remainder of the 1920s, narrative tales about cinema, which had held a privileged position among the cine-phobic intelligensia, had instead become the gathering place for a new cine-philic elite.

What the theoretical-narrator of the era attempted to do is to render the cinema a shared experience: common, collective, and therefore 'expressible'. The experience of the cinema was transformed from the temporary receptacle of individual anxieties and the already well-known, pre-modern panorama into the new and unknown lands of the modern. Therefore, as compared to the non-fiction essay, these texts direct themselves to a different kind of reader. If in the non-fiction essay, the presumed reader is the scientist, the politically-engaged bourgeois male, or potentially even the artist or viewer of art, in the narrative texts it is, instead, always an interchangeable figure, a reader in need of definition that we can call the 'reader without qualities', to paraphrase Robert Musil. Within the cine-theoretical narrative form, it is of little import if this person is a man or woman, of the middle- or lower middle-class, an occasional or a frequent movie-goer. Ideally, it is by not distinguishing between them that the cine-theoretical story embraces all of them, so much so that when published, the thematic structure of the stories change very little.

### **A Modern Backdrop for a Modern Literature**

But if these texts were put into dialogue with the cinematographic experience, how much, when we consider the form that the modern assumes in this period in Italy, can be said of this specific form of modernity? Here, the issue becomes more complex. If we mean technical-industrial modernity, we must come to terms with an extreme discontinuity. In Italy, between 1896 and 1922, there were only a few areas of the country affected by

modernization; in particular, the large and medium-sized urban centres primarily in the North. The South (with the exception of Naples, which was the former capital of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies) was totally excluded from this process, as were all of the mountainous areas and a large part of the agricultural areas in the rest of Italy. But also within these cities, the advance of modernity was spotty. It was in one *piazza*, but not in the adjacent one. It came through quickly on the street that overlooked cars rushing by, but it stopped in that same street with the arrival of the pedlar's cart. It is on the lowest floors of a building that housed a vibrant, new bar, but it disintegrates as you go up to the top floor, where that same building shows traces of its austere medieval construction. In countries like France, Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the United Kingdom, Denmark, and the United States, where a process of advanced industrial development and, more broadly, a process of political and social modernization has already taken root, the development of cinema was much more structured process. Therefore, as a whole, the panorama of the modern presents itself as much more continuous. In Italy, it was not like that; so, it follows that, on the Mediterranean peninsula in the 1910s, modernity and tradition were consistency found coexisting with one another, often under difficult circumstances. But there is a more distinctive feature that for the purpose theoretical analysis is almost positive. The presence of this new medium alongside the debris and the operating frameworks of the old world allows the sensible individual to see even more clearly the chasm that separates modernity from tradition.

The same goes for cinema as well. In fact, in the Italian context, the movie theatres were spread everywhere. But they were concentrated in urban areas, even though a large part of the population of the country was dispersed in rural areas and in small towns, where it was hard to see a film. And as compared to other sectors, cinema seemed to have greater communicative potentials. Until around 1911 or 1912, viewing a film took very little time, at most, according to the texts of the time, about 20 minutes to half an hour. And cinema had become 'popularized' in the early years of the twentieth century. By 1905, the cost of a film was already so cheap that even those who did not live in the city or who were not of the upper class could partake in the cinematic experience at a festive event, a trip to the city, or during military service, even on a minimal wage.<sup>9</sup> After all, the cinema is not a product that must be bought (like a car); it is not reserved only for a privileged few (like the airplane); and it does not require a prohibitive degree of urbanization (like the department store). In addition to these markers of democracy, it adds an important opening to women: mothers, daughters,



maids and nannies (often bringing the kids, often for themselves), had general access to the theatres and that for Italian society was a new norm.<sup>10</sup> We can say, then, that in Italy, cinema was the element of modernity most accessible to all.

To this deeply democratic nature, cinema also contributed directly in the field of perception. In fact, to Italians at that time, it does not appear only as a superficial experience; that is, it was not only a light from outside the doorway. It was instead, and above all, an immersive experience that sought to reunite in condensed form the entire visible world by re-viewing it through the lens of modernity.<sup>11</sup> In the eyes of the cultured elite of the time, the movie theatre not only integrated itself within the world, but almost seemed to want to undo it in order to reestablish it under new rules.<sup>12</sup>

### A Non-Canonical Literature

By virtue of all of these complex characteristics, it is almost obvious that the cinema became more than just a new form of entertainment for Italian writers of the era; indeed, it presented, in its form and in its function, the same impulse it had for Anglo-American, French, and German culture in the previous century.<sup>13</sup> That is, it was not only a banal technology with which to enliven the actions of a character or a key place to reference in a risqué passage, but it was an ideal symbol of the (modern) condition, which Italian writers wanted urgently to narrate. In other words, it is easy for the cinema, which is at the centre of the discourse that the twentieth-century Italian writer is having with himself, to be transformed into the signifier that carries the meaning of modernity.

It is no coincidence that, with the exception of a few essayists, from a certain point, writers explicitly seek to work on cinema in a way that is more prosaic, with the vast majority of narrators rejecting the use of the movie theatre as a mere source of interesting situations (the set that puts in motion a curious story, the movie theatre as a source of different types to 'observe' with pen in hand).<sup>14</sup> The engine of narrative-theoretical production seems to emerge not so much from the simple will to profit commercially from some variations of the 'new' (as some of the minor producers did for the novel or the theatre, such as Sandro Camasio, Nino Berrini, Primo Piovesan, Alfredo Testoni, and Nino Martoglio), as much as the widely-accepted conviction that only a traditional instrument, such as narrative, can provide a better explanation, with its view 'from far away', for the otherwise inextricable complexity of the cinematographic experience.<sup>15</sup> The narratives about the

cinema find space across diverse areas (and this is strong proof of its hold on the culture of the era). Of the ten stories republished here, three appeared in various art magazines (Borelli, Vanzi, Di San Secondo); two in a magazine on cinema (Tozzi, Doria); two others in a literary magazine (Cortesi, Lombroso); one in a daily paper (Gozzano); another in a children's magazine (Tanfani); and the last one, at the end of this volume, in a posthumous anthology (Gozzano). The social pervasiveness of these texts indicates that the desire for them was—we must conclude—extremely widespread.

At a certain point, the environment in Italy was almost overcome by this desire for conceptual elaboration. The production of narrative texts dedicated to the filmic experience (in the entire silent era there were about 90 in all, and an additional ten were theatrical texts) is quite excessive, and seemingly points to an exaggerated response to demand. This is especially true when you think that very few writers wrote additional stories about the cinema: the number of short stories, comedies, novels, just about coincides with the number of writers moving in this direction.

But if these stories appeared under the sign of excess, they also came to be almost immediately excluded from every memory. Not one of these texts (with the exception of *Shoot!* by the Nobel laureate Luigi Pirandello) belongs to the Italian canon. That is to say, the environment desired them, but they were not intended to last for a long time; not because they were of poor literary value, but because of their very nature as accounts or glosses.<sup>16</sup> What these stories were intended to do was to respond to a need that was contingent—to grasp a real novelty—and their transience is a sign of how well they responded such a task.

## A Hybrid Theory

Did fiction writers go outside the confines of the canon as a way to mimic the continual freshness of the cinematic medium in its first few years? The hypothesis is seductive, and perhaps in some ways true. After 1922, there are a number of Italian narratives written on the cinema that take up, in a new way, the situations and themes already confronted in the preceding decades, so much so that it is difficult to understand for many of these if it is plagiarism, coincidence, or strategy.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, this pervasive amnesia seems to stem from the hybridity of these narratives. In a country like Italy, where the philosopher Benedetto Croce, the most influential intellectual of his era, exalts the distinction between the various arts, the exchange between literature and cinema (in which cinema offers opportunity to

literature and literature helps cinema develop) primarily sparks scepticism.<sup>18</sup> This is the reason that, in the eyes of their contemporaries, these narratives must have appeared like a sort of monster that could only be exhibited among the curiosities within the pages of the magazine, the small volumes on the fringes of mainstream literature, maybe in the newspapers, but hard to find outside the domain of immediate consumption.

And yet, it is the standardized, but efficient form of these stories that strikes us today. It is about a form that is, in some ways, always 'philosophical'. The methodological framework with which Leo Marx analysed the conceptual core of Thomas Carlyle's *Sign of Times* can be useful.<sup>19</sup> In fact, Marx argued that the strength of Carlyle lies in the association between the idea of the machine as an object (a technological reality) and the idea of the machine as a metaphor (a symbol of values), in a way that presents culture as an integrated system, in which neither the causes, nor the consequences of mechanization can be relegated to the *external* or *physical* world.<sup>20</sup> In the same way, in these stories, the elements of the cinematographic experience and the experiences that surround it—including the movie theatre and the street, the projector and the crowds, the visual imagery of the film and the recounting of this imagery—are always in communication with each other. One makes use of the other, just as the one serves the other.

### Perseus's System

For Italians at the beginning of the century, the primary characteristics of the cinematographic experience can be seen more in 'mirror situations' (in our case, the mimesis of the filmic experience offered by literature), than by watching a film in the movie theatre, in the place where the hypnotic appeal of the emerging medium dulls judgement so much that it does not allow the 'average' spectator to be aware of the work's operation during its own expression. To filter the cinematic experience through the form of the narrative is, therefore, a method similar to that of the classic myth of Perseus. It is only through the reflection created by his shield's reflection—the myth says precisely this—that the hero is able to admire (or kill) the horrible, but also seductive face of the Medusa. In the same way—as the stories included here seem to say—the most important characteristics of the cinematographic experience are more easily observed when fixed on the literary page than viewed at the theatre. Together, what these stories seem to want to impart is an aesthetic of hybridity (no understanding of the cinematographic experience without the filter of literature, 'no

new' literature without the cinema) and wonder (no beauty without the suspension of judgement, no judgement without first having saved reason from the paralysis caused by beauty), in which the whole thing is further blended into a new solution. Being faithful to the aforementioned method, the theoretical-narrator declared (by pretending) not to know how to present the spectator's experience according to the frameworks of classic argumentation. Incapable of analysis, he instead intends to repackage it to the reader as a reflection of his internal experience of the cinema.

Therefore, the narratives included in this section are not only descriptions of an experience that in reality can never be described outside of the movie theatre. Rather, they are truthful outlines of those contradictory feelings, traces of shock from which there is no recovery. To study them today as 'theoretical objects' means not only to confront them with structures designed to be complex from the outset, but also to see the past 'of a modernity that is no longer' in the act of its own making. It means being able to look back, not only at its most planned aspects, which the tradition of criticism already offers, but also at its most problematic aspects, as only as literature allows, in the progressive process of comparing first, and then to connect Italian culture of the first 20 years of the twentieth century to the experience continuously (re)established by cinema.

## Notes

1. Raffaelli, *'Un pioniere'*; Bottomore, *'Reflet du cinéma dans la fiction'*; Mazzei, *'Non fermate quella manovella!'*; Mazzei, *'Anna Gentile Vertua'*; Mazzei, *'Risvegliarsi nel film'*; Mazzei, *'L'uomo che andava'*; Haller, 'Shadows in the Glasshouse'; Welle, 'Film on Paper'; Shail (ed.), 'Reading the Cinematograph'; Bottomore (ed.), 'The First Film Fiction'; Morreale and Pierini, *Racconti di cinema*; Ciccotti, *Cinema scritto*.
2. Raffaelli, *'Il cinema nella lingua'*; Càllari, *'Pirandello e il cinema'*; Marchi, *'Tozzi, la morte e il cinema'*; Gambacorti, *Storie di cinema e di letteratura*; Gambacorti, *'Lo schermo di carta'*; Diafani, *'Morte di un fantoccio'*; Marchesi, *La letteratura italiana e il cinema*; Syrimis, *The Great Black Spider*; Raffaelli, *'Giochi di voci e citazioni'*; Moses, *Film Theory as Literary Genre*; Loria, *Il personaggio e la trama*.
3. Lant and Periz, *Red Velvet Seat*; Banda and Moure, *Le cinéma*.
4. Bursi and Mazzei, *'Intermedialità'*, pp. 262, 267; Mazzei, *'Anna Gentile Vertua'*.
5. Mazzei, *'Risvegliarsi nel film'*.
6. Tanfani 'Colour Film'; Cortesi 'At the Cinema'; Lumbroso 'A Phantom Pursued'; Borelli 'Miopetti's Duel'; Gozzano 'Pamela-Films'; Vanzi 'Feature

- Film'; Tozzi 'A Cinematic Performance'; Doria 'Me, Riri'; Gozzano 'The Shears Reflection'. All these references are included in this anthology.
7. Cortesi, 'At the Cinema', included in this anthology; Lumbroso, 'A Phantom Pursued', included in this anthology; Gozzano, 'The Shears' Reflection', included in this anthology; Vanzi, 'Feature Film', included in this anthology; Tozzi, 'A Cinematic Performance', included in this anthology; Doria, 'Me, Riri', included in this anthology; Di San Secondo, 'Life, a Glass Theatre', included in this anthology; Gozzano, 'The Shears Reflection', included in this anthology.
  8. Tanfani, 'Colour Film', included in this anthology; Borelli, 'Miopetti's Duel', included in this anthology.
  9. Tanfani, 'Colour Film', included in this anthology; Cortesi, 'At the Cinema', included in this anthology; Papini, 'The Philosophy of Cinematograph', included in this anthology; Fiaschi, *'Al cinematografo'*, Riso Tammeo, *'Gran tribunale'*; Campana, *'La Notte'*; Un Re d'Attore, *'In...cinematograf'...andoci'*; Lucatelli, *'Famiglie di soldati'*, included in this anthology.
  10. Alovio, *'La spettatrice muta'*; Mazzei, *'Al cinematografo da sole'*.
  11. Thovez, 'The Art of Celluloid', included in this anthology; Casetti, *The Eye of the Century*.
  12. Papini, 'The Philosophy of Cinematograph', included in this anthology; Marinetti et al., 'Futurist Cinematography', included in this anthology.
  13. Mahr, *Eisenbahnen in der deutschen Dichtung*; Baroli, *Le train dans la littérature française*; Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*; Schivelbusch, *Geschichte der Eisenbahnreise*; Ceserani, *Treni di carta*.
  14. Livoni, *'Cinematografo ispiratore'*; Livoni, *'Il signore del cinematografo'*; Martini, *Si battono la parola ed il silenzio*; Guastadini, *'Letteratura Cinematografica'*.
  15. Camasio-Berrini, *Il cuore dell'amante*; Piovesan, *Signori!... Si gira!*; Testoni, *La spada di Damocle*; Martoglio, *L'arte di Giufà*.
  16. Mazzei, *'Risvegliarsi nel film'*.
  17. Borelli, 'Miopetti's Duel', included in this anthology; Bontempelli, *'Mia morte civile'*; Doria, 'Me, Riri', included in this anthology; D'Errico, *'Donna di ieri'*; Capriotti, *'Volevo gridare'*; Mariani Dell'Anguillara, 'Avventura cinematografica'.
  18. Croce, *Breviario di Estetica*; Croce, *Estetica come scienza dell'espressione*.
  19. It should be noted that the Carlyle's text is the source of the founding text of Italian film theory Thovez's 'The Art of the Celluloid', included in this anthology.
  20. Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*.

# Colour Film

*Roberto Tanfani*

‘The marvellous invention of colour photography is destined to bring about a revolution in the stage arts. Imagine, for instance, a phonograph in conjunction with a colour–photograph camera, able to reproduce not just movements, but also shades, hues, shadows, and just think of the effect ...’

Cristoforo Antolli threw the newspaper down spitefully. Yet, it was a copy of the *Avvisatore di provincia* (*The Country Courier*), a quality weekly paper—focused on rural affairs, to be sure, but moderate in outlook—which was printed in Radicofani and of which he, Cristoforo Antolli, was an erst-while contributor and shareholder. Everyone remembered the masterful essays on culture in the column ‘The Padua Sweet Pea’, which in recent years had graced the pages of the *Avvisatore* under Antolli’s illustrious name. And that had certain features on the grafting of plum trees—which appeared in the very same paper, and which caused quite the stir in the whole province—had they not been published under a very transparent pseudonym of the mayor of Roccaspereta?’

Thus, the suspicion that Cristoforo Antolli wasn’t favourably inclined towards the newspaper would be groundless. And the act of spite and anger that had so brusquely interrupted his perusal of the scientific article in the *The Country Courier* would have seemed strange, indeed, illogical even, had the very words uttered by the mayor shortly afterwards not served both as commentary and explanation.

‘These newspapers!... The monstrosity is certainly spreading fast... But I don’t buy it! No more singers, no more orchestra, no more choirs, only a filmmaker and a photographer on the stage... Good for them! They’re clever, for sure, but I’m not buying it.’

His words burned with an inimitable tone of fierce irony, impossible to capture in words.

Cristoforo Antolli refused to keep reading the paper. He was disgusted! So he began to leaf through the voluminous correspondence that the postman had just let fall into the letterbox: he ripped open many envelopes, glanced through the many written sheets, unfolded, and put to one side several newsletters. All of a sudden, in the middle of this onerous task, he made an exclamation of pleasant surprise.

‘Oh! The tenor Sebastiani will be at the Municipal Theatre! And not a cent in membership fees!’

The mayor cleaned his glasses and read the letter again. It was definitely an impresario's letter, with the classic letterhead at the top of the paper and the unmistakable stamp underneath the signature.

'*Catullo Merangoli, impresario!*' the mayor repeated several times, almost not believing his eyes. A first-rate company, the latest operas on the books, and Sebastiani as the tenor! It was absurd.

For, after triumphs in Milan, in St. Petersburg and in Madrid, there was no sacrifice that an impresario wouldn't make to ensure the participation of the famous tenor.

At a party in his penthouse on Broadway in New York, the billionaire Vanderbilt had paid 5000 lire for two hours of Sebastiani's singing; and an American journalist had once calculated that even an American oil baron wouldn't have been able to secure the famous tenor's services for anything less than a dollar per musical note... More expensive than Patti, and twice the price paid at a similar event to Madame Nordica!<sup>2</sup>

And now, Sebastiani was coming to sing *Gli ugonotti* (*The Huguenots*) at the Municipal Theatre in Roccasperta!<sup>3</sup>

It was absurd, but true.

For the very same day, Catullo Merangoli, the impresario, came straight from Milan, and requested the honour of a meeting with the mayor. He was a nervous little man, this impresario: very small of stature, with his face shaved very precisely; he hid the phenomenal thinness of his body in an enormous green cloak that reached down to his ankles; and his gold-rimmed glasses failed to mask the sly looks coming from his twitching, vivid, extremely mobile eyes. He examined the theatre meticulously, made a rapid calculation of the number of seats, and was evidently satisfied.

'There's only one clause in the contract,' he said just before leaving.

'Which is?'

'Extreme secrecy! No one must go inside the theatre before the start of the performance.'

'Not even the members of the Council?'

'Not even the mayor!'

Cristoforo Antolli, offended in his capacity as the first citizen of Roccasperta, wanted to argue the point, but the resolute tone of Catullo Merangoli's reply cut short the question before he had even asked it.

'Agreed?'

'Agreed.'

And so, the impresario left, and the Mayor went to attend a meeting of the Municipal Council.

That same evening, several mysterious boxes arrived in Roccasperta, accompanied by employees of Merangoli Enterprises. The boxes and their retinue were let into the theatre (a small, family theatre, left to the district by the late Prince in his will), and they were shrouded in the most total mystery for the three days that followed. The men never left the theatre, and the Mayor himself passed them food through the window in the ticket office; those who came to poke around were turned away politely, but firmly.

Three times a day, the entire Council could be found gathered under the station roof, awaiting the train's arrival. The train would puff to a halt, make its scheduled five-minute stop, then leave again, disappearing on the curving tracks between the sun-soaked hills, green with vineyards, and grey with olive groves. But not a single chorister, not a single costume, not a single musician, was headed for the theatre in Roccasperta.

On the day in question, a billboard of gigantic proportions, erected during the night, announced to all and sundry that at 8.30 that evening at the Municipal Theatre, Merangoli Enterprises would be mounting the first performance of *The Huguenots* featuring the famous tenor Sebastiani!

The well to do of Roccasperta consulted one another—indignantly! It was impossible, ridiculous, a joke in the poorest taste! There wasn't even the shadow of a singer in town; and what about the sets and the costumes, and the choirs, and the orchestra? Not even a trace. The only part of the enterprise that had been seen was those four mysterious people, still shut inside the theatre together with their suspicious-looking crates. Someone proposed to invade the theatre, and the secretary of the Council ran to the Mayor's residence, to request Cristoforo Antolli's authorization to adopt this extreme, but very necessary measure.

But Cristoforo Antolli had vanished. The butler was interrogated in short order; he claimed to have seen him in agitated conversation with a game warden from Radicofani. Then the mayor, his face flushed, had leapt on his mule and galloped out of town. And it was true! An hour or so later we could have found the mayor of Roccasperta in Radicofani, then in Castel Rotondo, then in Sforzesca, redder than a tomato, flinging sweat from his forehead with tight fists, frowning intensely, and his face conveying an air of dumbfounded astonishment.

For he had been informed that the very same Merangoli Enterprises billboard, advertising the very same performance of *The Huguenots* featuring the tenor Sebastiani—at the same time, no less!—had appeared in Sforzesca, in Castel Rotondo, in Radicofani, in a meeting hall, in an amateur theatre group, in a private home separated by several miles of valleys, hills, and vineyards, and he had wanted to confirm this himself.



'God help me! I'm going mad!' the mayor exclaimed in dismay, while the mule, trotting exhaustedly, brought him back to Roccaperta.

Once back in town, Cristoforo Antolli saw that the theatre's interior was brightly lit.

'The performance!' exclaimed the mayor, beside himself with dismay.

'It started half an hour ago,' said a gamekeeper.

Cristoforo Antolli leapt off his mule and, drenched in sweat and dust though he was, launched himself into the theatre.

The sight before him froze him in place, like a statue.

The large room was immersed in shadow, but crowded with spectators. On the stage, illuminated by an intense glow, almost dazzling, the action of the first act was taking place in a breathtaking setting. The orchestra was not visible; but it was certainly playing, hidden someplace, for at that very moment it was accompanying the tenor in the first notes of his *romanza*.

'Sebastiani,' said the mayor in a strangled tone.

It was really him, the tenor, he could recognize his voice; an immense, torrential voice with the most delicious timbre.

Just at that moment, a feverish and growing disruption was propagating through the theatre:

'Fire!'

There was a dreadful uproar. The ladies in the boxes fainted; the spectators on the balcony and in the stalls charged towards the doors, while the stage was lit up with a hot light, like the flames of an oven.

But the performance wasn't interrupted and in the midst of the smoke and the flames, Sebastiani continued to sing, smiling, with his warm, glorious tone.

The following day Cristoforo Antolli was reading the *The Country Courier*.

'Confirming what our reporter wrote in our last issue, the performance of *The Huguenots* was reproduced last night in Liquor Society Rooms of Radicofani by the marvellous Merangoli Colour-Photograph Cinema. Special machines invented by Catullo Merangoli gave the sound of the singing an extraordinary intensity; as for the images, these gave such an illusion of life that the audience, electrified, wanted the tenor Sebastiani on stage at all costs—without stopping to think that while his image elicited applause in Radicofani, the famous Sebastiani in flesh and bones was singing *Norma* at Covent Garden in London.'

'At the last minute we heard the news of a fire in the theatre of nearby Roccaperta. The damage is not serious and the building was insured: the Cinema is safe. As for this incredible machine, it continued to function during the fire; as long as the large empty space between the proscenium

arch remained untouched by the flames, one could see the tenor Sebastiani calmly miming along to his exquisite singing.'

'*Cinematografo a colori*', *Messaggero della gioventù*, 2/5 (4 February 1900), pp. 77–78. Translated by Marco Ladd.

## Notes

1. [*Translator's note.* As opposed to Radicofani, which is a small town in the mountains south of Tuscany, Roccasperda is an imaginary town.]
2. [*Editors' note.* Adelina Patti (1843–1919) was acclaimed Italian soprano and Lillian Nordica (1857–1914) was a renowned American dramatic soprano.]
3. [*Editors' note.* The author is referring to the 1836 French opera, *Les Huguenots*, by Giacomo Meyerbeer.]

# At the Cinema

*Luigia Cortesi*

The electric bell rang; the music *maestro* entered the hall, sat down at the piano and began to play a waltz tune.

It had been three months since he had taken the position at the cinema, and every day he repeated the same waltz, the same pieces of music, hour after hour, while the same scenes played out on the screen in front of him.

The feature was very successful, and it hadn't been changed for a very long time.

During the showing, the hall remained in darkness; a lone electric bulb, covered with a dark purple shade, lit up the sheet music, and illuminated the *maestro's* forehead in dark graveyard hues.

No one paid him any heed. The people who came into the hall were focused on the show; only a few individuals, seeing him enter the hall, noticed a tall man, about fifty years of age, with deeply sloping shoulders and a bowed head.

During that brief walk, when he sat down at the piano, when he sounded the first chord, his head would lift suddenly with youthful vigour. It would have been visible as a flash across his eyes, as though they had discerned a shining, dreamlike mirage... then, his head bowed down again immediately and remained there, pale, shrunken, with the dull look in his eyes just visible through the lenses of his glasses.

If they had continued to watch him, from time to time they would have seen, under the purplish glow, his head lifting up again and falling back down on his chest, heavy with dejection ... and the eternal waltz tune repeated hundreds of time, and the eternal pieces of music, always the same, seemed to mutate under his hands and acquire a new sound...

Twenty times a day, the same thing flashed before his eyes: a story about little *moussmés*, in colour.<sup>1</sup> Every day, he saw the same brightly-coloured pagoda, the same five little women with oblong eyes and purple-tinged hair, laughing and drinking tea. There was one dressed in pink who seemed to look at him every time, opening her little coral mouth with a malicious smile. Then the same plot followed, the same kidnappings, the same difficulties, and the triumph of the *moussmé* dressed in pink, reunited at last with her lover, who had come to save her after facing unimaginable perils.

The show lasted for 35 minutes, but the *maestro* was entirely oblivious to it. He played mechanically, but in the purplish glow, as though called

forth by the sounds of the piano, the past and the present were joined together.

In the silence, it was no longer the story about the tiny colourful *moussés* and their fantastic adventures that passed before his eyes, but the story of his past, in which there was nothing fantastic, nothing happy...

It was these memories that made him lift his head from time to time, bringing a glint to his eyes... and then... the poor *maestro* swept his gaze around him, apparently becoming conscious of reality once more, and his head fell back to his chest.

Every time he thought about the luck that had once smiled upon his life, and that smiled upon it no longer, his soul withered a little more.

Sometimes, after the first waltz, someone in the audience would applaud. It was a joke, and no one noticed the pained look that flared up behind the glasses, what a dismayed expression appeared on the *maestro's* face... but then the hall went dark, and the show started.

There were the five little *moussés*, flirting delicately with their gestures and smiles... and his hands ran unconsciously over the keyboard, while he was enveloped in the strange reverie of his memories. That tiny, that pathetic applause, which tasted of irony and mockery, had shocked every fibre of his being... and he remembered...

How many years had gone by! How many... but one day in the distant past, he too had felt such a thrill of glory, of optimism, passing through all his veins...

The past? In the darkness, through the sound of the music, how clearly he recalled everything! And then his head lifted up... Oh! In his day, he too had been a great artist, he too had experienced all the battles and the anguishes of art, and he had written his *magnum opus* wrestling with adversity, with misery, struggling to work in the tiny room he was renting.

He had poured his entire soul into this music. All the exalted feelings he had ever experienced, he had transfused into his art.

Once it was finished, he felt that he had given to his work the most vital part of his life, the full flower of his youth, all the splendour of his ideals... and he dreamt of having it performed.

Penniless and little known, he had few friends and no influential relations. But he tried to make connections, to speak to the right people. He worked for years and years towards the realization of his dream.

How much humiliation he was to suffer! How wretched he was, with his paltry earnings from giving piano lessons! How non-committal were his peers, who had already achieved success, listening to his music with a weak, pitying smile...

In front of him, on screen, two Tartar officials were falling in love with the *moussmé* dressed in pink, and kidnapping her despite her protestations... Unseeing, the musician remembered... The great day had come. The day had come when his music was to be performed—badly, yes, in a tiny theatre, with awful singers—but it was being performed in Rome.

He had sacrificed a small inheritance from his father towards his dream; the miserable sum of five thousand lire, the fruit of a country organist's thankless savings... and the opera was performed.

His hands were flying over the keyboard, the *moussmés* running around the screen, and with his head bent over his chest, the musician remembered... What a night it had been!

He had sacrificed everything for his vision... Everything, even including his love for a young woman! His artistic soul had been comforted by the caress of sweet hope, but it imposed silence on the music in his heart, all for his dream of Art.

And how was his *magnum opus* greeted by the public?

The singers were out of tune, the orchestra terrible... hundreds of people had come only to destroy him, they whistled, they booed, they laughed so much that the curtain went down after the second act... His few friends attempted to applaud, a small and weedy applause that in the midst of that hurricane seemed like laughter, like mockery, like the scattered applause from just a few minutes earlier...

The fantastic travails of the little *moussmé* continued to pass by on screen; after the kidnapping by the Tartar officers, an American officer who had fallen in love with her searched for her everywhere; and the *maestro*, his head still bowed, remembered... and the music seemed to change and vibrate under the touch of his hands.

He escaped into the wings, left by a secret door. Oh! His overnight flight! Alone! All of his hopes had crumbled; his future lay in ruins. Such jeering! It still rang in his ears, and above him the stars seemed to mock him, in the dark skies of that cold, winter's night... They hadn't understood his music, they hadn't perceived the originality of his ideas. And the poor opera, fruit of his labours, blood of his blood, had been trampled into the dirt!

The little *moussmé* had been trapped by the Tartar officers in a little wooden hut, which was being set on fire... How ridiculous the actions of the little Japanese girl were, always the same, whose little mouth was unable to produce a less nasty smile, and the *maestro* remembered ...

He remembered his flight from the capital, his dejected spirits, his misery... the feeling of desperation that had almost pushed him to suicide...

The world had failed to understand him, and so he preferred to be forgotten. He became a poor country organist, like his father before him... he married a farmer's daughter, and lived in sadness, disheartened, in silence and in sorrow... and then... the years went by, one of his daughters died while still an child... his wife died, and his desire for the city where he had worked so hard, lived and suffered so much, took hold of him again, and so he returned...

He returned as a poor man, obscure, forgotten, as he had always been, and obtained his position at the cinema, with its unsmiling conditions.

For three months the same waltz, the same pieces of music, the same feature about the little *moumés*. Who recognized him now? Nobody! Who cared about him? No one! Who paid any attention to him at all? No one! He played all day in the funereal light of the electric bulb, transformed, unrecognizable from the time when a vision of success had burned in his heart. He played... sometimes it seemed to him that the sounds of the piano were responding, like repressed sobs, to his inner torment. The sounds never elicited so much as a smile, not even a pleasant memory, nothing.

The triumphant American officer saved the *moumé* from the flames, and led her back to her exultant companions, kissing her wicked little mouth...

The show was over. Light flooded the hall once more, the audience left bit by bit... and the musician got up, still hunched over a little, his eyes wet with tears behind his glasses, and disappeared like a sombre, silent shadow.

'*Al cinematografo*', *La Rassegna nazionale*, 27/142, (April 1905), pp. 444–447. Translated by Marco Ladd.

## Note

1. [Editors' note. A girl who entertains the guests at a Japanese tea house.]

# A Phantom Pursued

*Alberto Lombroso*

*To my friend, Jean de La Jaline*<sup>1</sup>

‘Uncle! The *Cinematofono* Dacomo is here! What’s a *Cinematofono*?’

The question was put to me by one of my lively nieces, Letizia, one day last summer, during the bathing season at Viareggio.<sup>2</sup>

I explained to her that when a film is accompanied by the sounds of a gramophone—when the action on screen is combined with spoken poetry or singing on a gramophone recording, to create an even more total illusion—the resulting spectacle is called *Cinematofonone*. It was one of those words that not even the Greeks (from whose language it was borrowed) would understand.

My explanation, for all that I’d made an effort to simplify it, did not succeed in clarifying matters for Letizia, nor for her younger sister Luisa.

I realized then that a practical demonstration would be a thousand times more effective than my empty words.

‘I’ll take you!’ I finished solemnly, to cut short the questions coming from the children.

And because I savoured my time with those dear little girls, just as a connoisseur might savour a fine wine, I decided to take them to the show separately. Careful to observe the rights of succession, the next evening I took Letizia to the *Cinematofono* Dacomo. The music was Massenet’s splendid *Marie-Magdaleine* (*Mary Magdalene*), the film reproducing the scenes of the oratorio as it had appeared at the Opéra-Comique in Paris. I had heard the work a few months prior; not even the metallic quality of the gramophone could lessen the intense emotion that those magical melodies had made me feel in Paris, so simple and sad, sweet and authentically oriental. My little niece, her twelfth birthday long since past, could already appreciate the music, but she was more intent on admiring the unfolding of the biblical drama than the harmonies. The scene with Judah, and the insults Mary Magdalene throws at him when she sees him being ungrateful to Our Lord—and then the Lord’s Prayer sung during dinner!—brought tears to her eyes.

I noticed that Letizia was not the only spectator so moved. In the first row there was a tall, blond man—a Frenchman, I thought, for there are blond Frenchmen—who stared with rapt attention, as though he would never tire of hearing those songs and seeing those pictures.

‘How odd!’ I thought to myself. ‘And here I thought that the *Cinematofono* was only for children and soldiers!’

The next day, it was Luisa’s turn. There was only a year between her and her older sister, but as so often happens, the younger child had quickly caught up with the eldest. I scarcely noticed that I had a little girl next to me, so serious and perceptive were her observations, and so tasteful were her criticisms.

*Mary Magdalene* was playing, and I confess that I listened to it again with infinite pleasure. I was beginning to think that there might be some good in the cinema—that it wasn’t just ‘for the military and young people.’ Nonetheless I was stunned to see my blond Frenchman, sitting in the same seat in the first row. My gossiping niece noticed him too. ‘Uncle,’ she said, ‘can you see our beach bum neighbour? He’s the Frenchman who’s always on his own. He bathes every morning at dawn and in the evening by moonlight. The caretaker of private beach told me he wants “to be alone in the sea.” He never talks to anyone, but when he sees us, Letizia and me, he always smiles at us, very sadly... Had you not noticed him before? Yet, he’s a funny fellow. Letizia says that we need to try to say hello to him, to talk to him, to distract him... He must have suffered some great loss.’

In the meantime, the Lord’s Prayer scene had arrived, and Luisa broke off suddenly, to watch intently as the miserable drama of Jesus unfolded.

The next day, and for several days afterwards, I too observed our neighbour by the shore. He was always quiet, as he gazed far into the distance, towards the never-ending horizon. Then, in the evenings he would spend hours and hours on the balcony at Neptune’s, leaning on the railing to stare intently at the lighthouse, its light appearing and disappearing regularly as it turned in the gulf of nearby La Spezia.<sup>3</sup>

Certainly, he had noticed me just as I had noticed him. He must have recognized me as the companion of the two smiling little girls, because one evening he wound up greeting me politely, in the same way that you might greet someone you don’t really know in the stairwell of your apartment building. I responded a little more effusively, and he seemed touched by my efforts. Seeing him always alone, always quiet, I became convinced that only some tragedy—and an intense one at that—could explain his obsession with solitude and silence. The short story writer in me overwhelmed my façade of respectability; my curiosity piqued, one evening, I gathered my courage and to start a conversation if nothing else, asked him:

‘Do you like the shores of our Italian seas, sir? You’re not from around here, is that not right?’



His grammar, when he replied, was pure, even if his accent was not. From that evening on, we would regularly spend hours upon hours talking about art and poetry, travel and science: but he never asked me about myself or my business, nor did I ever ask him any indiscreet questions.

My inner short story writer, in other words, made no advances—indeed, he took a few steps back, given that he could never explain why, every evening at the same time, from nine to ten o'clock, this solitary young man would distance himself from the Neptune to go to the little theatre hosting the *Cinematofono* Dacomo, only to return each time more sad, more pensive than before. And on the way back, he would always stop to look at his lighthouse shining in the distance; and there he would remain, unmoving, until it was time for his evening dip, under the broad sweep of silvery moonlight.

The psychologist in me made my inner gentleman indiscreet. Once again, I gathered my courage, and one evening I asked him point-blank:

'Why is it, at your age, that you are so fond of the cinema that you go every night?'

He hovered, unsure whether to answer or to leave. Understanding that there was no malice in my question, only curiosity, after a long silence he said:

'What do you want from me!... I'm chasing, always, the beloved phantom, I spend my life running after the trace of a shadow that once adored.'

And so he told me his tale of woe.

'Like all men who live for the ideal of work, and working with one's mind, I went many years without realizing that Woman existed, without realizing that she is an integral, inseparable part of every Man's life (unless Religion, the only possible rival for Woman, banishes a man's innate desire for ownership, takes power over his mind, his senses, his heart...)

The education I received was pedantic, dogmatic in the extreme. My mother died when I was still just an infant. My father was always at sea, commandeering merchant ships; when he was on land, he stayed strictly in port towns, and would come to see me infrequently at Clermont-Ferrand, where I stayed in the house of one of my uncles, an elderly priest. My uncle decided it was my destiny to enter the priesthood, and he educated me accordingly. Like the hero of Prévost's *Scorpion*... you remember?<sup>4</sup>

In other words, I had never thought that I could become anything other than a priest... But towards my fifteenth birthday, some unknowable passion drew me towards studies in mathematics, then towards the sciences in general. It was when I was about nineteen that I finally obtained my uncle's blessing to study in Paris.

You must have noticed, have you not, how the study of the pure sciences and the study of harmony form a willing alliance? Well, living in the city which offers its public the finest concerts in the world, I acquired a passion for music. I studied harmony and counterpoint. I subscribed to the Opéra, to the Opéra-Comique, to the concert series at the Colonne and at the Lamoureux.<sup>5</sup> In other words, whenever I wasn't listening or making music, I was at the astronomical observatory studying astronomy.

I lived between stars and melodies. But my life of equal intellectual and auditory pleasures made an already innate tendency towards excitability, towards freely felt and intense emotions, towards an almost neurotic and morbid affectivity, more acute... I had been living in this way for two years, and I was therefore twenty-one years old, when, to my eventual shame, the great singer Rivière was contracted by the Opéra-Comique, one of the theatres to which I subscribed assiduously. A great artist, like your Bellincioni, who was an unsurpassed actress as much as she was a talented and moving singer...<sup>6</sup>

I saw her in *Manon* and in *Werther* by Massenet, in Puccini's *Bohème*, in Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* (*Rustic Chivalry*), in Leoncavallo's *Zazà*, in Erlanger's *Aphrodite* and his *Juif Polonais* (*The Polish Jew*), and in many, many other operas that formed the pleasant repertoire of the Opéra-Comique.<sup>7</sup> But never, never was she so moving, so unsurpassable an artist, as in the part of Mary Magdalene, in Massenet's *Mary Magdalene*!

I was diligent. I didn't miss even a single performance of that opera when she was singing in it. That woman's voice made me swoon; her beauty intoxicated me. Fate ensured that I met her in person, and I saw her more than once, in the drawing rooms of friends we had in common. We often ate there together, on her nights off, and after dinner our guests made her sing, and sing, and sing again. She never tired of it. Always selfless, and glad to make us happy, she would warble away all evening, without having to be asked twice. And we abused that privilege—overjoyed! Knowing her so intimately, I knew things about her that made the passion I felt in my heart for her burn even brighter. I knew that she was twenty years old, that she lived alone, and that she had given herself to Art because a fiancé—after having seduced and betrayed her in the most undignified way—had abandoned her, barely eighteen years of age, without means and heavy with child. The usual story of egotism and misery, of male vice and motherly abnegation.

Perhaps my great love for her seduced her, sad as she was to live without love, without dreams—or better, with shattered dreams. And she loved me. She told me so, and she gave herself to me, making a gift of herself

in the same way that one gives a toy to an upset child: to make sure he doesn't cry.

We lived together for a few hours each day. I had my telescope and she her studying—she was extremely conscientious about exercising her lovely voice, about preparing for the various roles she was to sing. But the few hours we did spend together filled our hearts with joy, gave us purpose in life: made us love our existence, till now so ungrateful, so empty, so sad for us both.

What took place within her heart? Did she tire of me, or had I in truth been deluding myself, and she had never loved me? Or perhaps she loved me sincerely, until her ill-fated encounter with the tenor Barinetti, who had come from a carpenter's workshop in Piedmont up, up, up to the stages in Monte Carlo and Paris?

I don't know! All I know is that I saw her change, and I saw her smile wilt like a flower: she still gave herself to me, but out of pity, not out of love.

I intuited this: but I wanted to persuade myself that my doubts were those of any lover. I loved her more than ever. I dreamed only of her. My life was in her hands... But I became something I had never been: which is to say, jealous and duplicitous. I wanted to spy on her, to have her followed... The usual banal, tragic story of a thousand betrayals took place... I surprised them... I have told you, I think, that I was prone to an extreme, pathological excitability? Certainly, I wasn't thinking about what I was doing, or about how dearly I held the life in that beautiful, idolized body: or what a loss it would be for that smile, without equal, to cease forever. I killed her right there in her sitting room, at the feet of her handsome tenor Barinetti, white with fear and trembling impotently.

Later, in prison, as I went over the horrendous act in my mind, that darkest of tragedies, I hoped that the judges would condemn me, that the Assizes would send me to the scaffold. But that's not how it went. A lawyer whom I didn't know arose, spontaneously; he read from my diary with a firm voice, though choking with real emotion. My sorrow-filled diary, in which I had marked, day by day, the steps travelled by my poor, deluded love on its road to Golgotha. The jury was crying. The testimony of the star witness, the handsome tenor Barinetti, also played a part in making me seem more sympathetic to the jury. Inevitably, a psychiatrist took the stand—the famous Meuriot—to argue for my almost complete lack of responsibility (on account of the terrible state of chronic nervous excitation to which my passion had led me). Even though I was practically an automaton, playing my part in the process as though the crime had been committed by a person unknown to me, I understood then that the death I hoped for would not

come. Already, the eternal rest I desired in the tomb—for only the grave would allow me to forget the events that had intoxicated me, the smile that I had loved so much, insatiably—was slipping away.

I was condemned, through God knows what indulgent partiality on the part of the jury, to ten years in prison... My long, unending martyrdom began. Not even a photograph of the deceased, down in the gaol: only the memory of her kisses, the certainty that I would never again see her lips opening around her unforgettable smile. That shared solitude, which I lived with her—perhaps even more than when we had lived together, before I had killed her—was painful beyond any utterance. I understood how much more serious than a capital sentence the sentence of living apart from one's beloved could be, face to face with one's memories of the past and with remorse for the crime committed.

I was so well-behaved, so docile, and I was able to make myself useful in the prison in which I had been placed, to my credit, that my lawyer—who had remained my friend and my only comforter—managed, with the support of favourable letters from the director of prisons, to wrest the commutation of my remaining sentence from the President of the Republic, after just five years of incarceration.

Fate decreed that the indulgence of others should be a continued source of great shame and intense torment: even the pardoning of my remaining five years was painful to me. Now a free man, I collected portraits of Mary Magdalene (I had always called her thus, to remember her in the role in which she had seemed to me the most sublime artist), surrounding myself with them, looking at them from morning to night. Until it seemed to me, then, that having lacked any means of envisioning the victim, my beloved, the years of prison had been less horrible, less wretched by far...

I lived in a miserable condition, dragging myself from place to place without a destination in mind, without the possibility of returning to my work. On the contrary, I couldn't even raise my eyes towards the skies, towards the heavenly bodies that I had studied so passionately as a young man, because it seemed to me that I was not worthy of looking at the stars, now that I had killed the only reason I had for living, and along with it my youthful smile.

Though I was unemployed and idle, the days went by rapidly nonetheless. I felt the woman's absence keenly in my heart, and I carried her with me wherever I went. Such is life: sometimes, memory is like company, and being alone with our thoughts is to have them populated with thousands upon thousands of spectres that make us forget the place in which we are, the facts that have occurred. They render us deliciously oblivious and they drag us enviously out of the present...

I ended up, one day, in a village in Piedmont, where the *Cinematofono* Dacomo was flooding the walls with its advertisements. And I saw that Massenet's *Mary Magdalene* was on the programme... I ran that night to the box-office. I need not tell you, surely, the emotions that flooded my body when the gramophone sounded the first measures of the prelude ... It was my favourite music: music that she had made me taste, so many times... I thought I would die, so strongly did my heart tighten in anguish when I recognized the sets that I had seen so many times at the Opéra-Comique... Was this an illusion? My illusion as a suffering and wounded lover, or was it reality? Judas came to the front of the stage: I recognized the bass who had sung that part in Paris... I was trembling... A cold sweat beaded my brow... I was clutching the cane I held in my hands so strongly, nervously, that it snapped with a dry, dry noise... The actress playing Mary Magdalene appeared... There she was! There she was! And in the meantime, the gramophone was reproducing the voice of my Beloved! Muffling it, to be sure, but stripping it of none of its warmth and characteristic personality! To see her move, to hear her sing, the Deceased! What a dream, and what a dream come true!... I had had one aim in life: to see her again, to hear her again... And that, good sir, is why I follow the *Cinematofono* Dacomo across every town in Italy, like the Wandering Jew, but of Love. Every day, among the fifteen or twenty rolls of film that it presents to its regular audience, there is one that fills my veins with new blood, through which I am reborn to new life. I stagnate for 23 hours of each day: but in the twenty-fourth hour, from nine to ten o'clock, I have an appointment with the Dead. It is for me that she smiles underneath the marquee, it is for me that she sings...'

A dry cough interrupted the blond Frenchman here... I understood then that not for much longer would he wander the world, *pursuing an image*, following in the *footsteps of a phantom*.

'*Parvenza inseguita*', *Rivista di Roma*, 11/8 (25 April 1907), pp. 226–230. Translated by Marco Ladd.

## Notes

1. [Editors' note. Jean de La Jaline was the pseudonym of Henri Joubert (1875–1947). Joubert was an official in the navy, a poet and writer. His most important works include, *Acquarelles Japonaises* (1904), *Le chemins du rêve*. *Journal de bord*. *Journal de bord sentimental* (1905), and *Le chemins du rêve*. *Sous le griffe du Dragon* (1906).]

2. [Editors' note. A seaside town in the northern part of Tuscany. It was known at the time for the grandiosity and elegance of its seaside establishments.]
3. [Editors' note. *Il Nettuno* or Neptune's, was own of the most important seaside establishments in Viareggio. Founded in 1865 by the Barsanti brothers, it was introduced as a great artistic work in wood that protuded to the sea. In 1907 the monumental gate was opened after serving as the opening entrance to at the Universal Exposition of Milan in 1906, and was moved explicitly to the site at the end of that event.]
4. [Editors' note. *Scorpion* (1887) is the first of three novels dedicated to the life of the French writer, Marcel Prevost (1862–1941).]
5. [Editors' note. L'Orchestra Colonne, founded by Édouard Colonne and L'Orchestra Lamoreux, founded by Charles Lamoreux, were the two major Parisian concert halls during the 'Belle Époque'. Competing with each other, they found their first key composer with Hector Berlioz and then with Richard Wagner.]
6. [Editors' note. Gemma Bellincioni (1864–1950) was a soprano and actress active at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twenieth century. She was famous for her performances of Verdi and Mascagni.]
7. [Editors' note. The author is referencing lyrical works put on strage at the Opéra-Comique. *Werther* and *Manon* by Jules Massenet debuted 16 January 1893 and 19 January 1884, respectively; *Cavalleria Rusticana* by Giovanni Mascagni debuted 19 January 1892 and *La Bohème* by Gianni Puccini debuted 13 June 1893; *Le Juif Polonais* and *Aphrodite* by Camille Erlanger, debuted 11 April 1900 and 23 March 1906, respectively. The exception is *Zazà* by Leoncavallo.]

# Miopetti's Duel

*Aldo Borelli*

Claudio Xilo didn't have to go to rehearsals that day, so he allowed himself the luxury of getting up at noon, after having eaten breakfast in bed and bored himself half to death leafing through the papers. Once dressed, he immediately felt the desire to lie down again, because his long sleep had made his limbs sluggish. So he went into the study, trying to shrug off the torpor by busying his mind with some work.

Spring had already arrived; gusts of fresh air came in through the large windows loaded with the scents of the nearby gardens, which were silhouetted against the white backdrop of the façades of houses, like fabulous, densely shadowed frescoes, with a statue here and a fountain there, poking out from the midst of the greenery.

Claudio Xilo observed all of this attentively, noting the curiously false and mannered expression that the warm afternoon light gave to the gardens, and murmured:

'What a marvellous setting for a romantic film. Someone should ask the owner for permission to make it!' He immediately rebuked himself for the thought:

'These goddamn films give me no peace, even on my days off! Did I really need to think about them before I enjoyed this lovely scene calmly and sincerely?' He moved away from the window, threw himself into the depths of a sofa, and considered a most unpleasant conundrum:

'What should I do today? Working is out of the question, because it's my day off, and I want to enjoy it properly; I won't go to rehearsal for the same reason. So... let's have some fun!' He let out a long sigh, stretching out further on the sofa and not making any decision at all. It was true, this happened every time he had a day off. He desired them ardently before having them; when they arrived he had no idea what to do with them; but given that they were days *off* he would rather have died of boredom than do any work. He called for the butler to engage in some light conversation at the very least:

'Bring me some cognac. Are there many people out and about? What ended up happening in that little matter with your brother?' The well-mannered butler, who had many years of service in a noble household under his belt, replied with exaggerated humility as he brought over the tray with the cognac.

At least I won't be obliged to throw this tray on the ground, thought Claudio Xilo, and he felt satisfied that he was able to savour his little glass of cognac, and satisfied with his butler, so polite that he would never have to chase him out with blows, and satisfied with the downy soft sofa, that was firm enough that it wouldn't collapse underneath him for the public's enjoyment.

These simple facts that wouldn't have brought happiness to any normal man gave Claudio Xilo the curious feeling of finally finding himself, of being able to live sincerely, if only for an instant.

Claudio Xilo was, in fact, used to performing all of these actions in front of a camera, which recorded them scrupulously and having transformed them into luminous projections, gladdened the hearts of the teeming cinema spectators. Claudio Xilo had plied his trade for more than five years. A brilliant actor for one of the major film production companies, with the additional obligation of writing the films which he then interpreted, he had since lived a decidedly curious double life, whose borders he had never managed to demarcate precisely.

His psychology was constantly changing: the actor peered often into the lives of private individuals; and their nerves, their sudden impulses frequently disturbed the mask of the comic actor. Claudio Xilo had been an intellectual in his youth. Then, on the verge of dying of starvation, he had put his talent for mimicry to good use. From then on he had earned enough money to live like a king. But Claudio Xilo was, regrettably, guilty of analysing his life far too often, and overthinking the irreducible duplicity that existed inside him, drawing from it laughter that was more often bitter than content. By virtue of laughing constantly in front of the camera, he had forgotten how to do the same, but honestly, for himself.

And he lived with a tremor that was hidden but constant, which he was unable to overcome despite his background in acting, even as he kept his every action under surveillance, policing the movements of his arms and legs as though the inescapable camera was always there to record them. He would frequently stop whatever he was doing to make his usual grimace, the characteristic and hilarious smirk that delighted the public and had brought his films clamorous success. When Claudio Xilo realized that he was doing this he would be in a bad mood for the rest of the day. Evidently, he thought, I can't go back to being a normal person like everyone else. He had become completely obsessed with films, and at the same time he detested those brutal confections of humour. A shop window full of crockery would lead him immediately to the idea of the innocuous, phantasmagorical catastrophes that he was frequently obliged to execute for the screen. A



ladder induced in him the temptation to knock it down as he passed by; flowing water brought to mind the frequent soakings to which he was submitted during chase scenes.

Policeman, thief, gentleman, stableman, soldier, plumber, Claudio Xilo had dressed in all of these outfits and worn all of these uniforms; but the roles that at first glance seemed so varied were, at heart, reducible to just one: the role of a bumbling idiot who takes part in the most unlikely and unrealistic adventures, and receives a good beating in the end. The role of a cinematic comedian is as unchanging as that of the old masks.

Claudio Xilo had earned the right to live in a princely home and to employ a butler only by getting a daily beating from a vast crowd of butlers, as a joke; he could sit in a comfortable chair only at the price of taking a comic tumble from a papier-mâché chair two or three times per film; and he allowed himself the luxury of taking a carriage that flew through the streets smoothly and peacefully only after having faked any number of crashes at the edge of a muddy trench. After having played that part so often, Claudio Xilo was now unable to enjoy his real life. Gradually, over time, a fear of crowds had entered into his psyche, as if the crowd were always there to clobber him after the usual pranks; and he felt an indefinable unease when he was in the midst of other people, as though he were worried that he would have to get himself into one of those monumental messes that his fantasy imagined for the screen.

He had, therefore, isolated himself from society and lived alone; but day by day, the voluntary solitude embittered his character. With his characteristic perceptiveness, he realized that he was tending towards misanthropy, and he regretted it without, however, being able to overcome that instinctive defensive impulse that distanced him from society. He made little small talk with his fellow actors, who appeared to him more often in the costume of the day than in real life, and so for him they weren't real, living people, but simple tools, machines for the production of tears or laughter. He hadn't a single friend, having broken off all his connections to the literary sphere, and his only substantial conversations were with his butler who, it seemed, felt some affection towards him. The butler, so proper and polite, who moved around the house with so much obsequious deference, served to lift his spirits in his more dejected moments. Not that Claudio Xilo was stupidly vain, but after coming back from those shoots, in which he'd had to submit to so many small and great humiliations for comedy's sake, his spirit drew a sort of ironic fortitude from considering the elegance of the house and the comportment of his servant, who had served a prince of royal blood with the exact same correctness.

'Before my butler,' he thought, 'I and his former master, the prince, are the same, and he equates us in the same respectful devotion.'

Claudio Xilo had almost grown fond of him, and he didn't notice that even his servant received some of his familiarities with a certain sense of wonderment. Of course, that excellent servant had some very firm and serious ideas about hierarchy, and couldn't easily accommodate an employer who descended, on occasion, to his level.

Claudio Xilo finally decided to make use of his afternoon by going out: 'Let's go see how other people live and how they enjoy their lives.'

He said this to himself, not without a certain feeling of envy for that part of humanity that passed through its existence in a single, continuous way.

'I am like a double-entry book,' he thought, 'kept by an incompetent accountant who gets the two columns mixed up.' The streets were full of people who slithered rather than walked along the pavement, indulging themselves everywhere, in front of a woman or an exhibition, enjoying the warm sunlight that cast soft and tenuous light, like a caress. Used to scenic trickery, Claudio Xilo had the impression that everyone was displaying their emotions with an almost brutal sincerity. An old man, his little eyes shining, winked shamelessly at the women passing by, tempted by the freshness and transparency of their spring outfits; a group of young people laughed without discretion behind the old man's back; the women took visible pleasure in the many admiring exclamations provoked by their passing. Nor did anyone seem to worry about the thousands of witnesses they had around them, and people offered up their feelings for consumption with placid indifference, for the curiosity of others. Claudio Xilo entertained himself for a while by noting the infinite variety of behaviours on show, and he fixed in his memory several of the more original facial expressions, instinctively, thinking of reproducing them himself. Then, he was irritated, as usual, by that spontaneous effort, which led him inexorably to thinking again about his job.

He let himself be carried along by the crowd, no longer looking at anything, unthinking, enjoying the physical sensation of the soft rays of sunlight that loosened his limbs like a restorative bath. He stopped like the rest of the crowd in front of a cinema's enormous billboard. His name shone there in a box-like script: *Miopetti's Duel—a side-splittingly funny film*, interpreted by the greatest of all comic actors: *Claudio Xilo*. He felt a sudden surge of disgust, standing before that unbelievably idiotic pseudonym that was nevertheless very suited to the idiocy of Claudio Xilo the actor; and he saw a long line of other Claudio Xilos dressed up as *Cretinetti*, as *Stupidini*, as *Bietolini*, all equally wretched in their chaotic

comicality, all recognizable by that characteristic grimace, that smirk, which had first come to him in a moment of pain, and which he had adapted as a comedic mask.<sup>1</sup>

The smirk was, in fact, the kind that precedes crying; by tensing his facial muscles painfully, Claudio Xilo used it in his films when he was in the process of receiving one of his customary clobberings; and the strident contrast between the pained expression and the laughable events happening on screen became an endless source of humour. The masses were pouring into the theatre, and the actor went with the flow: Let's go see me on screen, he thought, it's a pleasure that few can enjoy. He sat in a corner, next to some placid gentlemen who were already deeply affected by the fate of a poor orphan girl on screen, and were itching to submerge their emotion in a salutary bath of laughter.

On the blank screen flashed a few more sunny visions of landscapes, then appeared the sign: *Miopetti's Duel: Comic Finale*, etc. The audience let out a gasp of pleasure, reading the name of their favoured actor. Claudio Xilo felt that gasp resound like mockery. All of a sudden, he had remembered the sad arc of his erstwhile career as an intellectual, when no one had emitted an exclamation of wondrous enjoyment listening to one of his novels or short plays. And yet they weren't that bad; and yet the best of himself was in them, the flowering of his spirit and his ingenuity.

But the public preferred those idiotic films that he wrote and acted in for his job like an automaton, and it preferred to pay attention to his smirk rather than his soul. The film began to play on the screen; the public was constantly laughing. Miopetti was truly one of a kind, and his short-sightedness caused disasters on screen and laughter in the theatre.<sup>2</sup> Claudio Xilo observed himself, tried to recognize himself. As though he were seeing himself for the first time, he was amazed, furious:

'That imbecile moving up there is me!' He felt both love and hate for Miopetti, who was cruelly placing his very self before his eyes, forcing him to recognize the miserable falseness of his comic art. He had managed to fool himself, sometimes, that he was still an artist even despite the films: but now he was lost, as he realized how vulgarly he was behaving, how pathetic his inspiration really was.

'Stupid,' he hissed quite loudly, 'stupid.'

The men sitting next to him shushed him energetically, scandalized by the iconoclast who wished to bring down their idol. But Claudio Xilo wasn't thinking clearly any more, and he was also annoyed by the audience that was so entertained by his smirking, abandoning itself to a gross amusement that offended him to his hidden artistic core:

'This is stupid,' he repeated, 'unbelievably stupid, *basta!*' Some shouts of protest came from the hall:

'Out with the troublemaker! Who even is he? What does he want? Out! Show him the door!' The man sitting next to him, annoyed, said to him:

'Would you stop interrupting the show? Keep it down!' Claudio Xilo turned around, his anger rising:

'Keep it down yourself! Your Miopetti is stupid! Incredibly stupid, do you hear? Or are you stupid yourself?'

'Me? Watch your tongue, imbecile!'

'Oh! Oh! What's going on? Enough, stop that!' Several people had stood up, the ladies were emitting little screams of terror: then all of a sudden the film was stopped and the lights in the hall came back on. The two adversaries were immediately surrounded, pressed on all sides, interrogated. Claudio Xilo wrenched himself out of their grasp, screaming:

'Imbeciles, idiots, idiot, I'm talking to you, sir, you know that!' Struck by the movement that swirled around him, for an instant he had the impression that he was on the stage in front of the camera. This thought made him almost frantic. 'I'll challenge you, sir, yes I will!' And he took out his business card and threw it at the other man, who picked it up with excessive dignity as he prepared a pointed reply.

'But you're Claudio Xilo,' he exclaimed after a moment, 'so this is all a joke! Sir, I'm honoured to meet you!'

The audience was struck by the scene.

'Who is it? Claudio Xilo! Miopetti! It's really him!' A group of witty individuals started to shout 'Long live Miopetti, long live Miopetti!' People were throwing themselves around the actor in order to see him properly; then in a sudden swell of exhilaration they lifted him up over their shoulders and carried him triumphantly around the theatre and around the foyer, through an applauding crowd. Claudio Xilo wanted to escape; he kicked and screamed. He wanted to fight at any cost, truthfully, to experience his feelings honestly just this once. He felt brutal, fierce, in a sudden awakening of a long-repressed animalism.

It seemed to him that his very blood could have washed away the layer of theatricality that he felt clinging to him, at least momentarily.

He wanted tragedy and he realized, despairing, that tragedy was rapidly and irreversibly descending into farce. In the distance, he saw the man who had offended him moving away, and at that point he gave up all resistance, conquered by that overwhelming desire for buffoonery that he could sense was emanating from the crowd, exhilarated by the extraordinary adventure.

Finally they put him down on a chair; the crowd gradually diminished, and then there was no one next to him but for two ushers and the owner of the cinema, who was offering his services. Claudio Xilo felt physically exhausted and morally worn out. That duel that should have been, that fact of real life that had somehow mutated into a sort of extraordinary performance, took on a symbolic importance for him. It seemed to him the irrevocable ratification of his life as a mime. By now, any semblance of a sincere existence had been denied to him. The only option open to him was to continue to act, both on and off the screen.

Crushed, he almost felt like crying; he tried to hold back the tears and made the usual grimace, the characteristic smirk that was the distressing source of so much laughter. The ushers saw it, and recognizing it, smiled in satisfaction thinking that the actor was, in doing so, showing his enjoyment of the unexpected triumph of a few moments before.

*'Il duello di Miopetti'*, *La Tribuna illustrata*, 20/16 (21 April 1912), pp. 242–244. Translated by Marco Ladd.

## Notes

1. [*Translator's note.* These names are supposed to call to mind comic actors. The first name, Cretinetti, refers to a real person; from 1909 onwards, André Deed starred in a hundred or so Italian films under this monicker (translated for the English market as *Foolshead*). For all their apparent similarity, the other two names are entirely made up. They translate to roughly the same thing—dunderhead, half-wit, etc.]
2. [*Translator's note.* There is an element of nominative determinism at play here, in that Miopetti's name is based on the Italian word *miope*, short-sighted—a direct translation would be something like Mr. Nearsight. Hence the 'short-sightedness' causing disasters is part of Miopetti's persona as much as it is a physical affliction.]

# Pamela-Films

*Guido Gozzano*

Madamigella Ottempati (for years now, malicious folk in town had been substituting an A for the O) had a delicate Goldonian name: she was called Pamela.<sup>1</sup>

Pamela! Dimpled cheeks, a Watteauian profile, deep blue eyes, red lips, a smile that turned up at the corners...

Alas! Pamela was 60 years old and possessed none of these features. The passage of time couldn't have made her any uglier. Those who remembered her in her twenties remembered her like so: horrid and masculine, bony and angular, a little bit hunchbacked and a little bit lame, with a grotesque profile reminiscent of certain web-footed creatures. Her enormous nose was complicated by strange protuberances, her mouth was a crack running from ear to ear; her tiny, green eyes were protected by her eyebrows, which were conjoined into a single, extremely dense eyebrow, as prominent as some moustaches...

In many cases, Nature is perverse. There is no sight more pitiful than that of some poor soul condemned to live out her entire life in a deformed body, like a prisoner serving time in a terrifying prison for a fault not her own.

And yet in her youth, Pamela had enjoyed a ray of sunshine. She had been engaged to a notary's secretary. Cruel fate had robbed her of her promised spouse almost on the eve of their wedding, through a sudden attack of pneumonia. From that day on, the virgin widow no longer bothered to pluck her hairy chin, neither did she powder the bruised shininess of her nose. Time and religious observance had dulled that particular pain. But Pamela had later suffered the second and—perhaps—most serious heartbreak of her life: the argument with her brother, her much younger brother, a handsome man, of opposite temper, born for profit, for pleasure, for adventure. The argument had been terrible for the poor spinster, who had seen a significant portion of her material wealth snatched from her, and had been left alone in the old country house with her dog, her cat, her chickens, and her maid. The years had soured her disposition; they had made her implacable with regard to everyone and everything, compassionate only in matters of religion and charity. She hadn't seen her brother in fifteen years, but she heard news of him indirectly, from time to time. He had been abroad, in France, England, he had increased his fortune, then he had ruined himself, then he had gotten

rich again as a theatre impresario, then as a producer of films. A charmed and eventful life, profligate and sinful, about which Pamela didn't want to hear even the slightest detail. But for three years now, the old spinster had lived in the most profound distress: her brother was back in Italy and had settled in Turin, where he had founded a great film production company. And in three years, the Company had prospered beyond measure, vying with the leaders of the industry in the film market.

By now, Pamela was resigned to seeing her unsullied surname in the papers, next to the most wicked titles; a few films produced by the Company reached even the cinemas in Vareggio, and so, passing by the enormous billboards depicting sin and sex, bloodthirsty men and dishevelled women, Pamela lowered her eyes and knitted her enormous brows, muttering fiercely:

'Dishonour too! Injury, humiliation, and dishonour!'

In three years, she had almost entirely given up on her already extremely rare excursions to the city. And she had not seen her brother again, nor had she ever forgiven him.

She didn't forgive him even when he suddenly died.

The death of the great industrialist caused uproar everywhere, was discussed in the newspapers, was extremely discussed in the world of film. In the small provincial town, moreover, there was talk of little else:

'43 years old!'

'Such a handsome man!'

'Almost a millionaire!'

'A hedonist!'

'Strong and healthy!'

'Too hot-blooded!'

'Apoplexy!'

'So sudden!'

Death had struck him on the train, in fact, between Genoa and Nizza, during a few days of rest he had granted himself, a few golden days of vacation with his girlfriend of the moment: the divinely beautiful Diana Carmeli, a film star, whom a dissatisfied poet, satisfied by the Company, had dubbed 'the Duse of Silence'.

Madamigella Pamela didn't want to hear, didn't want to know. She was horrified. She couldn't weep for her brother, but all the same she was inconsolable regarding that deplorable death, which brought to a close an even more deplorable life, and she shuddered in the certainty of that lost soul.

'Pray, pray for his peace. It will be a great comfort to you!'

'Pray for his peace? But he died in damnation!'

‘No one has the right to say that, Miss,’ observed a priest, who was less severe and implacable than his devout parishioner. ‘No one can say what happens to a soul in its final moments.’

Madamigella Ottempati was inconsolable. She adjusted her fake, bluish bangs over her whiskery eyebrows, petted Bob, her decrepit little dog, and sighed unhappily, repeating to herself:

‘Damned! Damned for all eternity!’

A week after his death Pamela received a letter from Mr. Quinteri, her solicitor.

He was an old family friend, loyal, and trusted unreservedly, who had assisted her before, without great success, many years prior.

The solicitor, after a few words of condolence, ventured to ask—given their intimacy and their very old friendship—whether she was intending to see about legal formalities, and offered yet again, if required, all his services and advice in the difficult circumstances.

‘The difficult circumstances?’

‘The inheritance, ma’am,’ remarked the old maidservant. ‘You’re the only heir. I was right, you see...’

That scoundrel’s inheritance... Pamela didn’t sleep all night, and she rose at dawn, more frightened than ever. ‘I’m leaving. It’s necessary that I see the solicitor, that I speak to him immediately. Get me my things.’

Before the clouded glass of the large Imperial mirror, Pamela put on her city outfit: a lacy blouse with tiny beads, a very wide skirt (despite the passing years and changing fashions, she had never given up on her three starched petticoats or an hourglass waist); on her shoulders she adjusted a cardinal’s cape from around 1890, and on her fake, ropy hair, she arranged a delicate little hat, upon which trembled three filthy peacock feathers, held in place by a parrot’s head.

‘Ma’am will have to consider her mourning clothes.’

‘I’ll deal with it in town. In any case I foresee having to stay a few days. What news awaits me, I wonder!’

‘Comforting news! I would love to be in your shoes, ma’am.’

‘But what trouble also, I wonder!’

‘With Mr. Quinteri’s help, you can be certain everything will be taken care of.’

Pamela Ottempati adjusted Bob’s collar and leash, and left the house sighing:

‘God be with me!’

Pamela had never been able to understand the attention she received in the streets of the city.



‘So much curiosity for someone from out of town! They gossip more in the city than they do in the country!’ she muttered fiercely, narrowing her eyes at the naughty children, the young men, the ladies who stopped and turned as she went by.

‘After all, I’m not a monster, and I’m not dressed like these shameless hussies...’

To escape that trail of inexplicable admiration, she took a carriage. In Mr. Quinteri’s office, while she waited, she greedily breathed in the lawyerly atmosphere: the sour smell of ink, the putrid stink of stamped paper brought her back to her youth, to her hopes, to her deceased love. Alas! She had the paunchy Mr. Quinteri before her, speaking to her in a solemn tone, his eyes raised to the ceiling, the five fingers of one hand pressed against the five fingers of the other:

‘...You mustn’t worry, in any case. You have four months to declare the inheritance, for the legal certifications necessary to place you in possession of the assets left to you by your poor brother at his death.’

‘Very well, but where’s the money?’

‘There isn’t much in hard cash: maybe 40,000. Almost all the capital—about 800,000 *lire*—is invested in the company.’

‘Then sell it off immediately.’

‘Sell? But that would be madness! You’d get barely a fifth of the value.’

‘Find a buyer. I don’t want to be the owner of a depraved place.’

‘A depraved place... you’re wrong, my dear woman. Ottempati-Films is renowned for being a force of moral and artistic renewal among the other Companies of its nature. Do you want to reconsider? And avail yourself of a visit beforehand?’

‘Will you come with me?’

‘I will come with you. You’re staying at the Hotel Concordia, very near the factory. Let’s meet tomorrow, at half past nine in front of the production house. Is that acceptable?’

At nine o’clock the following morning Madamigella Ottempati was already pacing around the little square in front of the open gate, swinging her hefty umbrella with one hand, holding Bob’s leash with the other.

She hazarded a glance into the immense courtyard. Many things piqued her curiosity: a cage full of monkeys, a large flowering rosebush, two boys dressed as pages relaxing and playing with a greyhound. She ventured timidly inside, visited the imprisoned sisters, sniffed a rose without picking it, patted a boy who fled, laughing. When she turned to leave, the gate was clogged with a series of cars, which were disgorging a platoon of Napoleonic soldiers. These seemed to address her, greeting her from afar:

'Tulipier!'

'Hi, Tulipier!'

'Bravo, Tulipier!'

They were laughing, shouting noisily. Were they speaking to her? Bewildered, she took refuge in a doorway, followed a dark passageway, came out into a luminous hallway, in order to flee by the other gate: but the other gate was shut. She turned back, passed between two eighteenth-century backdrops, got lost.

'Tulipier, listen!...'

The voices echoed around her, followed her. She fled, almost running, passed other corridors, emerged again in a massive glass cage, divided into small theatres and backstage areas, a cluttered and complicated labyrinth. She escaped. She found herself in a ballroom, in between women in low-necked dresses and gentlemen in dinner jackets. A cameraman hit her violently:

'Tulipier! Get lost! You'll ruin my shot, you joker.'

Pamela backed away to the right, between a group of fakirs and of exotic dancers. Every escape was closed off; she was done for. She leaned against an altar to Vishnu, turned to defend herself, with Bob held tightly under her armpit, barking furiously, her heavy umbrella swinging in her right hand. Her trembling was wobbling her bearded chin, agitating her enormous eyebrows, the little hat with the three filthy feathers. The soldiers of Julius Caesar, Napoleon, the Brahmins, all formed a circle around her, praised her:

'It's Tulipier! What an artist!'

'His make-up is incredible!'

'You can hardly tell he's wearing make-up!'

'He looks like a proper witch!'

'Bravo Tulipier! Long live Tulipier!'

And a priest of Brahma, more enthusiastic than the others, grabbed her round the knees, lifted her up high, over the clamorous crowd. Pamela let out a cry and fainted in the arms of Mr. Quinteri the lawyer, who showed up at that moment.

'Scoundrels! What are they doing? This is Miss Ottempati, their lawful proprietor.'

Comforted with cognac and kind words, Madamigella Ottempati revived not long afterwards in the quiet rooms belonging to the Management.<sup>2</sup> She refused to visit the factory; she refused the car that was offered. And she wanted to leave the outrageous Company immediately. The artists' apologies counted for nothing; Mr. Quinteri's persuasive words were worthless.

And Pamela was unrelenting the following day and the day after and forever afterwards.

‘Sell, sell, whatever the price.’

An Anglo-American production house smelled a good deal. The factory was theirs within the week for 300,000 lire. Pamela received that treasure with a shiver of joy and fear. But she cleansed herself of any scruples by offering 25,000 to Vareggio Hospital, still in construction, and another 25,000 to the Women’s Shelter.

And so, in the oscillation of human affairs—according to which theosophists live—the law of perfect equilibrium was demonstrated once more.

‘Pamela Films’, *La Stampa*, (21 February 1915), p. 3. Translated by Marco Ladd.

## Notes

1. [*Translator’s note.* Thus, creating the surname ‘Attempati’, which is to say, past one’s prime or getting on in years.]
2. [*Translator’s note.* *Cordiale* in the original Italian, which refers to a kind of cognac of Italian origin.]

## Feature Film

*Pio Vanzi*

Nino's letters from the front were all alike: *Dearest mother, just letting you know that all is well here, and that we can't wait to defeat the most infamous Enemy of our time once and for all [...]* Or: *Dear Mother, life as usual here. The enemy is hiding, and they haven't been caught out yet by our troops, who are ready to give them the lesson they deserve for our dear Fatherland's final victory...* Or even: *Dearest mother, please don't worry about me, as I have health and courage to spare. Every now and again we'll get a shell or two, but they all explode too low and we're well sheltered by the rocks...*

Every time the post came round, this soft, monotonous, yet touching literature of correspondence threw his mother, always on edge, into turmoil. For her, a mother, whose child was now threatened by death—for her, those letters weren't alike, not at all. After all, her moods, upon which those letters fell like bombs, were never alike either. One day it might be a nightmare, the next some good news in the papers, then the sight of a mother—another mother, just like her—dressed in mourning for her fallen son: all of these things kept her swinging constantly between the highs and lows of hope and anxiety, optimism and dejection, rosy illusion and the blackest foreboding.

But for Nino's sisters, the news coming from their soldier brother, always the same, week in and week out, was by now no longer as compelling as it had been in the beginning. And in their complacent contentment, the two girls tried to impart courage and faith and peace to Signora Rosa, whose imagination, it must be said, tended to exaggerate the risks Nino might be running.

'But he said so himself,' said Lilla, 'he's not in much danger in his current position...'

'You must understand,' interjected Lella, 'that if he were really somewhere dangerous for four months, something would have happened to him by now. But he writes to us every week, and every week it's the same old thing. We should count ourselves lucky, that they sent him to a place where there's nowhere near as much to do as elsewhere. Now if he were on the Isonzo, I should say: poor things, they certainly see some battle and run some risks *there*. But where he is ...'

'With all the snow,' Lilla began again, 'how much fighting do you expect them to do? It's freezing up there, but he says he can't feel it, that he's covered up, that he's in good health ...'

Privately, Signora Rosa felt a little upset at what could be seen as thoughtlessness on the part of her girls, but she was comforted nonetheless.

The girls! Now they, along with their cousin Marietta, had their thoughts very far from the front, where every day Nino confronted his terrible danger. But Nino, for whom Marietta had at one point even shown something more than cousinly affection, was far away. And because Nino wasn't there, he was in the wrong by default. Whereas his brother Marco was close by, always present: and the two sisters and their cousin took enormous interest in his personality, his life, the tales he told. Certainly, between Marco's life and Nino's—between Nino's letters and the stories Marco told them in person—there was a wide gulf. Nino was a real soldier fighting in a real war, true: but it was monotonous, grey as the troops' uniforms, slow, without any concrete presence except for those pathetic weekly letters, all intoned in the same unchanging monotone. Marco, on the other hand, filled the house daily with heroic gestures, with narratives full of colour, with pathos, movement, surprise...

Come now, let's be fair: 20-year-old girls do not—cannot—have the same mentality, the same tastes, the same emotional outbursts as a mother of 50.

Their mother also stopped to listen to Marco when he held the girls spellbound with his daily stories: she listened and took an interest, of course, because after all, he was her son and she loved him as much as she did Nino, or Lilla, or Lella. But deep, deep down, she could think only of her other son, alone, up there in the snow, facing death, and all the praise for Marco, all the interest in him, seemed completely irrelevant to her.

Breathlessly, obsessively, Marco spoke a mile a minute to the girls, who eyed him enthusiastically, drinking in his every gesture, taking what he told them and running with it in their imagination...

'Ah! Today, today we got things done! I had to hold my position inside a house in a captured city. The Austrians were coming up from behind the hill, with machine guns and a cannon. We also had a cannon, disguised behind the shutters of the room I was in, where Signor Zagadin's daughter was lying, fainted on the couch.'

'Who? Zagadin? Who on earth is that?' asked Lilla.

'Zagadin? The owner of the villa; I told you that yesterday. He's the one with whom I had that terrible argument, because our side thought he was suspicious and wanted to take him prisoner... Anyway: here on the right, the sofa with Signorina Zagadin still passed out. On the left: the window, with the cannon armed and ready. Underneath, in the garden: 20 of my men, stationed with machine guns... There! the Austrians come over the crest of the hill. The machine guns start firing. *Prrr... tatata... tatatatata...*

And then: *boom! Boom!* Their cannon jumps into action. And so I, supporting the lady's head with one hand—she's opened her eyes and is looking at me—with the other hand pull the cord and *boom!* I fire the cannon... Smoke! Confusion! But they advance anyway; they're in the garden... My 20 men have retreated inside the house and keep on firing, firing... Let me tell you, at that moment I could hear nothing at all. So then I give the order: everyone down in the cellar, to the secret tunnel that leads to safety. I take *her* in my arms, and we're off, running. We take the underground tunnel, slowly, slowly, dragging the machine guns and the cannon behind us. And she's still half in a daze, over my shoulder. There, we light the fuse, just like Pietro Micca, and it's time to run...<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, the Austrians have gotten into the house and are searching everywhere, searching for the documents. But the documents are with me, in my satchel... Then, *kaboom!* The house explodes and all the Austrians are blown to smithereens. If you could only see what a show it is!...

'What about *her*?'

'She comes into the tent, then, and that's where the big love scene happens...'

Let's be fair, though: all of this couldn't possibly impress Signora Rosa, who among other things, had never had a great passion for the cinema. But for the girls—who went mad for these feature-length films, who followed every new production in the 100 or more cinemas Rome had to offer, who had memorised every one of Lyda Borelli's outfits in *Velivolo della fatalità* (*The Fatal Airship*) or in *Spasimo che redime* (*Redemptive Tremors*) in four acts and 160 frames—for them, Marco's tales passed by with the visceral thrills of a novel and special pleasure, which hasn't yet been defined in the dictionary of petty-bourgeois psychology, but which should be: cinematodramatic pleasure.<sup>2</sup> Material pleasure, with the many satisfactions, small and large, vast and minuscule desires, forever repressed.

Affordable theatre; new and unfamiliar perfumes appearing by the dozen that could in most cases be imitated with cheaper ingredients; and then love, lots of passionate love, just like the young women of the petty bourgeoisie imagine it—love born in the attraction of opposites, fed by drama, mad with desperation, and satisfied only with a happy ending. And then the settings, the grandiose settings: the duchesses, the princesses, the villas, the gardens, the automobiles...

Lilla, Lella, and Marietta could think of little else. Their conversations, their passions, they were all focused there. The war—the real war, the one that Nino was fighting—had never grabbed them the way Marco's less bloody but more passionate affair grabbed them now. Marco, discharged

from the class of 1883, had been declared unfit to serve his country, but the cinema had welcomed with open arms, even giving him the rank of... lieutenant.

And Marco wasn't just any lieutenant. He was 'the Lieutenant' in the marvellous, transcendental, lyrical, wartime romance film that he himself had written, and which *Rotofilm* was screening in its large theatre just outside the city limits: a film whose battle scenes were so well-executed, and whose bursts of passion were so sublime, that it could not fail to touch the girls' hearts. Marco *was* the Lieutenant, and the drama turned around *him*. He loved his country, yes, but halfway between his patriotic feeling and his soldierly duty, he encountered *her*—and immediately fell in love. Ah! Love, when it is strong, when it is felt cinematically, makes room for all. He, meanwhile, was shooting the enemy with one hand while he brought *her* to safety with the other—she, moreover, being none other than *Ausonia*, the famous, sublimely beautiful Ausonia, known from all those billboards as the 'Silent Star whose gestures speak!'; she, Ausonia, whose silent, laborious mimicry presented the most ecstatic passions of love, the darkest looks of repressed hatred, the most agonizing, impetuous outbursts of pathological hysteria to crowds all over the world...

For about two months, then, Marco had been the hero of the household. Or better, the hero of the whole building. For Lella, Lilla, and Marietta had made a great deal of noise about Marco's film with their friends and their friends' families, from the concierge's desk to the top floor, about his role of lieutenant, Ausonia's outfits, the battle scenes, and the premiere in the new *Vittoria* cinema—where those 2000 metres of film, destined to have the most clamorous success, were to be shown to a vast audience.<sup>3</sup>

A hero! The word is a little excessive. By now, though, many people in the apartment building were calling him just that. As a joke, certainly. But underneath the joking tone there was a foundation of admiration. And envy... More than once, upon hearing the automobile's horn outside her window as it pulled up outside the front gates, Marietta had looked out the window and felt a certain *je ne sais quoi*, as she watched Marco step out of the sleek *Rotofilm* car, give a gentleman's salute to the chauffeur, and step through the gates under the gaze of passers-by who had no way of knowing if that elegant young man was a film actor or a prince, a duke, perhaps even a marquis, returning to his *garçonnière* after a morning stroll...

That company car was a source of admiration throughout the whole building.

The same concierge, who remembered Marco from a few months before, the Marco who was an administrative assistant at a pharmacy in Banchi

Vecchi, was now instinctively compelled to raise his cap when he saw him arrive to the honking of a horn—for no other reason than that he didn't want to be judged inferior to the perfect example posed by the chauffeur.

And when one day, Marco arrived injured, with his arm in a sling, the concierge wanted him to stop in the office so that he could go to the *signora*, to the *signorine*, to 'prepare them', to tell them that they shouldn't be alarmed, that it was nothing, a graze on the hand...

The wound was shallow, in fact. Some torn skin, on the back of his right wrist, following an incident that took place during one of the most frantic scenes in the film. In the nearby pharmacy, they had already given him three stitches, and then they'd bandaged him up like that, so it appeared he had suffered some sort of terrible fracture.

As soon as he stepped in the house, he put Signora Rosa and the three young women at ease.

'Oh! it's nothing to worry about. In a bayonet attack, a mistake on my part, an extra wasn't paying attention, and the blade grazed my wrist... nothing serious: three stitches.'

Three stitches! Wounded! And he laughed it off so easily: 'nothing to worry about...'

Deep inside, Marietta felt something more than admiration for the film actor. How many of those fighting in the real war, after all, had come back with but two stitches on their wounds? And three for him! And it was as though nothing had happened. And now he was smoking a cigarette!

Having lit his cigarette, Marco unwrapped his arm to show them his wound. The girls had never seen a cut like it in real life. There were still a few drops of blood on the bandage.

Signora Rosa was looking and shaking her head, upset.

'My Marco! What have you done? Be careful, for heaven's sake... God has spared me having to suffer your being in the war as well, and it would be ridiculous if I had to worry about this too.'

Lella, Lilla, and Marietta ran to the cabinet in the bedroom, and brought more cotton, gauze, and iodine solution... Instantaneous first aid. And Marco, his arm extended, calmly smoking his cigarette, allowed himself to be attended by the three nurses, competing against each other to show the most tenderness. He really seemed like a fallen hero. Certainly, Marietta thought of the 'Dying Gladiator' as she tied the knot on his bandages.

This continued for many days. The nursing hour was the most solemn moment of the day for Marietta, Lella, and Lilla.

Signora Rosa, from her corner by the window, watched and contemplated. She felt discouraged. She saw Marietta busy herself, blushing,



affectionate, delicately flirtatious around her Marco, and in her mind's eye she glimpsed a not-too-distant past. She saw Marietta, during their last holiday at Cineto Romano, responding with the same affectionate flirting to Nino's lovesick attentions, and she asked herself—mothers always take their children's affairs to heart!—if the sudden end to that vacation hadn't cut off the declaration of love that her Nino had been about to make...

Then Nino enlisted...

And now there she was, Marietta, in love with Marco. Oh! Mothers will always see, even when they're not aware that they're looking. And even as she kept an eye on the grey woollen socks that she was knitting, Signora Rosa could see Marietta and Marco come ever closer to one another, could feel the flame that warmed them. More than once, to follow the path traced by these thoughts, and perhaps also to send a furtive glance towards the other corner of the room where Marco, and the girls spoke of the next showing at the *Cinema Vittoria*, she had happened to drop a stitch on the woollen sock. But Nino wouldn't notice, putting it on. What's a single stitch in a whole sock, anyway? And what, to a mother's heart, is one more sigh?

The great day arrived. The film, advertised on billboards at every street corner, would be screened that evening at the *Cinema Vittoria*.

Marietta, Lilla, and Lella could hardly contain themselves. They had advertised to the entire apartment building, the entire neighbourhood, their entire circle of friends and acquaintances. And they had given out invitations left, right, and centre. The word was out: that night, at nine o'clock, everyone to the *Vittoria*. The venue was making its debut with the premiere of a film: the great, the wonderful patriotic, sentimental feature-length film, *La sorella irredenta* ('The Irredentist Sister'), featuring the outstanding interpretations of Ausonia ('the Silent Star whose gestures speak!') and Marco de Fuego—his *nom de plume!*—scriptwriter and actor. And including, moreover, an orchestral accompaniment: 30 musicians...

Lilla, Lella, and Marietta started doing their hair at eight o'clock in the morning, for nine o'clock that evening. Lella curled Lilla's hair, Lilla curled Marietta's, and Marietta curled Lella's.

And then their clothes, their shoes, their hats, and their nails. Busy, busy they were that morning...

At midday, Marco arrived for breakfast, and found the sisters and their cousin in their dressing gowns, their hair still only half-curved. The other half of the coiffure would take up the afternoon hours.

They sat down at the table as they were, looking like madwomen—as Signora Rosa said.

Breakfast was almost over when the maid brought in a telegram.

Signora Rosa went pale...

Ah! A mother's heart...

The girls and Marco were struck dumb. They watched their mother open the telegram, her face whiter than the tablecloth, her hands shaking as if she were feverish. They saw her unfold the sheet, read it in an instant...

'Nino! My Nino! He's coming tonight! He's been discharged!'

And Signora Rosa kissed the telegram, no longer pale but all ablaze, as if right there, in that yellowing piece of paper, was her little boy, her little soldier, alive, healthy, safe from Death's clutches, discharged!

She got up, ran out the room, called the maid, called Marco, the girls, immediately wanted to get the room ready for Nino. Everything, absolutely everything had to be prepared as soon as possible.

Sheets, covers, water, soap... Come on, hurry up! Poor Nino! Who knows what his journey's been like, how tired he must be! And what happiness, for him, to find a bed, his own bed, made up by his mother, after four months in a tent in the snow!

The girls were helping, true, they went back and forth too, but when they passed each other in the corridor, away from the reach of the maternal gaze, they exchanged certain glances that meant:

'What now? Yes, Nino is coming back, very well... we're delighted too. We'll embrace him again with all our heart... But Nino will certainly be here for some time, whereas the evening at the *Vittoria* is tonight and tonight only. And what about our hair? And the thousand and one things still to do for our *toilette*? Marietta still has to do her nails!'

Marco, who wasn't party to these legitimate concerns, took it upon himself to resolve the situation.

'Mother,' he said to her, while Signora Rosa, practically on her knees, dusted the feet of the armchair at the foot of Nino's bed, 'I wonder what time he'll get here?'

'Tonight, the telegram says. But it didn't say what time. I suppose he couldn't specify one.'

'And [...] what are the rest of us to do if he's late? We have to be at the *Vittoria* at nine o'clock...'

And so Marco, with his supremely diplomatic 'The rest of us', cleverly insinuated his scheme.

By 'the rest of us', Marco meant—if Nino happens to arrive late, we will go to the cinema regardless, when the all-important hour arrives. And you, Mother, can wait for him at home [...].

Signora Rosa immediately grasped her son's strategy. She offered no objections. What could she do? She could well understand that the younger generation didn't see things the same way as poor old women like herself.

'Yes, yes, you all go. I'll wait for him.'

'Who knows', added Marco, 'perhaps Nino will arrive in time to come along with the rest of us.'

'But God knows how tired he'll be! He'll want to go to bed early... He can go another night.'

'No, Mother: it's important to me. Let's do this: if he arrives in time, during the day, he can come with us. If he arrives, say... around nine o'clock, you can take him, after he's freshened himself up a little. If he arrives very late, that's too bad...'

'Yes, yes,' Signora Rosa replied, her mind elsewhere, 'that's fine. Don't worry, I'll take care of things.'

At half past eight, Nino still hadn't arrived. The girls were ready. Marco was looking out the window every five minutes, waiting impatiently for the *Rotofilm* automobile, booked for that time.

Finally—hoooonk, hoooonk, hoooonk—the chauffeur alerted them that their ride was waiting.

Like skylarks freed from a cage, the girls fled, with Marco still instructing his mother from the stairwell:

'Tell him, Mother dear, that it would mean so much to me. If he arrives in time and he's not too tired, bring him there. Don't forget the tickets for your seats: they're on the cabinet in the dining room. Goodbye...'

'Goodbye... Yes, yes... don't worry...'

Signora Rosa went to the window. But not to see them leave: to discern, in the distance, at the bottom of the street, if someone else was arriving.

And Nino arrived only a few minutes later. The carriage hadn't even stopped at the gates before Signora Rosa was flying down the stairs, even faster than the girls had done just a quarter of an hour before.

'Nino! My Nino!'

'Mother!'

The concierge, cap in hand, had tears in his eyes.

They stayed that way, embracing on the doorstep, without saying anything, with the abandon of someone who, after long and perilous travels, reaches journey's end and sweet, sweet repose.

They climbed the stairs holding each other at the waist, with the lump in their throats stopping any words from coming out. They went into the house, sat down on the sofa in the dining room, exchanged long glances, smiling through a veil of tears...

Then, finally, the words came in torrents.

Nino told his story. He said everything that his letters could not say. His life in the previous months, the battles, his wound...

'Wounded? Where, Nino? When?'

Oh, nothing serious! A shallow cut on his calf. He hadn't written about it because he hadn't wanted her to worry. He had also kept something else out of his letters. Something that he'd kept secret in order to surprise his mother...

While he was speaking, Nino had gotten up, gone to his suitcase, and as if bringing a rousing speech to an end, removed from it a twinkling object.

'A medal! They gave you a medal!'

Nino pinned it to his chest, with a comic gesture of pride.

'Voilà! For you, Mother: a portrait of the perfect hero! Present arms!'

Signora Rosa threw her arms around his neck, with fierce love, and covered his face with kisses...

At ten o'clock they were both in the foyer of the *Vittoria*. Nino had his medal on his chest, and his mother at his arm. But he wore the latter with more triumph than the former.

An usher, having taken their tickets from them, directed them to two seats together in the last row, which they felt rather than saw in the darkness of the theatre.

On the big screen the action was in full swing.

Sitting down, Nino found it decidedly curious to see his brother right there, enormous, on screen, in a lieutenant's uniform, revolver in hand, at the head of a battalion of heroes... cinematic heroes.

'After so many months, to be reunited with Marco... And yet I can't embrace him... In fact, I should salute him, because he's an officer, and I'm just a lowly corporal...'

Signora Rosa drew her son's arm tightly towards her and didn't answer. She scanned the rows in front of her and saw Marco, next to Marietta; she saw Lella and Lilla, and all their friends...

Nino saw them too.

He coughed, two or three times, to make them turn around, but the orchestra masked his call.

'Marietta is here...' he said to his mother.

'She is...'

'How is she?'

'She's well...'

'Has she been thinking of me all this time?'

'Yes... but you know, she's so flighty...'

What a stab to the heart his mother felt, then!

Oh! How much a mother's heart must suffer, even unknowingly—when silently her children's hearts cry out.

The action on screen was reaching its climax. The crowd's enthusiasm was becoming ever more apparent. Whispering, rumbling, applause. And of course there was more applause, thundering, delirious applause, when the handsome lieutenant, followed by his *bersaglieri*, appeared at the top of the hill, and planted the Italian flag, snapping garrulously in the wind.<sup>4</sup> The orchestra started up the *Marcia Reale* (*Royal Fanfare*).<sup>5</sup> Then, the crowd's noise was awe-inspiring.

The handsome lieutenant was there, massive, on the luminous screen, and it seemed the applause was all for him.

Signora Rosa instinctively drew her Nino even closer, put her head on his chest, and in the darkness of the hall, unobserved by anyone there, she kissed that medal that no one could see, crying.

'*Lungo metraggio*', *Noi e il mondo*, 7/3 (March 1916), pp. 244–250. Translated by Marco Ladd.

## Notes

1. [*Editors' note.* Pietro Micca was a soldier in the Piedmontese army, charged with guarding a series of underground tunnels that allowed for the entrance or exit of troops from the fortified portion of the city of Turin. On the night between 29 August and 30 August 1706, he single-handedly succeeded in halting what seemed like the unstoppable advance of the French army on the city, by blowing up an enormous quantity of gunpowder with a short fuse. His flight before the explosion was, however, in vain; only his companion, sent away by Micca before he lit the fuse, managed to save himself. For all that he fought for the Piedmontese army (in 1706 the Italian state did not yet exist), for the entire period of the Risorgimento and again in the twentieth century Micca was celebrated as a hero, in the defence of the nation against foreign invasion.]
2. [*Translator's note.* These titles are entirely fabricated. Nonetheless, they allude to the passionate and melodramatic films that the actress Lyda Borelli typically acted in.]
3. [*Translator's note.* *Vittoria*, of course, is the Italian word for victory. The cinema's name is highly symbolic, therefore, and amplifies for the spectators the importance of the wartime context from which the film emerges.]
4. [*Translator's note.* Soldiers in the light infantry corps known as the *Bersaglieri*, one of the most important and numerous of the military corps in the Italian army.]
5. [*Translator's note.* The wordless national anthem of the Kingdom of Italy, from the country's unification in 1861 until the armistice of 1943.]

# Me, Rirì, and Love in Slippers

*Luciano Doria*

Then, I wasn't semi-famous, but I was already on the list of geniuses in waiting.

Rirì, waiting to become a tragic actress, contended herself with being a silent comic.

No one would have ever imagined that beneath our seemingly pure and sincere souls was hidden the drama of love in slippers.

It began like this. One day Rirì asked me to sign her album. An album is a book in which one thinks what one doesn't write, and writes what one doesn't think. Therefore, I wrote a few lines that were an invitation to love.

But woman is an irrational animal, who lives in the magic lantern of illusion.

And indeed, Rirì was misled.

And she saw herself reflected in my eyes...

More than the 999 volumes that I have not written, and the 999 comedies that I have not performed in, I attach importance to the 999 women that I believed I loved.

I am a collector of women. I do not love a woman as a woman, but as a part of my collection. I desire a woman more for the pleasure of remembering her than for the fleeting moment of the kiss.

I have an enormous archive of love in my home. There is an album of photographs with names, dates, and distinguishing characteristics. There is an erotic potion, letters, and a catalog of garters.

When Rirì began to be misled, I was in the midst of a sad moment. I was looking for two garters to complete my collection, and when my most recent lover decided to give them to me, she could only find one. The poor thing, in a moment of distraction, had forgotten the other garter in my close friend's bachelor pad.

This unexpected event left me disheartened and dejected: my archive was little by little collecting dust. I wrote the words 'the end' in the album of photographs, and I put my heart away. And all of the women I met in the street no longer interested me: they seemed to be doubles of those who had already been mine.

Rirì too was in the midst of a sad moment. Her most recent fling had fallen to pieces, struck by the gold of an American millionairess, who wanted to show once again that money could buy love.

We brought our misfortunes together. From the misplacing of a garter and the wicked gleam of a coin our infatuation was born, and quickly changed its clothes and face. And it was love.

It was love with a capital 'L', the kind that one dreams of and doesn't experience, because when we manage to experience it, we are dreaming.

In the chapter of my erotic archive entitled 'Actresses', beneath the names of the fortunate ones who had the honor of belonging to me for a few hours, there was an annotation in blue pencil:

—Among all women, actresses are the most boring lovers. They love theatrically: for the public. And even when you are in bed with them, you have the sense that those in the stalls are watching your loving embrace, grim and sardonic—

The conclusion that my repeated experiences had led me to was destroyed by Riri.

She was, like the others, living artifice. Smiles and tears, agitation and abandon, were for her prepared, studied, and staged with knowing care. Her gestures, words, and expressions were drawn with a ruler and compass. She laughed, cried, yawned, and sighed in time with music and perfect intonation.

But she knew how to add a personal note into this artifice: something that transformed the mechanical play of coloured lights into sudden flashes that seemed to descend from the soul and rise up towards the infinite. Her mask became something close to the face, wiping away its make-up. Her eyeshadow softened into a diffuse penumbra that gave her eyes an air of sweet tiredness.

Everything in her was false, but of such refinement that through a spasmodic tension it became an expression of spontaneity. She drew from it an attitude so naturally artificial that the artifice disappeared. And even if her tormented sensibility alerted you to the effort behind this, you ended up feeling affection for this little doll who was able to make her porcelain appear to be smooth, warm, and tempting flesh.

And so I loved her. I felt that I loved her so much that I one day crossed out my pessimistic annotation. Her smile reconciled me with actresses. And soon, I persuaded myself that the happiness I sought in my first love was instead hidden at the end of my 999 experiences.

But now we come to the drama.

One day, a famous silent tragedian got married.

The cinema is, as is well known, the realm of imitation. One cannot conceive an idea for the cinema without eight or ten bad pictures of that idea appearing.

Following the example of their illustrious associate, all of the actresses suddenly felt an unexpected desire to start families.

It seemed like a whirl of madness, an infection, an epidemic. All of them wanted a husband, all of them sought a husband, and all of them got married.

And the spectre of marriage appeared in all of the fragile glass studio stages. Marriage! That grotesque love in slippers, that insipid repetition of fixed-term embraces regularized under law, between the clock going tick-tock and the purring cat!

I am anti-matrimonial by nature. I have always preferred the solitude of a *bon retiro* to the domestic hearth. I have always detested children, while loving dogs and horses.

And yet, when Riri, falling victim to this infection, spoke to me of marriage, I was so idiotically in love with her that I renounced my theories and became her fiancé.

Fiancé: a sweet, simple, and good name. A name that seems to come from other times, but is in fact of today, and is in fact my own.

Engagement is, in general, a period of reciprocal deceit, suited to showing how two united truths form a lie.

But it is not so for everyone. Honest women do exist in the world, for example, Riri.

When she became my fiancée, all of the honest feelings that were dormant in the depths of her soul awakened. And Riri wanted to belong to me, completely and exclusively.

And so, goodbye cinema! She said her final farewell to the studio, locked away all of her photographs, and fled the city each time that her films were shown.

But this was not enough. I have already said that Riri was honest, and honesty is the evil sister of morality, which produces all of the world's misfortunes.

An honest woman is capable of anything.

Riri pushed her honesty to the point of treachery. After having changed her life, she threw away her mask once and for all.

And she became what she was in reality: a good and placid housewife who had been an actress by some bizarre order of fate.

There were no more mad outbursts or sudden fervors. There were no more incurable sorrows or unexpected fits of passion. There were no more losses of sense, no more delirium or abandon.

Love stepped out of the fantastic violet automobile of our dreams, and continued on its way in the provincial coach of domestic peace.



Riri made her first communion, enrolled in the Union of Catholic Girls, dressed modestly, became frugal, and subscribed to a cooking magazine.

The day that she asked me to call her Mirella and not Riri, as everyone else did, I felt that I was with another woman.

And then my torment began.

I was by that time attached to that false, capricious, and lying doll, and I could not resign myself to this docile governess who yearned only for the pots of the kitchen and to sew the buttons on my old clothes.

I pleaded, I implored, I protested.

Fruitlessly.

The idea of marriage had upturned Riri's psychology.

Riri was ugly, *pas chic*, boring. Her smile became increasingly colourless, faded, and diluted: a seltzer-water smile. Like every respectable and honest woman, she began to get upset over nothing. She had been a bubbling fountain of laughter, and she became a sponge, a drainpipe.

Like the others, she directed our asthmatic love in slippers towards the antechamber of disappointment, like any druggist's daughter who types out Chopin's nocturnes on the piano in her father's backroom.

And I, kissing the palm of her hand, awaited with terror the day in which the warm breeze of Houbigant and Coty perfumes spread all over her body would give way to the bitter and repugnant odor of a conscientious washing of the dishes.

Now, I no longer love her.

But I am still Riri's fiancé.

Why?

Here it is necessary to look close-up at my feelings.

I do not love Mirella, my current fiancée. But I still love Riri, my happiness in days gone by.

Where is Riri? Where?

Dead? Run away? Vanished?

I look for her with the anxiety of one who has lost everything, with the obstinacy of a maniac. I look for her in the places we visited together, among the people who smiled at us, among the things that we brushed with our hands.

I am therefore connected to Mirella because I love Riri; because, even today, in the submissive words and humble gaze of my fiancée, the bubbly laugh, the fatuous brightness, and the odd gestures of my girlfriend of days gone by at times appear again. The mask of illusion still sometimes shows through the cold and anonymous face of my future wife.

For these moments of happiness that I secretly seize, feeling as though I were stealing them, I tolerate the chains of my misfortune. I listen to an

interminable litany of the price of eggs or the best way to cook a rabbit, because between an addition or a subtraction, between a gravy or a sauce, an odd pet name, or a sudden smile, or a quiet refrain sometimes appear, taking me back to my lost joy.

In order to experience my love again completely, I have come up with a trick. I will reveal to you my secret, but I ask that you keep it.

In a remote neighbourhood outside of the city, I bought an apartment house steeped in the verdant vegetation of an imposing wisteria. Silence and mystery surround it. The shades of the windows never open to the sun.

Every day, I furtively enter into this house, and my body seems to dissolve in the penumbra of a perfumed projection room, where a merciful machine projects images of my love onto a white screen for the delight of my eyes.

I bought all of my little Riri's films, and I spend the day in contemplation of misplaced happiness; I speak with it, I cry, I laugh, departing in the evening, staggering with emotion and almost drunk with joy, when the moon has thrown its scarf of stars around its neck.

My fiancée, worried about my mysterious absences, pouts and says that I am cheating on her.

It's true. I am cheating on her. With another. With Riri. And as I fold my mouth around Mirella's pure lips, I think with a sharp shudder of desire of those other lips, the pink and tempting ones that I saw before me on the screen of my silent museum of love.

By now, it is decided.

Fate wishes it so.

I will marry Mirella.

I will destroy my entire erotic archive, the memory of my 999 experiences; I will write no more, I will think no more.

In a smoking jacket and skullcap, listening to the murmur of the pipe, sunken into a flowered armchair, I will inform myself about the price of cabbage and anxiously keep track of grape season.

In a tranquil and forgotten provincial corner, I will grow tomatoes and carrots, after having fruitlessly brought illusions and chimeras into the world.

And instead of the album of my lovers, I will thumb through a stamp album, lamenting one missing from my series.

My wife, passing the day between the kitchen and the church, will become the most respectable and devout woman in the area. And she will recall having been an artist only when reciting a poem or making a *tableau vivant* at the town society for the benefit of a nursery school.

Until her increasing rotundity leads her to more reasonable things, and she places herself definitively in retirement.

Then, in order to preserve the husk of an ideal, she will end up cheating on me.

She will cheat on me with the town secretary or the notary, or with the police marshal. And this fortunate man will experience incredible happiness at the thought of being the lover of a famous artist.

Fool! He will simply be the illegitimate love of my legitimate consort.

The other, the actress Riri, will continue to belong to me alone.

And while the stiff whiskers of the handsome marshal prick the sunken cheeks of poor Mirella, I, in the nocturnal darkness of my study, sitting between a stuffed parrot and some wax flowers, will passionately bring to my lips that frame of crystalline celluloid from which the fresh smile and mouth of the one I loved will beckon me...

The one I love...

The one I will love...

Riri...

*'Io, Riri e l'amore in pantofole'*, *Cinemundus*, 1/1 (July 1918), pp.17–21. Translated by Michael Cramer.

# A Cinematic Performance

*Federigo Tozzi*

Calepodio the doorman is also a cobbler. There's nowhere for him to go, not even a broom closet; so he sits just inside the door, and whenever anyone goes in or out, he pulls his knees back (if he can manage in time) because the doorway is too narrow; no one could get by otherwise. There's a fat woman who, when she sees him there, stops a couple of steps away so he can move aside even more than usual. Naturally, for her this represents an annoyance; and she looks at him indignantly, frowning. The cobbler notices this and, without taking offense, ready even to get up from his seat, asks her:

'Can you not get past, Signora Pia?'

She doesn't even answer him; she tries to look indifferent, but ends up looking away instead; and her anger lasts until she's reached her apartment, huffing and puffing; and then, for some trivial reason, she blows up at her maid or at her daughter.

The cobbler goes red and lowers his head. Regardless, he is friendly to all the thin women in the building; and he's almost sure that they appreciate him the more for it. The men, moreover, are almost all kind to him; and they pass him holding themselves a little to one side, so he doesn't need to move. But they, too, tolerate him through force of habit more than anything else. He's always been there, in that dark and filthy corner; he delivers the mail correctly; and they find it convenient to send down the maid, shoe in hand, so that he can fix it without them having to wait. Even if he's eating, he puts his bowl on the floor with the spoon still in it; and, smiling hastily, picks up his awl and his thread. The maid, under strict orders from her master, stands there sternly, not taking her eyes off him or the shoe for even a second. He tries to make a joke about this and says to her, knowing it's an impossibility:

'Why don't you take a seat?'

The maid, somewhat ill-mannered, but happy to stay downstairs doing nothing, fixes her hair, looks to see if her petticoats are hanging too low on one side, then answers him:

'Hurry up, Calepodio! I still have to tidy the kitchen.'

The cobbler smiles even harder, and obeys. He has a big beret with a smooth leather brim and a white border; his head looks like a knobbly square. In front of women, he's more than happy to keep his head down, because he knows he's ugly and he's afraid. As a boy, he served as an amusement for his friends. Thin and pale, he's got spot-strewn cheeks and blondish, nearly

transparent whiskers; glasses so big they leave a mark on his flesh; grey and bulging eyes, like a crab's; and a neck that looks purposely deformed. And that idiot smile, even if shy and well-meaning, strips everyone of their desire to talk to him; everyone thinks they don't really need to talk to him. That said, whenever anyone—whoever they are—is concealing something they'd rather not confide to others, without wanting to they'll find some excuse, should they happen to be at the door, to say a word to Calepodio; who doesn't understand, but hammers harder at the soles of the shoes he's working on. Even Signora Pia, the fat one, felt this need when she caught her maid stealing from the pantry; but she restrained herself, though she was so angry she was within an inch of giving herself a lash. She considered this weakness that she had felt; and because it seemed to her almost sinful, she hated Calepodio for it. Until now she knew only that he slept in a cramped little room without windows, and so he was forced to work in the middle of the corridor. She always wrinkled her nose when she saw him, filthy as the walls and the floor, with a torn and blackened apron; with those glasses that made his eyes look smaller than pinheads; eyes that themselves looked filthy, untrustworthy.

When she left the house the following morning to go have her hair died at a *Maison de beauté*, she pretended to pause and look for something in her green silk purse. Calepodio had already prepared to make room for her, and was waiting for her to go by; with his feet pulled in, without looking at her and listening intently. Suddenly she said to him:

'Calepodio, would you care to ask my maid if I've left my bracelet on top of the dressing table, the one with the topaz?'

As always, he smiled, and he got up from his seat. Signora Pia saw that he was embarrassed, and she felt pleased. So she added:

'The stairs bring on my asthma!'

Signora Pia was not only fat, but looked so fragile in general that such requests seemed perfectly justified. He stopped smiling, lifted his gaze just up to her shoulders, and answered:

'I'll go straight away, ma'am! A gold bracelet, you said...'

'Topaz. Wait, please: I'll take another look to see if it's in here, that way I'll spare you the stairs.'

'It's no problem, ma'am. I'm happy to go.'

And he went. Then Signora Pia closed her purse where the bracelet had been all along. She heard the doorbell ring and the question being addressed to the maid; who after five minutes, leaning over the stairwell, said distractedly:

'I couldn't find it. I think you must have taken it.'

Calepodio came back down the stairs and, without saying anything, waited for his tenant to leave. But she said to him:

‘Thank you. At least I didn’t lose it on the stairs, thank goodness!’

He stayed standing where we was, with a hand still resting on the balustrade, as though he were trying to escape from her. And the woman could say nothing more to him.

But when the maid came downstairs, he asked her:

‘What’s wrong with your mistress, this time? She never used to speak to me, but today she did.’

‘She talks whenever it pleases her.’

‘I’ve seen the proof of that!’

But even the maid, seeing that smile appear, left immediately.

He, in the meantime, can’t put it out of his mind that Signora Pia spoke to him; and he is as pleased as if he had had some great stroke of luck. But when she goes past, he loses his head; and as he’s getting to his feet, trips over the chair or the shoes scattered on the floor near the wall. It’s not friendship, but a feeling that shakes him to the core of his being.

One morning, she says to him:

‘Do you live alone, Signor Calepodio? Don’t you have any relatives?’

He risks looking at her, lowers his head again immediately and starts working. Then he answers:

‘Why do you ask?’

‘I thought you might have a wife.’

‘God forbid!’

‘Why not?’

‘I’ll never get married!’

‘There are lots of nice women around! It’s not hard to find one!’

‘But I don’t want to.’

Signora Pia says goodbye then, and climbs the stairs to her apartment. Her perfume has stayed behind, and he looks up to see if she’s still there. Then he says to himself, laughing: ‘She’s got nerve, asking me all those questions!’ He doesn’t remember anything about his childhood; he doesn’t even remember what Frascati looks like, though he was born there. He’s been alone for a long time, and he’s been a doorman and a cobbler for a long time, in that old house on Via dei Greci which he never leaves, unless it’s to have a drink at the tavern which is practically next door. For breakfast, he buys fruit from the stalls; the bakery is nearby; and the tavern does good *baccalà* (‘salted codfish’) and *cicoria* (‘chicory’). Other men he knows only by their shoes, when they’re in need of repair. He’s kind and almost pathologically shy. He knows all the tenants in the building, but is genuinely

indifferent about what they do. When a new one appears, the first few days are always a trial, because he has to answer all the questions they ask him. When another one leaves, he can barely wait for the moving to be over, in case they ask him to run some errand or other. And it's hard to express just what displeasure he feels when they leave him their new address, or when a passer-by asks him for clarification. He can't listen to anyone for long; he's restless, he goes white as though he were unwell; eventually, he stops answering altogether. It's not pride, but modesty. If only other people would recognize that! Instead, it seems that no one at all knows; and it upsets him, deep inside, so he does everything in his power to avoid these unbearable, almost cruel, scenarios. For him, men are their shoes: he's doesn't care about the rest. But if they didn't even bring their shoes to him, he would be upset only because he wouldn't have the means to eat. He would rather have a little less money to spend, than waste time in conversation. He takes their money without looking them in the eye, at ease only when they leave him alone. And yet, despite his best efforts, he could probably recount the life story of every family living in that building. He gets angry if one of the maids tries to ask for something.

'What do I know? Go away!'

And he looks at her shoes, to see if her patches are still holding up. For him, shoes aren't just leather, cut and stitched together: from the shape they assume when they've been worn for a while, he can tell how the foot is put together. And the foot is everything. Only when he knows a person by their feet does he then count them as his friend; otherwise, not at all. That's also why he can't be Signora Pia's friend, because she hasn't had him resole so much as a slipper. He feels an intense curiosity about her, which he can't overcome, and he can't resign himself to not knowing. He even loves his clients in some way, because he's come to love their feet. Calepodio lives thinking about their feet; and in fact, without a single exception, other people haven't taken the care to allow him to get to know anything else. No one, for instance, has ever offered a handshake. So he barely gives the hands a second look. No one has ever asked who he is: they go to him only when they need him for their shoes. He doesn't pay attention to anything else. And because Signora Pia insists on pretending to be polite to him, even though it's clear from her voice that she's mocking him, one day he thinks: 'She's in love with me. I need to hide when she goes out. I don't want any woman to fall in love with me.' He convinces himself that this is true.

From that moment, a new life begins for him, which both disgusts him and gets in his way. Sometimes, he stops working and stands at the door, because he can't stand the thought of Signora Pia being in the same building

as him. Even on Sunday, though, for all that he's not working, does he go out: he stays in his room, sweeping and dusting it. Via dei Greci is empty, but regardless, Calepodio can see a tiny bit of the Corso, crowded with people and carriages in the middle. However, on Sundays he smokes, and he reads a paper or two. He enjoys listening to the chatter of all kinds from the tavern next door, which he likes so much that he can spend hours at it without once getting bored. When it comes towards evening, though, the dark upsets him as though he were going blind. The shutters closing and the street lamps turning on bring on an intolerable anxiety, which ceases only when he goes back to his room, where the owner of the building allows him a single light bulb, which looks like a red knot that can't be switched on any more. Outside, at least, if he looks up, he can see a road through the stars up in the sky, where perhaps he would walk more comfortably than on Via dei Greci. A road that he would like to know, if one day he should end up there, never to return. How quiet it must be up there! He can almost make himself believe he's there, and if he doesn't get distracted by someone going by, bumping him, he can forget where he is. If only resoling shoes were enough to get up there! You need good legs and feet! And why shouldn't he manage to reach it? Who knows, perhaps he wouldn't even need to put some grain in his pocket; and he would walk and walk, without tiring, until finally his desire was satisfied. Surely it would take fewer steps than the number of times he's hammered on a sole? What a shame he hasn't kept track. But he's worried that he won't be able to earn living in this way: he senses some indefinable trap, hidden somewhere, that isn't letting itself be seen enough for him to understand what it consists of.

One day, Signora Pia's maid comes vaulting down the stairs, dishevelled, yelling:

'Oh, God! My mistress is dying!'

And she runs towards the Corso where there's a pharmacy.

Calepodio goes white and stops working, but he doesn't know whether he should go upstairs. After a long while, he moves the stool and the little table out of the hallway, so it doesn't inconvenience anyone. The doctor arrives, a well-dressed man with a golden watch chain: after half an hour, Calepodio is told that Signora Pia had slipped into a coma and died.

He becomes sad, not because he's sorry, but because death has this effect on him. He's so sad that he can't cope any more. He feels like crying, and he gets a chill when that maid tells him to come upstairs to measure Signora Pia's feet, so he can make her a pair of shoes to wear in her coffin. He won't look at those feet, never. So he answers, allowing himself to be taken for a fool:



‘Find someone else.’

‘But why?’ the maid asks, her voice trembling with anger and emotion.

‘I won’t tell you the reason’, he answers with a crafty air.

But he’s got a sense of unease eating away at him like never before. This unease also frightens him, because he doesn’t know what it is. And he’s so upset that he too wants to die. He’ll go throw himself in the Tiber. He feels that Signora Pia shouldn’t die alone: he doesn’t love her, but he thinks that when a person dies, everyone else should die too; or that they should disappear, in any case. Sooner or later, it doesn’t make a difference. Death isn’t individual, but belongs to everyone. Maybe, in death, he’ll find the way to that star road, because you need courage to pass that point! Then, the rest comes from within. He’s made a marvellous discovery! It’s a discovery which both excites and lifts him up; where he doesn’t know, but he even feels kinder and gentler than before; he already feels like he’s living in a new world, and he doesn’t want to go back. He must obey. Already he’s in Piazza del Popolo, because he’s going to drown himself where the Tiber is most deserted, on the other side of the Ponte Margherita.

In Piazza del Popolo, the sun is beating down. The flagstones are burning. Calepodio feels dizzy. All that light, which he had forgotten, terrifies him, stops him in his tracks. But his death wish doesn’t disappear, because he’s had it for too long, every day.

He turns off Via Flaminia, and winds up at the parapet above the river, under the row of sycamores. There’s the arid countryside, with the tree-lined Monte Mario; there’s the little villas, with their gardens. It’s of no consequence to him; but, counter to his desire, he sees, not far from where he’s standing, a bunch of people dressed in fashion from 60 years back.

Amazed, he stops to watch.

They’re film actors. One puts a puppet on the parapet, because it will have to feign a man drowning himself; the actors, who have to chat among themselves beforehand, pretend to notice only when he falls, and rush forwards screaming and dangling over the edge to look into the river.

For the moment, it’s just a rehearsal: and when it’s done, they laugh. The women, with those quaint hairstyles, wander about, made up and impatient. One or two snicker nervously. A ring of curious admirers has fun keeping their eyes on the prettiest ones. One of the actors, satisfied with his part, smokes half a cigar. But then a man shouts, and everyone goes back to their places: the puppet is ready, once again, on the parapet; and it really looks like someone who’s climbed up their in desperation.

A cart driver, after having drunk from a fountain, calls to his friend:

‘Take a look at this nonsense!’

At that moment, Calepodio feels a shock run through his entire person: his eyes fill with tears, and he heads back the way he came, with the anguish of knowing he will never try to kill himself again.

*'Una recita cinematografica', In Penombra*, 1/6, (November 1918), pp. 241–243.  
Translated by Marco Ladd.

# Life, a Glass Theatre

*Pier Maria Rosso di San Secondo*

Lately, life has felt a bit like the bottom of the sea, when I brushed up against it, diving down with my eyes held tight, open against the water that tried to close them, and my lips shut tight to prevent my breathless, contorted heart from escaping. I had such a strong desire to see it clearly, the bottom of the sea, to define it within me: the smooth, caressing seaweeds undulating just beyond my reach, or the fine, silty sands recoiling at the slightest touch, or the firm outcrops of rock capped with fronded greenery. And smooth patches, ever so slightly textured like the breasts of a trembling young woman, silky tangles of vegetation, hard surfaces softened with swathes of downy fuzz; these things stayed with me—when I surfaced again to breathe, everything concretely defined in the sunlight—like waking dreams, or like a child's memory of a world, or part of a world, seen only through thick, frosted glass. No sound came from it, and it was so far away, and it would have been so wonderful to live there, wandering weightlessly in the oblivion of the rocking waters.

Sometimes, when I look at the white city, blinding in the stillness of the afternoon sun, or during the night when the frozen moonlight falls on its rooftops, I think that it too must be entirely buried at the bottom of the ocean, an ocean as clear and transparent as crystal. And I find it hard, when I am disturbed by the breathless urgency of people around me, to make sense of such activity—unless it's that all these people are out of their minds, busying themselves with meaningless tasks in the deafening aquatic silence. Compare my white, anaemic inertia—the perennial sensation in my chest of being shut off from the world—with the full-blooded vigour of others, the congested commotion of the daily necessities of the masses. And I really feel their every movement, their every gesture, every shout, so distantly and so out of tune, that I find it hard to imagine that there won't come a day when all of them—through a sudden, simple revelation—find themselves stunned, ashen-faced, immobile, stumbling through their astonishment. They will look into each other's eyes, like children who have waited for so long, with burning curiosity, to rip their dolls apart, and find themselves with nothing but stuffing in their hands.

So it is that certain evenings, walking the streets with the high spirits of one who has spent the day loosening the knots that have successively tightened around my soul, and so tired that feeling anything further is

simply impossible, I like to imagine that every face I encounter, happy or sad, frustrated or satisfied, bears the traces of that stupor, the marks of that day of universal disillusionment. And I smile very cordially, foreseeing that on that day the curled whiskers of this or the other man will melt off his chin, leaving him bald as a Chinese man; and that his taut, arrogant, rounded belly will be as flaccid as an empty wineskin, so that eventually I'm overwhelmed by a sense of extreme pity for all of them, and I want to go round touching them all on the shoulder, to tell them:

'Yes, yes... come now, you poor thing, it's best not to think about it. Really, I admire you, that you can go about your business with such high spirits... It must be one of two things; either you don't have a clue about anything, and you're as blissful as the ignorant. Or you understand fully, and that notwithstanding, you pretend not to understand, and in fact do everything in your power to forget, due to a sustained sense of desperation.'

'In either case I feel great pity for you, because I feel an equal pity for myself.'

Were someone to deride my philosophy with a knowing smirk, or to judge it superficial and weak, I wouldn't know how to go red, or get angry, or even to change it: because it's already a great achievement that I've manage to put it into words. Eight or ten years ago, any existential observation thrown my way, whether in a café or a restaurant, whether by someone I was with or a nearby stranger, made me want to bend over with laughter, or spurn the unhappy person with a sneer. A cavalry officer for twenty years, I treated life like my favourite horse, smacking her lovingly on the rump, cracking the whip when necessary, sweetening her with sugar cubes after each whipping.

And yet, I remember that even then there was something inside me that was missing in others, and every now and again a thrill or a shudder would alert me to my exceptional sensitivity. On certain delicate spring mornings, I liked to ride alone on Fanny through the suburban streets, occasionally even wandering aimlessly in the open countryside, to a stand of sycamores or eucalyptus trees. I trembled with emotion even when the animal trampled the dead, spongy leaves littering the ground; I was overcome by a sweet tremor as the young branches brushed against my head as I passed, leaving a splash of fresh dew on my face. Sometimes I would even get down and throw myself on the ground, closing my eyes and dreaming in the scented silence, hearing nothing but the sound of Fanny chewing the chain on the bridle, and the birds whose voice rose and fell with the breeze, which rustled through the leaves every now and again.

How many noblewomen I saw then, coming towards me in delicate silk gowns fringed with gold, with youthful arms emerging from wide sleeves,

with blonde and wavy tresses, with rose-lipped smiles, bearing bouquets of lilies as gifts! I don't know what sort of intoxicating excitability was influencing me so that in my dreams I would rack my brains trying to find a way to make love to the maidens in my fantasies.

Nothing could satisfy me, whether I got down on one knee to kiss her delicate hand and then to suck on her tiny fingers, her little pink nails; or whether, unbuckling her sandals, I held her tender little feet in my hands like some kind of fleshy tropical fruit. Certainly, waking up and returning to the world was painful to me; that evening, tapping my sword against the cobblestones in front of the lively café, my back erect and proud in a soldier's posture, with indifferent or disdainful looks for the people seated and for passers-by, underneath the mask of my nonchalant superiority, I could perceive a nagging desolate sadness, an omen of some unbearable loneliness, which even the thought of Colette or Elviruccia, Dorina or Loletta couldn't ease. Often, in the pink sitting room of one of the latter, I would think nostalgically of another, and when I went to this other, I felt equally frustrated, until each night, I found myself in a restaurant, with all shiny, mirrored surfaces, white plaster, and touches of gold, whose blinding whiteness forced me to yawn bitterly.

Despite being of an age to reflect and understand, I couldn't identify the reason for my lack of satisfaction, why neither Loletta nor Dorina could take the place of the maidens I dreamed that morning under the pines, the beeches, the eucalyptus trees.

Not that they were ever rude or foolish towards me; in fact, they liked me a great deal, so much so that whenever I was there, they did nothing but try to find ways to make me happy.

Loletta, whose hair was as black as her brows and her eyes, and whose cheeks were as red as an apple, tilting her head one way, then the other, looked at me with a smile and a little flirtatious gesture that excited me. But, at the same time, my unhappiness was growing, because I was forced to reflect on my misfortune. 'There's a very sweet girl right here who wants nothing but to be yours. She's looking at you, batting her eyes, from whose intense, velvety heat drop ineffable promises of sweetness; and she has a delicate, shy little nose, with two small nostrils so dark they seem made on purpose to inhale the scent of youth; and now she's nibbling some sweet things to make you laugh, now she's saying something impudent and dropping her spoon on purpose, now she's trembling all over with some alarming 'ahs'... and it turns out to be only her shoes, which, no one knows how, are hurting, only (naturally) so you lean down to look at the jewels on her feet and her beige stockings... Such an inviting caress for you, and you're

indifferent, as though the hands of time, brushing your temples over an unbearable number of nights, won't end up leaving the indelible traces of wrinkles at the corners of your eyes, on your forehead, around your mouth!...'

So one evening, having taken Loletta or Nennella to the theatre, I don't know which, I barely let the first act finish before I took her away again. Having left her at home and back in my quarters, I crammed linens and suits in a suitcase, which my doorman threw into the first car that came his way, and the driver later made fly like a football into the net of a first-class compartment in the very next super-direct train leaving the station.

'Your ticket, sir. Without a ticket!...'

'Well, you can sell me one now, on the train.'

'Very well: where are you going, sir?'

'To the ends of the earth, if possible.'

'The train doesn't go that far! It can only take you to the border.'

'Good, I'll have a ticket as far as this train can take me.'

My desire wasn't too different from what a boy might feel after a party, having to return home half asleep. For me too, the lights had gone out, and of the sweets I had eaten, only the bitter aftertaste remained in my mouth: I wanted to sleep, simply to sleep, taken away by the train, in no particular direction, with no particular destination in mind. I thought that at the border I would take another train that would take me to another border, and so on and so forth, until I found the one that would take me to another planet.

And, in fact, I was already falling asleep, even though the last murmurs among the furloughed soldiers on the benches had yet to die down, and despite the banging, as the the last doors were shut and the train began to move.

I woke up alone, in the middle of the night, having dreamed that my coach had come across an Indian tribe, which, under a huge tropical sun, circled the vehicle with bestial cries offering bananas, dates, open coconuts. It was, instead, a dispute between a wheezing fat man and the conductor, which was reaching its peak just at that moment, even though it had started some time ago. They were discussing whether a pair of gloves could reserve one's place or not, and the fat man was arguing in favour as if he were defending a dissertation in philosophy, and the conductor was saying not, since otherwise he would never have dreamed of allowing the lady into the compartment. In any case, the lady in question was suffering on account of certain individuals who were smoking, and the fat man could have sat in her seat, leaving her his. But I didn't want to hear any more: all I cared about was the fact that there was a lady, and that the lady might come to sit

in the place next to me. In the middle of the countryside darkness, in the faint turquoise light of the moving train that gave men's faces a vague air of spectral distance, mystery entered the compartment with her.

In brief, once the argument had ceased, she really did come into the compartment, welcomed by the muttering of three others who, having been woken abruptly by the argument, were just falling asleep again. But she was ablaze in a halo of blonde hair, which, in the turquoise light, took on metallic reflections. Her brow furrowed, humiliated by the rudeness of the fat man whose seat she wouldn't even have wanted any more, still nauseated by the crass behaviour of the smokers over there, offended by her treatment by the travellers here who had already started snoring again, she found my gaze calmly focused on her, and it seemed to me that she relaxed slightly, luxuriating in my gaze like in an oasis of freshness in the midst of so much aridity.

Nonetheless, we said nothing to one another. The glass door was shut, and we heard nothing but the anxious rumble of the train in the melancholy tranquillity of the night. Only later did I realize that although she was sitting as though she were trying to sleep, she wasn't sleeping, but instead her eyes were open and fixed on one point as though lost in her memories, while the three men opposite, little by little, had opened their mouths and looked like three mummies marvelling at her beauty.

I leaned closer and said to her softly, with one breath:

'Don't be sad, miss, you must try to forget instantly the vulgarity of man: see? God has punished them. Asleep, they reveal their true idiotic appearance, and it seems that with their mouths open, they are astonished by you, by your beauty, while a short while ago, half awake, they were ready to insult you.'

She looked at me thoughtfully, unsurprised at my forwardness, and as though we had known each other for a long time. Then she smiled with so much melancholy that my heart was moved by it; and she murmured:

'And yourself? Are you not yourself a man?'

'Oh, certainly,' I replied, 'My God, I am a man just like them, but one who can understand what you must have felt in this little affair, and who can guess what bitter taste it left in your mouth.'

She moved her lips as though she really did wish to swallow the bitterness to which I had just alluded, and she pressed a hand against her breast.

'You are suffering,' I said to her.

She nodded affirmatively, and she apologized: she loosened her corset and stayed that way for a while with her eyes closed, like a creature in need of air.

I don't know why, but I felt in my heart the pain I had felt as a boy, in a tiny seaside village, when the nets were pulled back up the banks, and I saw the little fish gasping for air as if their ribcages were about to burst open. I would retreat to one side and cry, asking myself what those poor creatures had done that they deserved to die this way! And now the lump clutching my throat was restraining a similar sob: what harm had this white and blonde creature done, that at every turn her little hand should be stung by vulgarity? She who was so fine, so open, seemingly impossible to approach without adoration? Oh, from her open mouth searching for air, I could guess the entire course of her life! And when she told me that she had once been a soprano it seemed to me I already knew; when she told me a vulgar man had made her his wife, I had already guessed; when, with a single gesture, she acknowledged the countless trials of a miserable and wretched world, I already understood her martyrdom. And when she revealed to me that she, too, had left behind everything, renounced everything to live freely and modestly, I invited her with my hand, and she saw that it was so loyal, so frank, so sincere, that she put both her hands in mine, delicate, dear, soft. And she leaned into my chest like a little girl, with the pearly tears still on her lashes gleaming in the faint light, but also with a sigh of relief, freedom, gratitude, and with a desire to finally rest on this kindly heart, as if on soft grass...

At dawn she was sleeping sweetly, while the rosy glow of the sky warmed her hair and gave colour to her lips. There was, on her face, still a veil of melancholy, but so faint that it seemed nothing more than a memory of past sorrows.

The three men opposite, by contrast, seemed yellow and undone; they had the swollen eyes of drowned men, their mouths open and black.

She woke up slowly, without sudden movements, slowly regaining a sense of reality: all the same she remained silent for a long time. Then she told me where she would be getting off; and she knew that I could have gotten off with her. But I did not suggest this; neither did she acknowledge it as a possibility.

I whispered:

'I think that I've been waiting my whole life to meet you.'

And she whispered:

'I thank the Lord God and you, for this little time that I've been able to sleep: I think that I've been waiting my whole life for this respite.'

I could get off the train with you, now that you are free, I could live my life next to you, I thought in the meantime, all I needed was you, all I needed was a woman who had suffered greatly! I needed to feel the pain



of existence, to truly love! Why shouldn't I get off the train with you, now that I've rediscovered my soul?

'Will you write to me?' she asked me.

Right then, at a stroke, I thought: It's over. She won't even admit the possibility that I can get off with her!

'I will write to you,' I replied.

But maybe, I thought, seeing her turn pale at my words, she expected me to reply differently.

And to repair the damage, I added:

'We shall remain friends.' But I perceived immediately such a sense of distance and coldness in my voice, so I tried to make things better and said:

'But more than friends... more!...'

She repeated it sadly, like an echo:

'Yes, more than friends... more!...'

And we didn't speak until the train stopped, and then, having recomposed herself, she got off. I passed her suitcases out to her; the doors were shut again; but she didn't move away, no, she did not: she waited until the train had started moving once more to tell me:

'Farewell, and God bless you. But don't you see we must always renounce something? Thank you, in any case, thank you, now I shall be able to die in peace.'

Renunciation? So she had expected me to get off, that I not leave her alone, that I live with her by my side forever, forever! Despair! Now everything was broken, everything was finished; in one night the world had been built; my soul had been found once more, as had hers: and when Fate had finally offered us something with its generous hands, it destroyed it again in an instant: I had destroyed it! Even had I jumped off the moving train, without crushing myself, and had returned home barefoot, in penance, I couldn't have cancelled out my misdeed, I couldn't have overcome the distance that now separated us. My good fortune was irreparably damaged.

And so I travelled, I travelled for several more days and nights, no more peace, not a wink of sleep, tense in my muted soul, in my sluggish limbs.

It was after much time had passed that I began to think it might have been a mistake not to go back, that the irreparable disconnect existed only in my imagination. As it was, I couldn't have lived without seeing her again. How could I carry on living, if one night on a train I had found my soul once more, only to leave it behind in one of the world's train stations?

It was nighttime when I arrived: a howling wind hurled the rain underneath the station roof and soaked the legs of those who were pressing themselves against the wall, awaiting their fate. I set off through the city

as though it were a forest, smelling the air, to discover if she had come this way. I inquired first at a hotel, to ask if a blonde lady like so and like so was staying there: 'Yes... perhaps, she was there; a Frenchwoman...'. 'No, no, what are you talking about? A Frenchwoman!...' And I moved on; a second, a third, a fourth hotel, until finally I was told precisely 'yes'; but they maintained that she was a film actress of all things! The small city lived only for the cinema, and the blonde women who came here were all film actresses.

I wanted the same room in which she had slept. I went through every corner, the drawers, the wardrobe, to find any trace of her; then I threw myself on the bed, reasoning that she had almost certainly rested her limbs on it.

In the morning, I left the hotel, when the shoes of pedestrians were still lined up in rows behind closed doors, in silent hallways; and I wandered aimlessly around the little town, which, having been washed by the rain over the night, gleamed in the bright sunlight of the early hours of the day, decked in soft colours under an intensely blue sky.

I don't know why, but all that joy, seemingly intended just for me, made me yearn hopefully with every step I took. As if I were about to reach the apex of true happiness, I felt my spirits become so light that, there!, leaving my bodily wretchedness all of a sudden, it fluttered away like a butterfly, between the green tops of the tree-lined the street, under the sills of the shining windows with quaint green shutters and flowering shrubs in vases; or further up, further up, on the chimney tops where swallows were making their nests, chirping joyfully in the clear purity of the air to remind the little town, which was beginning to go about its daily business, that life was good, and that its citizens should not curse it, and that they should remember to take pleasure in it.

Oh, how wise those swallows were, even as they seemed delirious with joy! And instead, how much true madness there was in me, who had managed to live until that moment amidst the fervours of existence, not knowing how to savour its intoxicating essence!

So many thoughts, then, through the fevered streets of this town of love! I would have built my nest there too, right there, underneath the swallows', in a little rose-coloured house, with lots of carnations in the windowsills: and I never would have left, never! With her by my side, with my little swallow, I would have passed the years in sweet peace, without surprises; my scars would have healed over, hers too, and all the cinematic bitterness of the past would have faded in our thoughts, and we would have forgotten it... But yes, yes, it was really there; they had told me that it was right outside one of the town gates, with a little bridge just like in the olden days; a gate

that bore a strange warrior's name, a warrior's name... who, I don't know why, appeared in my clouded, distant memories as an unfortunate who had, like me, been so good in life! And right beside it, in the middle of a vineyard, modern man had erected a huge, glass theatre, where all human emotions were feigned in mechanical and silent gestures, in the midst of the most outrageous disguises. Going in, the transition from the free air of the fields to the stuffy air enclosed in the glass panes warned of the false world one was approaching; and it immediately invaded my soul with a sense of melancholy and nausea, in which the naive joy from life outside was snuffed out.

It seemed, between the smell of freshly coloured sets, paint, make-up, the actresses' perfume, that the sunlight filtering through took on a deadened, disenchanting air, became sadder as though before a sorrowful spectacle. Immediately, it seemed to me that the dreamlike state in which I had found myself coming here dissipated, flattened in that heavy air. And then on the stages there were ladies in low-necked dresses and men in coattails who were practically fainting from the most viscerally fake gestures, declaring to one another, silently, the most insincere sentiments. I, who had taken off my hat, retreated to one side to wait, almost afraid to find her, my blonde soul, somewhere in between those fake gentlemen in evening dress.

No, no, fortunately she wasn't there. She wasn't participating in that farce, she would never take a part in any such sham, because she would live by my side, without needing to subject her heart's lovely smile to sadness in the midst of that horrible fakery.

And I began to look around me and fixated on God knows what kind of strange contraption, impossibly tall, which was perhaps supposed to represent the top of a glacier, because it was all white, and in certain places, it was covered in glass. In fact, right at the tip—where the canvas or paper covered a ladder, to simulate a winding path, broadened out in a pane of glass—the fake rock made of glass was broken, shattered. I began to tremble. That break was not supposed to be there, no, because in fact, it revealed the trickery, the fakery at its heart. But how had it happened that the rock had broken in that manner, as though a man, climbing, had felt the flats give way under his feet, and had fallen from that height to the floor of the theatre?...

When the scene was finished, and the actors came down with a distracted air, which contrasted with their finery, I realized they had on their face the shadow of some sadness... And I was coming closer, my hat still in my hand, and asking, as politely as I could possibly manage, after a blonde woman like so and like so... who had arrived in the city the certain day of a certain month... and who having sung for some time as a soprano, had dedicated

herself to *l'arte muta* (*the silent art*)... yet they did not answer, and in fact, one by one they dispersed, leaving me alone, astonished, with empty eyes and hat in hand...

It was true! The breaking of that infernal machine had told me everything...

She had been forced to climb up there, as part of the story, and she had climbed, climbed, poor thing, up the fake glacier, as though on Calvary, bearing the cross of her melancholy, her sadness at having to submit to such a pantomime in order to survive. And suddenly, the ground had given way, one single panel in the fake glacier, and she had been swallowed; yes, yes, swallowed by that travesty, only to plummet to the ground, injured in her entire lovely body by the spears, the nails, gasping breathlessly as great bursts of blood spewed from her mouth...

And on screen, of course, the tragedy appeared in the theatres of the city, in front of the public now; so real that the story became very popular, very popular indeed, even if the story as it had been originally conceived wasn't supposed to have that ending...

I took the train again that very evening, and travelled without ever stopping. Only later was I overcome by such a strong sadness and a mad desire to see her that I stopped and wandered between the film houses until I saw her, her, my lost soul, who had climbed up the fake glacier and suddenly, in an instant... had been swallowed by fate!...

I don't know if I've lost my senses, and perhaps reason still escapes me. But certainly, life for me is like the bottom of the sea, when I brushed against it with eyes wide open; or better, like a theatre made of glass, where fantasy cannot be distinguished from reality, and men in dinner jackets and ladies in dresses exchange sad, funereal looks; and a wooden glacier, laughably silly, appears suddenly to reveal Death.

'*Vita, teatro di vetro*', *Il Secolo XX*, 27/1 (1 January 1919), pp. 815–819. Translated by Marco Ladd.

# The Shears' Reflection<sup>1</sup>

*Guido Gozzano*

How old could Albina Albini (was that really her name?) possibly be? 32? 35? Perhaps more.

Of course, she looked much younger. So she continued to be, as she had long been, the most sought-after actress by the major film production houses. Her beauty was resistant to celluloid, which normally shows up the early stages of feminine decay without mercy. Albina's face was more than beautiful: it was expressive, well-sculpted, with a brow, a chin, a profile whose beauties were accentuated in even the starkest *chiaroscuro*. And her slim figure looked equally graceful wearing an Empress's robe or a courtesan's cloak, an Amazon's riding outfit or a convent-girl's smock. For Albina was extremely intelligent, and she brought to the aesthetics and gestural vocabulary of the silent arts a certain spirit and good taste that were the envy of many a theatrical actress.

Why, then, had she not made a career on the stage?

Hearing her speak, one understood immediately. What a voice!

It was an ugly voice, ugly and masculine; and to hear her express the most graceful sentiments with that voice, hoarse as that of a dying man or an alcoholic, was painful indeed.

In the first days of their acquaintance, Tito Verri had insisted, very naively, that Albina cure her aphonia, to which she had replied—in the open theatre—that there was no escape. Then, irritated, she had also specified out loud, with a single word, the cause of her incurable ailment. She hadn't even blushed! But the young painter, a novice in that environment, had blushed instead. And the extras, the cameramen, the stage managers, the technicians, all had laughed hysterically at the little episode.

'She's so original!'

And Tito Verri had felt attracted to that tremendous scepticism. A few days later, he became Albina's lover, hardly a rare occurrence and barely worth mentioning; but he also became her friend, a far more delicate affair. He was that friend that you don't choose, but are drawn to; that friend that Fate predestines you to have, perhaps even before birth, and presents to you in your darkest hour as a comfort. A strange affinity between certain feelings and events attracted them to one another. They had confided their lives to one another, keeping no secrets, flaunting the most brutal honesty imaginable with an almost bitter delight. For Albina's fate had traced quite a different arc to her peers.

She had once been a genuine noblewoman; she hailed from the rural nobility, her family aristocratic and extremely rich. Orphaned at too young an age, the little girl, under guardianship, had wandered from governess to governess, growing up with strange passions; from the mysticism of her early adolescence, she had graduated to an lauded predilection for reading and art, then to a marked passion for the theatre. She had left school at eighteen to make her debut, a mere extra in a first-rate company; then she had moved on to third-rate companies in order to be the star. Then, with the naive and undisciplined impatience of a beginner, she had wanted to start up a company of her own, asking her horrified guardians for more and more money. She had little luck. The money flowed, but success was not forthcoming. Taking possession of her remaining endowment, she had made the worst mistake of all for an actress: she had married a fellow adventurer who was meant to be her collaborator, working with her towards almost certain success. Instead, it had been her utter ruin, both financial and moral, and the first step towards artistic and romantic vagrancy.

Sensitive souls have no strength in their moment of ruination; they fall, horrified and resigned, far faster than those who grow up in vice, who are inured by their surroundings. The cinema had saved Albina Albini, at least in part, from mercenary gallantry.

Tito Verri had also passed through a luminous phase of artistic illusion in the grey arc of his youth. Little more than 20 years old at the time, he had made a name for himself in Monaco, in Venice. Then certain events, pathological self-criticism, and innate pessimism had paralysed the young man; to artistic drought had been added material need, and many long years had passed, sacrificed to illustration, to billboards, to every possible commercial squandering of inspiration. Now the cinema made use of whatever was left of the artist's former talent. His billboards disguised, with a certain pretension to style, the violent plots of these police dramas. No one could imagine a compelling scenario or a complex set, choose appropriate locations, or frame the action against picturesque backdrops of ruins and vegetation better than Verri. They were very well paid, the painter and the actress, but money didn't console them. At the heart of their bitterness there was the same, unacknowledged torment, which brought them close more than anything else: they were frustrated artists.

For no earthly good can make up for permanently thwarted artistic ambition.

They could read this in each other's eyes, when in glassed-in rehearsal rooms, on stiflingly hot days, in a torrid atmosphere of madness or in the freezing, snowy ruins of a castle Albina had to repeat a scene for the tenth

time, while Verri watched over the cameramen, gave orders, constantly running around. Then they would draw close together and give each other a fleeting, weary smile, whispering to each other with bitter tenderness:

‘Accursed life!’

‘Wretched profession!’

It was their way of saying they loved one another.

A cameraman was speaking to Tito Verri in a loud voice, marking up a script with large strokes of blue pencil.

‘The second and the fifth scenes are missing, and the close-up in the eleventh, and the last three shots of the second part. Yet *Fior di chiostro* (*Flower of the Cloister*) has to be in post-production by next month.’

‘The director said to shoot the scene in the courtyard.’

‘The director is crazy. You need real brick, real steel, real trees. They cost less and they look better. What to do? My dear Verri, you know perfectly well that you’re the one who’s supposed to think of these things!’

Albina Albini, who had been tormenting a captive lioness with her umbrella, stepped into the conversation; taking the script out of the set designer’s hand, she perused it for a second.

‘A seventeenth-century monastery? Authentic? Rough brickwork, mossy balustrades, a large stained-glass window facing unkempt gardens, boxwood hedges, ivy-strewn tabernacle... I know where to find all of this.’

The director listened attentively: everyone knew of Albina’s intelligence and good taste.

‘With favourable light? Suitable for our purposes?’

‘I guarantee it.’

‘Then we should head there immediately. Is it far?’

‘In Varello Pellice. Two hours by car. We’ll arrive by midday. We can get everything done in the afternoon.’

And so an automobile carrying the actress, the painter and the cameramen, and the bandwagon with just a few extras—for the film was a slight, sentimental affair—arrived two hours later in the smiling countryside.

The director got out, armed with Albina’s information, and set out to make inquiries: but half an hour later he returned, desolate, to the hotel.

‘The monastery is there, and it’s magnificent. It’s like it was made for us. But the Mother Superior is inflexible. They must have already been put out by other colleagues of ours.’

‘Did you mention my name?’

‘Yes. She said that she doesn’t remember having met you.’

‘Verri, shall the two of us go? We’ll see what we can do.’

So Albina set off with her friend; they walked through the countryside, following a wide, sloping road flanked by century-old linden trees. They reached a place where the thicket opened out onto a grassy parvis, which dominated the countryside below on one side and was shaded by a high, crumbling embankment on the other, the bricks alive with ferns and earthworms. A circular staircase made of worn, polished marble led up to an immense, panelled walnut door that the painter, like a good connoisseur, caressed voluptuously. They rang the bell. In the wait that followed, all they could hear was the deafening chorus of sparrows in the linden-thickets, and further off, the chirping of youthful voices: and the one and the other combined into a single harmony. They heard an unsteady step, the rattle of keys and coins. Surely, the stifling stench of centuries of darkness must reign beyond the door! But the door opened, and a tremulous light greeted the visitors, filtered through the trellises of a vast courtyard, in the middle of which the sky was like a blue Moorish veil.

'The Mother Superior?'

'Here she is.'

An imposing nun of middle age stepped forward with cold politeness.

'You? You, the Mother Superior? But what about Sister Candida? Has she died?'

'She's blind. Do you know her?'

'Mother, I was here for five years.'

'When?'

'Eighteen years ago.'

The nun accompanied them. They passed through colonnades and cloisters, climbed the steps to the gardens that spread out along the hill in wide terraces. The whiteness of the marble alternated with the dull green of the cypresses, the glossy green of the boxwoods. On a bench were sitting three nuns.

'Here are the three eldest... Sister Candida... it's a former pupil of yours!'

'Albina Albini: do you remember me?'

The old woman lifted her wimple off her lifeless eyes, and with her bony hands grasped the beautiful hands held out to her.

'Albina Albini? Of course! I remember you, even if I can't see you any more! Albina Albini: the one who used to manage the Carnival celebrations so well.'

'Just the one! And this is my husband.'

Tito stepped forward with a bow, without irony. The good, old, naive souls believed the necessary lie without hesitation.

'We're both artists. I followed my calling. We make cinematic projections. But only legitimate, honest repertoire, subjects drawn from the Bible or from moral literature.'



Tito confirmed:

'For boarding schools and families. Today, we would appreciate being able to take a few shots of the scenery in the gardens and the convent.'

The old nun assented profusely with a gesture and a smile.

'You may wander anywhere you please, like in the old days. Show your husband around. We'll stay here for our afternoon meditation.'

Albina and Tito explored the gardens. The painter was enthusiastic as he considered the scenery, grasping at key motifs and framing shots in his mind's eye.

'It's like it was made for our film. In two hours, we'll have all the missing episodes...'

Move back; come closer; move forward entirely in profile: you look better against the green backdrop...'

They had been accustomed to this preparatory work for years, which the cameramen would then follow mechanically, like a dictation exercise.

They climbed up to the highest point in the gardens, then went back down to the third terrace. From the balustrade they could see the three nuns, still unmoving, and the chattering convent girls swarming around them.

'It's the four o'clock recess. How unchanged everything is!'

The woman sat down on the marble, observing the girls from up above, with narrowed eyes.

'But that's Rosa Isnardi! And that's Ida Gaudenzi! And that's little Gina Vitale, who died on Easter day.'

'What's all this nonsense?'

'Nothing. I was just noticing how the same types of women appear again and again, as time goes by...'

Albina murmured in her gloomiest voice. 'This is a nursery, incubating souls that will produce brides and mothers and actresses and loose women... and all of this without ever ceasing... life is so peculiar!'

'Are you feeling sad?'

The woman turned towards her friend with her bitterest smile:

'Sad? I'd like to feel that way, but I just can't anymore. Sadness, my dear, is a luxury reserved for only the happiest among us.'

'Let's head down. Now that we've got the go ahead and everything is ready, we need to tell the others and get started...'

'Accursed profession!'

'Wretched life!'

So they set off towards the final terrace, through the crowd of merry children, who fell silent in astonishment at the sight of that worldly apparition.

On the bench, the three decrepit nuns, sitting equidistant from one another, were moving their rosaries mechanically through their bony fingers: but it was as though they were holding spindle, shears, thread.

*'Il riflesso delle cesoie', L'ultima traccia* (Milan: Treves, 1921), pp. 49–62.  
Translated by Marco Ladd.

## Note

1. [*Translator's note.* This is the title as published in the text of the story. In the index of the volume, it was curiously entitled the '*Il riflesso delle idee*' ('The Ideas' Reflection').]

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# Author Biographies

## Giovanni Battista Avellone

(b. 1843, Palermo, d. 1923, Rome)

Attorney General, lawyer. In his early years, he participated in all of Garibaldi's campaigns to unify Italy. After practising as a lawyer, he entered the judiciary, becoming the General Prosecutor at the Court of Assize in Cagliari and in Turin, before finally ending up in Rome, where he had started his law career in 1883. He then returned to practicing law. In January 1916, he was named an official of the Ordine Mauriziano by King Vittorio Emanuele III. Politically tied to the historical Right, and in particular to Onorato Caetani, he wrote numerous publications on juridical and social questions (drawing on his personal experience rehabilitating convicts), in addition to verse compositions for specific occasions. In 1911, he wrote an expansive and controversial introduction (which then attracted the attention of Leonardo Sciascia) to one of the first studies about the Sicilian mafia, which was published by one of his pupils, the criminologist Salvatore Morasca. In 1912, his letter in the *Piccolo Giornale d'Italia* (*Small Newspaper of Italy*) against the corruption brought about by the cinema unleashed a debate in the newspaper that stretched out in eleven replies, involving people ranging from cinema professionals to the average citizen.

## Goffredo Bellonci

(b. 1882, Bologna, d. 1964, Lido di Camaiore)

Journalist and literary critic. He was among the most important editors of *Il Giornale d'Italia* (*The Newspaper of Italy*) in Rome, which he contributed to from 1907 to 1952. His articles also appeared, however, in other newspapers, such as *Il Resto del Carlino* (*The Rest of the Change*) in Bologna and *Il Messaggero* (*The Messenger*) in Rome. In his work as a journalist, he primarily wrote about literature, but he did not turn his nose up at writing about art, theatre, or even economics and foreign politics. He was the President of the Istituto internazionale per la storia del teatro (International Institute for the History of Theatre) and the



Centro nazionale di ricerche teatrali (National Centre for Theatrical Research). In 1947, he founded the Strega Prize with his wife, the writer Maria Villavecchia (who is better known by her married name), which is the most important Italian literary award. He wrote some important articles about cinema over the course of the 1910s, some of which were published in *Il Giornale d'Italia*.

## Giovanni Bertinetti

(b. 1872, d. 1950, Borgaretto)

Essayist, novelist, playwright, and screenwriter. At the end of the 1800s, while he was still very young, he was one of the key players within lively, journalistic-literary circles of Turin. At the turn of the century, he wrote for vaudeville in a Piedmontese dialect, and wrote a series of rather varied publications under pseudonyms. He wrote popular manuals of household wisdom, including *Dalla cucina al salotto* (*From the Kitchen to the Parlour*) in 1905, and both *Eleganza femminile* (*Feminine Elegance*) and *Guerra alle rughe!* (*War Against Wrinkles!*) in 1907, all signed with the female pseudonym 'Donna Clara'. He also wrote successful pseudo-philosophical essays written under the guise of an elusive American scholar, 'Ellick Morn', including *'Il mondo è tuo'*, ('The World Is Yours') in 1907, *'Sorgi e cammina'* ('Rise Up and Walk') in 1909, and *'La conquista dell'energia fisica, intellettuale, finanziaria'* ('The Conquest of Physical, Intellectual, and Financial Energy') in 1911. In these last titles, inspired by certain suggestions of thought by Henri Bergson and Maurice Blondel, he developed a theory of the will, focusing on the passion for life and supremacy of action. Between 1901 and 1905, he founded and directed *Forum*, an art and science magazine based in Turin. In 1908, he published his most famous narrative work, *Le orecchie di Meo* (*The Ears of Meo*), a novel for children that marked the beginning of an intense narrative production aimed at a young audience, which would extend into the 1930s (one memorable work from 1930, *Il gigante dell'Apocalisse* (*The Giant of the Apocalypse*), was a science-fiction mystery set in Hollywood). In addition to these activities, he wrote eighteen apocryphal novels under the name of Salgari, presenting them, in agreement with Salgari's heirs, as posthumous works of the great writer from Verona. From the second half the 1910s until the early 1920s, he was also very active as a screenwriter in Turin, working for production houses, including Corona Film, Itala Film, Gladiator Film, Latina Ars, Pasquali and,

in particular, for Albertini Film. The latter was founded with his friend Luciano Albertini, an actor, body-builder, and acrobat who became famous playing the cinema character Samson.

### **Michele Biancale**

(b.1881, Frosinone, d. 1961, Rome)

Journalist and art critic. After graduating from the University of Naples, he moved to London and Paris to study art history. On his return, he became a teacher, a job he held until the 1940s. Later, he became a professor of Contemporary Art at the University of Rome. During his career, he also worked as an art critic at a range of publications: *Il Messaggero* (*The Messenger*), *Il tempo* (*The Time*), and *L'Italia che scrive* (*The Italy that Writes*) based in Rome, *Il Resto del Carlino* (*The Rest of the Change*) in Bologna, *Nuovo Antologia* (*New Anthology*) in Florence, and *Illustrazione italiana* (*Italian Illustration*) and *Spazio* (*Space*) in Milan.

### **Aldo Borelli**

(b. 1890, Monteleone di Calabria, d. 1965, Rome)

Journalist and short-story writer. He was one of the most important editors and directors of newspapers in the country. He was first published in the daily the *Alfiere* (*The Standard Bearers*) in Rome while still a law student. In 1911, he was employed by the Agenzia Stefani, but by 1912, he was working for Roman edition of the important, Naples-based nationalist daily newspaper, *Il Mattino* (*The Morning*). In 1914, he went to *La Nazione* (*The Nation*) in Florence, where he was the director from 1915 until 1929, overseeing its passage from a generic right-wing nationalism to Fascism. From 1929 until 1943, he was the director of *Corriere della Sera* (*Evening Courier*) in Milan. In the postwar period, he was initially excluded from any job because of his past ties to the regime, but in 1946 he once again took on important roles, first at the Roman daily *Il Tempo* (*The Time*), then at the Roman edition of the Milanese magazine *Epoca* (*Era*) and, in the end, as the Editorial Director at Mondadori, overseeing the entire periodicals section of the publishing house. From November 1955 until 1958, he was the General Director of Cines, the Roman cinema production house which had been revived. He concluded

his career as the Director of the *Il Giornale d'Italia* (*The Newspaper of Italy*), which was owned by the Gruppo Editoriale Tribuna.

### **Anton Giulio Bragaglia**

(b. 1890, Frosinone, d. 1960, Rome)

Theatre director, journalist, and essayist. A restless intellectual and multi-faceted artist, in his youth he was part of the Futurist movement, theorizing and experimenting alongside his brother with 'photodynamics', an anti-naturalistic photographic technique inspired by the 'chronophotography' of the late 1800s and Giacomo Balla's kinetic painting. In 1916, he started a magazine in Rome focused on politics and art, *Cronache d'attualità* (*Chronicles of Today's News*), which he directed until 1922 and which was particularly open to the reception of European avant-gardes. Also in 1916, he entered into cinematographic production by establishing Novissima Film. He oversaw the direction of some films (which, according to some sources were actually directed by Riccardo Cassano), including the famous *Thais* (1916), which contained experimental sequences created in collaboration with the Futurist director Enrico Prampolini. Two years later, he founded the Casa d'Arte Bragaglia (Bragaglia's House of Art) in Rome, which held conferences and promoted innovative art exhibitions (from Balla to Sironi, from De Chirico to Dadaism). For nearly ten years—from 1922 until 1931—he directed the Teatro degli Indipendenti (Independent Theatre), which he founded with his brother, Carlo Ludovico. The theatre was both a point of reference for Italian and international avant-garde theatre, and a locus of experimentation in the fields of stagecraft, lighting, and choreography. His theatrical research continued with his experience of the Teatro delle Arti (Theatre of the Arts), which was promoted by the fascist regime. Bragaglia directed the Theatre from its founding in 1937 until its dissolution in 1943. In 1931, he produced his first and only feature-length film with sound, *Vele ammainate* (*Lowered Sails*). In the 1950s, he would return to movie directing, creating two documentaries, *La Floridiana* (*Floridiana Villa in Naples*) in 1950 and *Cosenza tirrenica* (*Cosenza on the Tyrrhenian Sea*) in 1953. His editorial activity was very intense. It was mostly dedicated to the theatre (and in particular to the Commedia dell'Arte, Roman masques, the history of screenwriting, and popular theatre), but also discussed the cinema. In addition to articles published in sophisticated cinema magazines like *Apolon* or in his own *Cronache d'attualità*, often under the pseudonym of B.

Galaragi. He wrote two books on cinema: *Il film sonoro. Nuovi orizzonti della cinematografia* (*Sound Film: New horizons in Cinematography*) in 1929 and *Evoluzione del mimo* (*The Evolution of Pantomime*) in 1930, which was largely dedicated to a theoretical comparison between sound cinema and theatre.

### **Angelina Bambina Maria Buracci**

(b. 1891, Casasco d'Intelvi, d. ?)

Educator. In the early 1910s, she came into contact with the Baragiola publishing house, founded in Como by brothers Fausto and Emilio (Baragiola), who were also the owners and operators of an international institute in the nearby Mendrisio (in the Ticino Canton of Switzerland) that sought to promote pedagogical innovations of the time. In 1913, Buracci published a small book with this company, *Il pensiero educativo di Caterina Franceschi Ferrucci* (*The Educational Thinking of Caterina Franceschi Ferrucci*), comparing the ideas of the noted Catholic scholar, who lived during the 1800s, with modern pedagogical thinking. In the book, she positioned herself within a new wave of thinking that was more attentive to the personality of the student and the specifics of gender. In 1916, she published a 60-page book on *Cinematografo Educativo* (*Educational Cinema*) through the Tipografia Sociale Sironi, probably covering the cost herself. This book explored the role of films in the education of children in the 1910s, and in it, she demonstrated, in addition to a vast mastery of educational themes, a broad familiarity with the actual movie theatres she claimed to have frequented since the turn of the century.

### **Ricciotto Canudo**

(b. 1877, Gioia del Colle, d. 1923, Paris)

Scholar of aesthetics, cultural critic, and organizer. After having completed his studies in Italy, he moved to Paris in 1902, where he became involved in the most influential intellectual circles, and forged strong friendships with Guillaume Apollinaire and Blaise Cendrars. In the early years of his Parisian sojourn, he focused mostly on musicology, but also on art, literary, and theatre criticism. His studies of Beethoven, Dante, and d'Annunzio were particularly noteworthy. At the outbreak of the First World War, when Italy was still lingering in neutrality, he enlisted as a volunteer in the French

army. Right after the war, he focused on cinema, deepening his original theoretical reflections on the new medium dating from 1908, organizing experimental projections, and proposing a cinematographic union of Latin peoples. On 7 June 1923, he married his colleague Jeanne Janin. He died suddenly in Paris on 10 November of that same year. His studies were brought together posthumously in the 1928 *L'usine aux image* (*The Image Factory*).

### Edoardo Coli

(b.1871, d.1926, Florence)

A high school literature teacher, poet, essayist, writer, and textbook author. He is best known for his work as an editor, first at the Florentine literary journal *La Nazione letteraria* (*The Literary Nation*), then for *Il Marzocco*, which he co-founded in 1896 in Florence with Adolfo Orvieto, Enrico Corradini and others, and finally for *Vita nova* (*New Life*) in Milan. In an important piece in *Il Marzocco* he took a stand against the use of Cesare Lombroso in theories of art, a choice that placed him strongly in opposition to Mariano Luigi Patrizi, a major advocate of this branch of Lombroso's school of thought. During the 1910s, Coli worked with two Roman literary magazines, *Il Fanfulla della Domenica* (*Sunday Fanfulla*) and *Il Primasso*.

### Luigia Cortesi

(b.?, d.?)

Novelist and playwright. She worked with the *Rassegna Nazionale* (*National Review*) in Florence. In 1904, while still very young, she published the novel *Verso la Gloria* (*Towards Glory*) with the Cogliati publishing house based in Milan, which had already been published in *Rassegna* over the course of 1903. In 1906, again through Cogliati, she published the novel, *Diana Vannutelli*. In 1915, Emilio Ghione directed a film entitled *Spine e lacrime* (*Thorns and Tears*) based on one of her plays, which starred Gastone Monaldi, Fernanda Battiferri, and Alberto Colli, and was produced by the Tiber production house. In 1917, Nino Oxilia directed a film for Cines based on one of her 'cine-comedies', *L'uomo in Frak* (*The Man in the Tuxedo*), starring Berta Nelson.

## Romano Costetti

(b. ?, d.1913, Bologna)

Priest. In 1899, under the guidance of the economist Giuseppe Toniolo, he co-founded in Lucca (where he was a clergyman at that time) both the Circolo Cattolico di Studi Sociali (Catholic Circle of Social Studies), and the Cassa Rurale Lucchese (Rural Bank of Lucca), which was strongly opposed by the public authorities, in particular Antonio Starabba, Marquese Di Rudinì. He contributed to the Lucchese Catholic periodical *L'Esare* (*The Serchio River*) and was the director of the Bolognese journal *La figlia di Maria, periodico cattolico per giovenette* (*The Daughter of Mary: A Catholic Periodical for Young Women*), and he was the abbot of the Abbey of San Salvatore in Bologna. A follower of Giuseppe Toniolo, he was an active collaborator in the archbishop's school in Bologna, and in 1910 he started the Società emiliana delle proiezioni (Film Society of the Emilia Region), which was immediately renamed in his honour after his death.

## Crainquebille [Enrico Thovez]

(b. 1869, d. 1925, Turin)

After a brief stint studying engineering, he graduated in literature from the University of Turin in 1896. His first poetic works came out in 1887. He would continue to produce such works—without any great success—throughout his life. He was also a painter and his works were displayed at the Biennale in Venice in 1901. His major contributions, however, were as a critic of literature and of art, which he also began at a very young age. Among the publications that he contributed to were *Corriere della Sera* (*Evening Courier*) in Milan, *La Stampa* (*The Press*) and *La Gazzetta del popolo* (*The People's Gazette*) in Turin, and *Il Resto del Carlino* (*The Rest of the Change*) in Bologna. In the world of literary criticism, he was especially known for his positions against Giosuè Carducci and Gabriele d'Annunzio. He was also the director of the Museo Civico d'Arte Moderna (Civic Museum of Modern Art) in Turin. Among his most noted books are the collections of literary-critical writings are the 1910 *Il pastore, il gregge, la zampogna* (*The Shepherd, the Flock, the Bagpipe*) and the 1921 *L'arco di Ulisse* (*Ulysses's Bow*), the 1919 anti-modernist pamphlet written in the form of a collection of moral tales *Mimi dei moderni* (*Modern Charades*), and the 1921 collection

of critical writings on art *Il Vangelo della pittura ed altre prose d'arte* (*The Gospel of Painting and Other Stylized Writings*).

### Giuseppe d'Abundo

(b. 1860, d. 1926, Barletta)

Physician and assistant to the illustrious psychiatrist, Professor Leonardo Bianchi. He received a medical degree in 1884 at the University of Naples where he focused on nervous and mental illnesses and gained expertise in laboratory research. His first article of many articles in the Neapolitan journal *La Psichiatria, la neuropatologia e le scienze affini* (*Psychiatry, Neuropathology, and Related Sciences*) came out in 1885. In that same year, he moved to the University of Pisa, where he taught in Clinical Psychiatry at the Istituto di Neurologia (Institute of Neurology). In 1894, he was named Professor of Psychiatry in Cagliari and later in Catania, where he remained for nearly thirty years. It was here that he founded the *Rivista italiana di neuropatologia, psichiatria ed elettroterapia* (*Italian Journal of Neuropathology, Psychiatry, and Electro-therapy*) in 1907. That same year, he founded, along with Leonardo Bianchi, the Società Italiana di Neurologia (Italian Society of Neurology), which is still in existence today. In 1924, he was called to the University of Naples to take the place of his mentor, Leonardo Bianchi, who was forced to retire because of his age. He continued his research in the field of psychiatry, and among his nearly one hundred publications, there are numerous essays dedicated to neurological issues.

### Lucio d'Ambra [Renato Eduardo Anacleto Mangarella]

(b. 1880, d. 1939, Rome)

Journalist, novelist, comedy writer, theatre and cinema critic, screenwriter, director, and producer. He began his varied and lively activity in 1896 in the fashionable journal, *Fiammetta*, as a writer, and spending the early years of the twentieth century writing on a topics that ranged from commentary on current events to literary and theatre criticism. He wrote for large circulation publications, including the theatrical journal *Il Tirso* (*The Thyrsus*), the newspaper *La Tribuna* (*The Tribune*), the weekly publication *La Tribuna Illustrata* (*The Illustrated Tribune*), and the monthly *Il Mondo* (*The World*). His most important theatrical successes include the 1904 poem *Bernini* (written in collaboration

with Giuseppe Lipparini), the 1912 comedy *Effetti di Luce* (*The Effects of Light*), and the 1916 patriotic drama *La Frontière* (*The Frontier*). He was among the promoters of the 1913 *Teatro per tutti* (*Theatrer for All*), which was dedicated to the performance of one-act plays or other short works, the 1923 *Teatro degli Italiani* (*The Italian Theatre*), which was dedicated to the performance of solely Italian works, and the 1932 *Baracca e i Burattini* (*Give it all up*), which was reserved for theatrical performances of Italian works accompanied by conferences. In 1922, at nearly the same time that he was named president of the Società degli Autori (Society of Authors) in Rome, he started a cultural circle, Le Stanze del libro (The Book Rooms), which hosted conferences, exhibitions, book tours, and theatrical performances from a variety of different fields of thought and practice. His work as a novelist occupied him for the rest of his life, beginning in 1900 with *Il miraggio* (*The Mirage*) and continuing with his larger successes, all dating from 1915, including *Il re, le torri, gli alfieri* (*The King, the Towers, the Standard Bearers*), *Il damo viennese* (*The Viennese Lover*), *L'ombra della Gloria* (*The Shadow of Glory*), and the three volumes of *La Vita in due* (*Life in Two*) (1924–1933). He was very active as a short story writer in the 1930s with the series *False e vere* (*False and True*) in the *Corriere della Sera* (*Evening Courier*). The cinema captivated him for around 30 years: from 1909—the year he wrote his first article on cinema—until his final days, when he was still planning numerous screenplays. After successfully writing screen adaptations of *La Signorina Ciclone* (*Miss Fluffy Ruffles*) and *Il Re, le Torri, gli Alfieri* in 1916, he held a number of positions in the industry, as a screenwriter, director, producer, cinema critic, theorist, and in 1920, editor of the film journal, *Il Romanzo Film* (*The Film Novel*). He occupied himself primarily with journalism, particularly for literature and theatre, and in 1913, he was the first in Italy to call attention to Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, only a month after it came out in French. His long and varied professional career brought him two important honours: he was named an Official in the Légion d'Honneur (Legion of Honour) by the Académie Française (French Academy) on 1 July 1928, and he was appointed to the Reale Accademico d'Italia (Royal Italian Academy) by the fascist government on 19 April 1937. He died in Rome on 31 December 1939.

## Silvio d'Amico

(b.1887, d. 1955, Rome)

After graduating with a law degree in 1911, he won an exam/contest at the Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. In 1913, he began to seriously dedicate



himself to the theatre, primarily as a critic. By 1914, he was already at the nationalistic newspaper based in Rome, *l'Idea Nazionale (The National Opinion)*, as an assistant to the drama critic, Domenico Oliva. After volunteering to serve in the First World War, he collected his ideas in two books, *Il teatro dei fantocci (Puppet Shows)* in 1920 and *Maschere (Masks)* in 1921. Repudiating the bourgeois realist theatre of the late nineteenth century was critical for him. In 1923, he became Professor of Theatre History at the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia (Saint Cecilia National Academy), an acting school in Rome, thanks to his work as a writer and as a promoter of the new, nationalist dramatic theatre. In 1929, he published *Il tramonto dell'attore (The Waning of the Actor)*, which criticized the old Italian theatre tradition, which still saw the actor, and not the text, as its focal point. In 1931, after having visited and studied at various theatre programmes, both in Italy and abroad, he published *La crisi del teatro (The Crisis in Theatre)*, in which he expressed his ideas on theatre direction, according to which the Socratic method allows the actor to connect with the reality of screenplay. In 1932, he founded one of the most important theatrical journals of the era, entitled *Scenario (Backdrop)*, with Nicola de Pirro. At the same time, in *Teatro del Novecento (Twentieth-Century Theatre)*, he began and directed the series *Teatro italiano (Italian Theatre)*. In 1935, while he continued his activities as a critic, he became the first head of the newly-formed Accademia Nazionale d'Arte Drammatica (National Academy of Dramatic Arts), for which he immediately took a role as an instructor of theatre history. In this same period, he worked on the *Storia del Teatro Drammatico (The History of Dramatic Theatre)*, published in four volumes between 1939 and 1940. After the war, he added the *Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo (Encyclopaedia of Performances)* to his body of work, but the first volume would not be released until 1954, just one year before his death.

### Luciano Doria [Romolo Augusto Gizzi]

(b. 1891, d. 1961, Rome)

Journalist, novelist, comedy writer, essayist, and film director and producer. At the beginning of the 1910s, he started his career as a journalist, but made forays into theatre, co-writing with Aldo De Benedetti *Colui il quale (The One Who)*, which was performed in June 1916 at the Teatro Argentina in Rome. He entered into the field of cinema production in 1918 as a screenwriter for Tiber Films, writing films which included *Mademoiselle Pas-Chic (Miss Low Class)*, *La principessa di Bagdad (The Princess of Baghdad)*, *Le avventure di Doloretta (The Adventures*

of *Doloretta*), and *La signora senza pace* (*The Woman without Peace*). In short, he was one of the most prolific screenwriters of Silent Era in Italy. In 1920, without abandoning his work as a screenwriter he moved to the Fert-Pittaluga's studio and began his career as a director with the *Lisola della felicità* (*The Island of Happiness*). In that same year, he also founded the magazine *Fortunio* with Nunzio Malasomma, which would become the first in Italy to systematically publish passages from scripts with all of the stage directions. In 1927, he left the Fert, to be a founding member, alongside Mario Camerini, Augusto Genina, Aldo De Benedetti and many others, and the General Director of the innovative film studio, Autori Direttori Italiani Associati (Italian Association of Authors and Directors) or ADIA. After 1930, when the advent of the first Italian sound productions ended up bankrupting the economically weak ADIA, he fulfilled a variety of roles for other production companies, such as Director of Production, General Manager, and Producer, the role he held until the year before his death.

### Edipi [Ettore della Porta]

(b. 1861, Verona, d.?)

A prolific journalist at the successful *L'Arena* (*The Arena*) in Verona and *La Nazione* (*The Nation*) in Florence, and an editor of numerous newspapers and periodicals, including the fashionable and sometimes licentious, *Fiammetta* (Florence-Rome), the sardonic *La Scena illustrata* (*The Illustrated Scene*) in Florence, the refined *L'illustrazione italiana* (*The Italian Illustration*) in Rome, the artistic *Il Ventesimo* (*The Twentieth*) in Genoa, and the widely circulated *La Gazzetta del Popolo della Domenica* (*The People's Sunday Gazette*) in Turin. He also tried his hand—with less success, however—at narrative (novellas), theatre (plays, comedies, pantomimes), and even music (opera librettos). In terms of cinema, he wrote, in addition to the article included in this anthology, *'Il teatro della nevrosi'* ('The Theatre of the Neurotics'), which was published in *La Scena illustrata* in 1910.

### Ettore Fabietti

(b. 1876, Cetona, d. 1962, Solbiate)

Writer, editorialist, librarian, and author of political and educational texts. A staunch Marxist connected to reformist socialist environments,

he only obtained his elementary school diploma because of his humble origins, and was almost entirely an autodidact. Because of that, starting in 1903, he dedicated himself almost exclusively to the promotion and organization of the nascent 'libraries for the people', a growing phenomenon that he steadfastly believed in. He conducted these activities from Milan, where he moved to in 1901. After 1908, he worked across the entire country. It was in this period that he started a demanding slate of work as an editorialist, primarily for the Milanese journals *La Cultura popolare* (*Popular Education*) and *La Parola e il libro* (*The Word and the Book*), which he also directed. In 1926, because of pressures against him and the institutions that he was working for from the Fascists, he dedicated himself to writing and editorial work for educational scientific and literary publications. He began to occupy himself the public libraries only in the immediate post-war period when, however, a long illness forced him out of public life.

### Mario Foresi

(b. 1849, Portoferraio, d. 1932, Florence)

Journalist, poet, composer, short story author, and collector of paintings and rare books. The son of an important family from the island of Elba, he lived and worked in Florence in a lavish home on Corso de' Tintori, which had been the property of the ancient Doni family. He sent the young Gabriele d'Annunzio to the school where he had studied, the Liceo Cicognini in Prato, with his own personal letter of recommendation. As a journalist, he contributed to *La rivista d'Italia* (*The Italian Magazine*) in Rome, *Varietas* in Milan, *Italia moderna* (*Modern Italy*) in Naples, *La Scena illustrata* (*The Illustrated Scene*) in Florence, *Il Giornale d'Italia* in Rome, and *Il Nuovo giornale* (*The New Paper*) in Florence. He published short stories and sketches in *Nuova antologia* (*New Anthology*), which was based in Florence at the time, as well as the *Rassegna Nazionale* (*National Review*). There were also various works of poetry and fiction that came out in series. He was well-known for his translations of Dante's *Divina Commedia* (*Divine Comedy*) and Petrarch's *Canzoniere* (*Song Book*) into prose, which made these works comprehensible to a wider audience. In 1909, after the death of his wife, he ceased all activity. In the mid-1910s, he gave all of his precious collection of paintings, books, and antiques to

the town of Portoferraio on the island of Elba, where they are united in the Foresi collection.

### Giovanni Fossi

(b.?, d.?)

Journalist and pedagogue. Tied to Florentine Catholic-nationalist circles, he became the director of the Istituto Nazionale Sordomuti (National Institute for Deaf Mutes) in Florence in February 1920, six months after the death of its founder, Francesco Mangioni. At the same time, he founded the monthly publication *Parla* (*Speak*), which apprised readers of the institute's activities in addition to those of the wider Italian pedagogical community connected to these matters. However, the publication made many forays into the literary and artistic world, and from its earliest issues published accessible works by illustrious authors from the Florentine scene, including Isidoro del Lungo, Giovanni Papini, and Ferdinando Paolieri. In 1928, he also founded *Corrierino dei Sordomuti* (*Little Courier of the Deaf-mutes*), which was intended to be more sleek and practical, and eventually merged with *Parla* in 1935. He also published a series of small instructional books in connection with the *Corrierino dei Sordomuti*, whose most important titles were written by Fossi himself. In this series of publications, the weight of Catholicism, whose rules are presented as essential normative elements, is very strong. Also, from a certain moment on, the rules of Fascism were given the same weight. He left as head of the Institute in 1943.

### Gaio [Adolfo Orvieto]

(b.1871, d. 1951, Florence)

Successful journalist, lawyer. After growing up in Florence, he moved to Rome, where he completed a law degree in 1893 and began contributing to *Vita nuova* (*New Life*), first under the pseudonym 'Jago' and then, as 'Gaio'. In 1901, he became director of the literary magazine that his brother Angiolo had founded in 1896, *Il Marzocco*. The magazine had become a hub of cultural life in Florence, and it slowly abandoned the aesthetic idealism of its early years and began to favor a more eclectic approach under his

leadership. In addition to his journalistic work, the Treves Brothers publishing house collected his caricatures of notable Florentine figures, and in 1905, published them under the pseudonym 'Kodak'.

### Renato Giovannetti

(b. 1892, Rome, d. 1917, Cal di Canale)

Journalist. In 1906, when he was only 14 years old, he published the short story 'Il Faro' ('The Lighthouse') in the weekly Florentine publication *Il Vascello. Giornale di avventure di mare e di terra* (*The Vessel: Journal of Land and Sea Adventures*). In 1911, while still completing his law degree, he began editing for the nationalist daily *La Vita* (*The Life*) in Rome. He graduated in 1914 with a thesis on legislative reform to libel laws. When the *La Vita* closed in 1915, he went to *Il Giornale d'Italia* (*The Newspaper of Italy*), which was also based in Rome. He also contributed to Milanese publications *Don Chisciotte: Giornale di viaggi e di avventure* (*Don Quixote: Journal of Travel and Adventures*) (Milan) and *Il Bacio* (*The Kiss*). In 1915, he enlisted in the war effort with the rank of second lieutenant in the infantry. Initially sent to the Tonale Pass in the Alps, he sent war correspondence to his newspaper. These were later published posthumously in 1918 in the collection *Alla fronte. Impressioni* (*At the Front: Impressions*). In June of 1917, he and his unit, which was part of the Brigata Potenza (The Power Brigade), departed for Banjšice Plateau, where he lost his life at the end of August.

### Guido Gozzano

(b. 1883, d. 1916, Turin)

Poet and novelist, considered one of the greatest representatives of what is known as *crepuscolarismo*, an important poetic movement in the early part of the twentieth-century, which focused on the scathing critique of the present. His most important collection of poems, *I colloqui* (*Conversations*), came out in 1911, preceded by *La via del rifugio* (*The Path of Refuge*) in 1907. His short stories and fables for children, *I tre talismani* (*The Three Talismans*) in 1904 and *La principessa si sposa*, (*The Princess Gets Married*) in 1917, are also noteworthy. In 1912, he took a voyage to

India in order to recover from tuberculosis—a disease that would bring him to an early death at the age of 30—and his impressions are collected in the posthumous work *Verso la cuna del mondo* (*Towards the Cradle of the World*) and published in 1917. He also worked on two screenplays, one for Turin-based Ambrosio film studio for the 1911 film entitled *Solo al mondo. La storia di piccolino* (*Alone in the World: The Story of a Little Boy*), and the other for a film about Saint Francis written in 1916, which was never made.

### Antonio Gramsci

(b. 1891, Ales, d. 1937, Rome)

Politician, historian, and journalist. Coming from modest means, he was drawn to socialist thought in 1905 after reading *Avanti!* (*Forward!*) for the first time. Thanks to a scholarship, he enrolled in 1912 at the University of Turin in the Faculty of Liberal Arts. Interested in the widest array of subjects, he took courses in law as well as literature, particularly in modern philology—the programme of study in which he was enrolled. However, his contact with workers and politicians drew him to political activism of the radical Left, a fact that distanced him from the typical trajectory of the average student. His formation as a activist was also different with respect to the culture of the Partito Socialista Italiano (Italian Socialist Party). Dedicated since the First World War to the principal texts of Marxism as well as to the thinking of the neo-idealist and liberal camps (found in Giuseppe Prezzolini's *La Voce* (*The Voice*) and Gaetano Salvemini's *Unità* (*Unity*)), he assigned a specific role to the renewal of culture: as a bridge between the world of the workers and the world of intellectuals and the university—an idea that was not present in Italian Marxism at the time, but that was instead connected to the positivist tradition. In 1918, after having begun to work as an editor for *Il Grido del popolo* (*The Cry of the People*) and *Avanti!*, he found strong points of contact between his thought and that of Lenin, particularly in his work on the relationship between the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. He then founded *L'Ordine Nuovo* (*The New Order*), a weekly review of socialist culture, with Umberto Terracini. In January 1921, with the Partito Socialista Italiana (Italian Socialist Party) divided into two sections—since after the Russian Revolution it was no longer able to bridge the divide between the reformist wing and the revolutionary

wing—and the entire editorial board joining the newly established Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian Communist Party), the periodical was transformed into the official organ of the PCI and moved from being a weekly publication to being a daily one. Between 1922 and 1923, having ended his assignment with *L'Ordine Nuovo*, he stayed for a long time in the USSR—both for political and health reasons (he spent a lot of time in a sanatorium)—where he met and married Julija Schucht. In 1924, he became the secretary of the party, and put it on path towards a progressive bolshevization. In November 1926, based on a newly-instituted law by the fascist regime, which prohibited all political parties but the Fascists, he was arrested. In 1928, the Special Tribunal condemned him to 20 years, and he was effectively barred from any contact with the outside world. In February 1929, while he was in prison in Turi, Bari, he obtained the right to write notes. He then began the draft of his *Quaderni del carcere* (*Prison Notebooks*), a monumental and programmatic reflective work (in 33 notebooks). Fortunately, they were saved and published starting in 1948, eleven years after his death.

### Haydée [Ida Finzi]

(b. 1867, d.1946, Trieste)

Journalist and writer. At not yet fifteen years old, her first articles appeared in the leading irredentist paper in Trieste called the *Indipendente* (*Independent*), where she began to use the pseudonym which she carried for her entire life. After that, and under other pseudonyms, she also collaborated with a number of other publications: the daily paper *Il Piccolo* (*The Small-Format*) in Trieste (for which she would become the editor for more than 26 years), the magazine *Fanfulla della Domenica* (*Sunday Fanfulla*), *Favilla* (*The Spark*), *Illustrazione Popolare* (*Popular Illustration*), *Illustrazione Italiana* (*Italian Illustration*), where she published under the name 'La signora in grigio' ('The Lady in Grey'), *Secolo XX* (*Twentieth Century*), and *Grandi Firme* (*Big Names*). As a writer she is best known for her short stories, which were often published in magazines and newspapers. Her work as a short story writer brought her acclaim beginning in 1895, winning a number of important prizes awarded by other prestigious magazines, including *Natura ed Arte* (*Nature and Art*), *Roma Letteraria* (*Literary Rome*), *Rassegna Internazionale di Roma* (*International Review of Rome*). She was also active in other forms of writing for which she received widespread recognition, from novels and

dramas to comedies, memoirs, and poetry. The novel *Faustina Bon* published by the Milanese publishing house Vallardi in 1914 was, for example, awarded by the Società degli autori (Society of Authors) in Rome, while a comedy in two acts, *Cenerentola per forza* (*Absolutely Cinderella*), won the female drama competition held by the Turin-based magazine, *La Donna* (*The Woman*).

### Luigi Lucatelli

(b. 1877, d. 1915, Rome)

Prolific journalist from a family of liberal patriots, known especially for his satirical writings. Published in the weekly *Il Travaso delle idee della domenica* (*The Sunday Outpouring of Ideas*) under the pseudonym Oronzo E. Marginati, in which he pretended to be an imaginary underpaid worker in order to comment critically on the events of the week in a language peppered with Roman dialect and bureaucratic slang. In addition to these works, he cast a wide net as a journalist: he published in a number of Roman dailies, including *Il Travaso delle Idee* (*The Outpouring of Ideas*), *Corriere d'Italia* (*The Courier of Italy*), *La Patria* (*The Fatherland*) as well as the Milanese *Il Secolo* (*The Century*). For *Il Secolo*, he followed the war in Libya from 1911–1912 as a reporter, later collecting his writings in the 1912 volume *Il volto della Guerra* (*The Face of War*).

### Sebastiano Arturo Luciani

(b. 1884, d. 1950, Acquaviva delle Fonti)

Musicologist, theorist (of tragic theatre, music, dance, and cinema), film dramatist, and director. He contributed to a variety of publications, which ranged from the most important art and theatre magazines, such as *Cronache d'Attualità* (*Chronicles of Today's News*) and the '900 (*Twentieth Century*) to some of the best newspapers of the country *La Stampa* (*The Press*), *Corriere Italiano* (*The Italian Courier*), *Il lavoro d'Italia* (*The Work of Italy*). He dedicated numerous articles to cinematography, arguing that it was an art of time and space that was destined, in his mind, to change entertainment in the future. These articles were later collected—with only slight variations—in three books: *Verso una nuova arte. Il cinematografo* (*Towards*



*a New Art: The Cinematograph*) in 1920, *l'Antiteatro (The Anti-Theatre)* in 1928, *Il cinema e le altre arti (The Cinema and the Other Arts)* in 1942. At the beginning of the 1920s, after having begun to write some screenplays, he also began to work as an artistic director for Triumphalis Film, and a director of set design for 1920 film *Tristano e Isotta (Tristan and Isolde)*. Unfortunately, the beginning of the crisis in Italian cinema at practically the same time he began work in film production, quickly brought him back to his work as a theorist. From 1934 until 1935, after Emilio Cecchi left Cine, he took a position during the Office of Scripts. Then, together with Carlo Mariani dell'Anguillara, he wrote the screenplay for the fascist regime's historic 1937 film *Scipione l'Africano (Scipio the African)*. Later, he wrote other screenplays, often with Henry Clark, some of which were never made.

### **Alberto Emanuele Lumbroso**

(b. 1872, Turin, d. 1942, Santa Margherita Ligure)

Historian and legal expert, jurist, man of letters, magazine director, and Italian military attaché in Greece. Belonging to the nobility (he was a baron), he graduated with a degree in law from the University of Rome with a thesis on Napoleon and England in 1894. His passion for Napoleon increased in the following years and by the early twentieth-century, he was already considered one of the greatest biographers of the military leader and his family. In 1904, he donated the entirety of his rich Napoleonic library to the National Library in Turin, and beginning in 1900, he dedicated himself to the study of French personalities, including Voltaire in 1901, Stendhal in 1902, and Guy de Maupassant, to whom he dedicated a hefty monograph—the first in Europe in 1905. A contributor to the *Archivio per lo studio delle tradizioni popolari* (Archive for Research on Popular Traditions), directed by Giuseppe Pitré, but also to the prestigious *La Tribuna (The Tribune)* in Rome, the working-class *Lettura (Reading)* in Milan, and the *Paris Revue*. In 1907, he took over the management of the *Rivista di Roma (Rome Magazine)* alongside Arturo Jahn Rusconi, and he became the sole director in 1909. He held this role until 1932. Having already moved from erudite subjects to patriotic ones, the journal argued in favour of Italy's intervention at the outbreak of the First World War. In 1915, Lumbroso enlisted as a volunteer in the war, with the rank of second lieutenant. After being promoted to lieutenant, he joined the Italian embassy as a military attaché in Athens from 1916 until 1918. In 1924, he was transferred to Genoa, where he began

to publish the *Rivista di Roma* again. From that point on, he dedicated his research primarily to the Great War and to the lives of the members of the Royal Family. His contacts with the Regime were very strong in those years: in 1923 he had begun to collaborate with *Critica Fascista* (*Fascist Criticism*), and in 1929 he requested a membership card from the party. Of Jewish origin, he was struck by the racial laws of 1938, which completely interrupted his editorial activities.

## Maffio Maffi

(b. 1881, Florence, d. 1957, Rome)

Journalist, essayist. After graduating with a liberal arts degree, he contributed between 1903 and 1906 to three prestigious Florentine literary-artistic journals, *Hermes*, *Il Marzocco*, and *Il Regno* (*The Kingdom*). In 1907, he landed at the Florentine daily *Il Nuovo giornale* (*The New Daily*), and later helped found *Il Giornale di Vicenza* (*Daily News of Vicenza*) in 1908, which he then directed. From 1909 to 1924, he was the lead editor of the *La Tribuna* (*The Tribune*) in Rome. A fascist from the very beginning, from 1924 to 1925 he was the head of the Ufficio stampa del capo del governo (Press office of the Head of State), while from 1925 to 1927 he was the director of *La Gazzetta del popolo* (*The People's Gazette*) in Turin. From 1928, following the wishes of the fascist government, he worked at the *Corriere della Sera* (*Evening Courier*) in Milan. Considered insufficiently expedient in aligning the publication with fascist priorities, he was removed the following year and worked as the editor of political news in the monthly *Nuova Antologia* (*New Anthology*) in Rome until 1932. He returned to newspapers in 1932, as the director of *La Nazione* (*The Nation*) in Florence, and as an Italian correspondent for the Buenos Aires paper, *Razon*. Because of his past collaboration with the fascist regime, he was excluded from any work after the Liberation in 1944, and only began to work as a journalist again in 1948, contributing to two Roman papers, *Il Tempo* (*The Time*) and *Il Messaggero* (*The Messenger*), and occasionally to the Milanese paper, *Corriere della Sera*. There were various publications over the years that gathered his writings together, especially those he completed as a war correspondent. As an official of the Navy during the First World War, he was also employed in the Servizio Fotocinematografico della Marina (Photocinematographic Service of the Navy), where he worked as a director.

## Fausto Maria Martini

(b. 1886, d. 1930, Rome)

He debuted at a very young age with *Le piccole morte* (*The Little Dead Things*) (1903), a collection of poems in the *crepuscolarismo* style, continuing his poetic activities with two similarly-inspired new collections *Panem nostrum* (*Daily Bread*) in 1907 and *Poesie provinciali* (*Provincial Poems*) in 1910. In 1907, he took a long and adventurous voyage to the United States, which he later recounted in the 1930 novel *Si sbarca a New York* (*Arrival at New York*). Once he returned to Italy, from 1909 until 1925, he edited the theatre criticism column in the newspaper *La Tribuna* (*The Tribune*), occasionally focusing also on cinema, with long reviews of films. From 1925 until 1929, he held the same position at *Il Giornale d'Italia* (*Newspaper of Italy*) in Rome. He also worked as a playwright and between 1913 and 1929, writing and producing numerous theatrical works. Starting in 1920, he published various volumes of fiction, including many novels. Among his writings were some accounts of military life, dedicated to the experience of the Great War, a conflict from which he returned home mutilated. His first foray into the world of cinema was with Nino Oxilia on *Rapsodia satanica* (*Satanic Rhapsody*), for which he wrote the story (together with Baron Alberto Fassini) and the intertitles in 1914. Though the film was made in the early months of 1915, it was not presented to the public until July 1917, when a second film based on one of his original stories, *Lucciola* (written in collaboration with Augusto Genina), had already come out. The following year, he contributed to two other films as a storywriter, *Il rifugio dell'alba* (*The Refuge of Dawn*) and *Il volto del passato* (*The Face From the Past*). In these same years, he planned other films, which never came to fruition. In 1918, having recovered from the trauma of the war, he contributed some articles on cinema to the Roman journal, *In Penombra* (*In the Shadows*).

## Mario Umberto Masini

(b. 1876, d. 1943)

Psychiatrist. Student of Enrico Morselli (one of the founding fathers of modern Italian psychiatry), he worked primarily in the Cogoletto and Paverano asylums in Genoa, where he was the first to use non-coercive techniques with patients. His research focused in particular on criminal anthropology

and sexual psychology. He was interested in the mental disorders of famous historical figures (see, for example, his studies on the psychopathologies of painter Sodoma and military leader Sigismondo Malatesta), and he was also the editor of the journal, *L'illustrazione medica italiana* (*Italian Medical Illustration*), which specialized in the study of medicine and psychology in art. As an expert in the local history of Liguria, he published a successful guide to the art history of Genoa in 1929.

### **Domenico Orano**

(b. 1873, d. 1918, Rome)

Journalist, erudite historian, pedagogue, and philanthropist. From a wealthy family, with degrees in both law and medicine, he was a fervent Mason and historian. Between 1896 and 1903, he successfully published various volumes on Rome, the papacy, and the history of the papacy's suppression of free thinking. In the same period, his articles also appeared in various Roman periodicals connected to the anti-clerical world, including *La Rivista della Massoneria Italiana* (*The Revue of Italian Masonry*), *Capitan Fracassa*, *La Tribuna* (*The Tribune*), *La Roma del Popolo* (*The People's Rome*), *La Capitale* (*The Capital*), *Gazzetta di Roma*, (*The Roman Gazette*) and *Cyrano di Bergerac*. Starting in 1905, nearly all of his energies were directed at improving the quality of life in the Testaccio neighbourhood of Rome, a cause to which he dedicated his life and all of his wealth. Indeed, thanks to him, in 1906 the neighbourhood had first a biblioteca popolare ('public library'), then a women's professional school, then a concert group, a public assistance office, and also an educational cinema. In 1907, specifically to represent these programs, he ran on the ticket of the Partito Radicale (Radical Party) and was elected to the city government. His sociological analyses of housing and life in that neighbourhood, which he described in minute detail in various volumes published from 1908 onward, are still important today.

### **Francesco Orestano**

(b. 1873, Alia, d. 1945, Rome)

Philosopher and pedagogue. After completing his law degree in Palermo, he studied in Lipsia, where graduated with a degree in philosophy in 1901. In

addition to his predilection for philosophical studies, he had a strong interest—which he never abandoned—in educational policies, as evidenced by his tireless collaboration with the authoritative *Rivista di pedagogia* (*Journal of Pedagogy*) directed by Luigi Credaro. In 1905, the Minister of Public Education, Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, entrusted him with the task of drafting guidelines for scholastic reform. Two years later, Orestano began to teach moral philosophy at the University of Palermo, where he remained until 1924, when he asked to leave the professoriate (and would return to in the 1930s). The motivation for this temporary choice of Orestano—a thinker solidly rooted in new realism—was the increasingly difficult intellectual, but also academic, battle with the neo-idealist philosopher Giovanni Gentile, who was the intellectual at that time with the greatest influence on the fascist regime. In the following years, however, he continued his philosophical work, and was gradually able to take on roles of importance within the fascist regime. A contributor to *Gerarchia* (*Hierarchy*), the journal founded by Mussolini, a member of the Reale Accademico d'Italia (Royal Italian Academy), starting in 1931, President of the Società filosofica italiana (Italian Philosophical Society), over the course of the 1930s, he emerged victorious in the clash with the Gentile's idealism, promoting a philosophy of reality and of experience that was influenced by experimental psychology and open to scientific inquiry. From the beginning of the 1940s, he progressively withdrew from public cultural life, developing strong interests in religious studies.

### **Vittorio Emanuele Orlando**

(b. 1860, Palermo, d. 1952, Rome)

Jurist and politician. Professor of law at the University of Messina, the University of Palermo, and eventually, the University of Rome. He was established new curriculum in Italian constitutional and administrative studies. In 1900, he entered into politics. As Minister of Education from 1903 to 1905, he extended compulsory schooling from nine to twelve years old, and at the same time improved teacher compensation. As the Minister of Justice and Clemency from 1907 to 1909 (a post he would fill again from 1914 to 1916), he instituted the Consiglio superior della magistratura (Supreme Judicial Council) and the legal statute for state employees. As Minister of the Interior from 1916 to 1917, he opposed the drastic provisions against the workers protests that others were seeking from him. He was the Prime Minister during the most difficult period of the war, from October 1917

until the conclusion on the Paris Peace Conference in June 1919. In 1924, struck by the news of the Matteotti incident, he moved to the opposition, denouncing the methods of the Fascists, which up until that point, he had supported. In August 1925, following the violent acts that took place during the administrative elections, he resigned his position as a member of parliament. He returned to politics only after the liberation of Rome, participating in the constitutional assembly under the banner of the Partito Liberale Italiano (Italian Liberal Party).

### Alberto Orsi

(b. 1867, Leghorn, d. 1935, Castelnuovo di Magra)

Journalist, novelist, comedy writer, scientific writer, and cinema director. A member of a noble family, he graduated with a degree in medicine and had his journalistic debut in 1890 in Genoese newspapers. Then he became an editor of the Roman paper, *Capitan Fracassa* then of the *Corriere Toscano* (*Tuscan Courier*), based out of Livorno, where he served as the director. Then he moved to the *Il Messaggero* (*The Messenger*) in Rome and *Il Resto del Carlino* (*The Rest of the Change*) in Bologna. His narrative works are divided into two categories: adventure novels for children—often with technological elements that today could be classified as science-fiction—and romantic novels for adults. His essay writing often took up the themes of his romantic novels, and his scientific writings focused almost exclusively on the field of sexology, touching on themes like desire, chastity, and modesty, which at the time were considered extremely licentious. Between 1908 and 1912, he wrote comedies that were performed by various national companies, but from 1919 onward, he dedicated himself to the cinema, founding the Filmissima production house in Rome. With this company, he made three films based on his own stories and screenplays: *Le ali* (*Wings*) and *Il capolavoro* (*The Masterpiece*) in 1919 and *La collana del Milione* (*The Million-Dollar Necklace*) in 1920.

### Giovanni Papini

(b. 1881, d. 1956, Florence)

Writer, critic, and philosopher. Of humble origins, he continued his studies on his own after having obtained his primary school teaching certificate,

constantly mixing together philosophical readings, in-depth literary, and artistic analyses. His reflections on politics were continuous, even if that meant they were in continuous evolution: he started with Stirner's anarchism, then, in the early 1900s, moved toward secular, antidemocratic nationalism before following it under the banner of clericalism in the 1920s, then, at the beginning of the 1930s, he fully adhered to Fascism, before finally, in the postwar, moving toward humanist Christianity. In the early 1910s, his role as a cultural organizer was very important. He founded and directed literary journals, which were almost always motivated by avant-garde aims. In 1903, with Giuseppe Prezzolini, he founded *Il Leonardo* in Florence, a philosophical journal that aimed to bring the pragmatism of William James, the New Thought of Prentice Mulford, and the thinking of Henri Bergson to Italy. In 1908, he also founded *La Voce (The Voice)* with Prezzolini, which continued the avant-garde spirit of the preceding journal, but was more open to political and literary thought. In 1911, in collaboration with Giovanni Amendola, he started *L'Anima (The Soul)*, a journal of spiritualist philosophy that sought to unify philosophical concepts of voluntarism and theosophy in a single system of thought. Influenced by the French avant-garde, especially Guillaume Apollinaire, he launched, with Ardengo Soffici, in 1913 Florence, *Lacerba*, a political periodical that sought non-dogmatic open-mindedness in the direction of the Futurist experience. Later, in 1919, he founded the bilingual journal *La vraie Italie (The Real Italy)*, which was open to new metaphysical thought in the visual arts. In the first decade of the 1900s, he was intensely dedicated to his work as a writer of narrative, which was manifested in three collections of philosophical novellas: *Il tragico quotidiano (The Tragic Everyday)* in 1906, *Il pilota cieco (The Blind Pilot)* in 1907, and *Parole e sangue (Blood and Words)* in 1912. Starting in 1903, he focused on philosophy, gathering together in 1906 a series known as the *Il crepuscolo dei filosofi (The Twilight of the Philosophers)*, which was based on series of conferences held at the University of Florence. His work as a translator and editor of anthologies brought together the thought of those whom he held to be the only worthy representatives of modern thinking, William James, whom he was an esteemed correspondent, and Henri Bergson. His work as an essayist and editor extended through his entire life. In 1919, he had a spiritual crisis, which led him to focus intensely on religious subjects, aligning himself unhesitatingly with Florentine Catholic circles. In this period, he contributed to the Florentine monthly *Il Frontespizio (The Frontispiece)* and founded a journal on Renaissance Studies, *La Rinascita (The Rebirth)*. During this period, he also wrote the screenplay *Santa Caterina da Siena (St. Catherine of Siena)*, a film that was supposed to be directed by Duvivier,

but was never made. In 1937, along with Alfredo Oriani and Lucio d'Ambra, he was named as a member of the Reale Accademico d'Italia (Royal Italian Academy).

### **Mariano Luigi Patrizi**

(b. 1866, Recanati, d. 1935, Bologna)

Doctor, physiologist, and psychologist. After receiving his medical degree in Rome, studying under Jakob Moleschott, he was a special assistant in Angelo Mosso's physiology laboratory in Turin. He was among the major Italian pioneers of ergographic techniques, which measure the work done by muscles, as well as applied psychology and psycho-physiology. Much of his research focused on the relationship between brain activity and muscle movements. After teaching at the universities in Ferrara and Sassari, he transferred to Modena to become a Professor of Physiology, where in 1889 he began a laboratory of psychology applied to work. In 1911, he inherited prestigious title of Chair of Criminal Anthropology, which had been held by Cesare Lombroso. In Turin, he insisted on the need to integrate the results of Lombroso's research with an accurate and systematic analysis of the psyche. In 1914, he returned to the University of Modena, where he remained until moving to the University of Bologna in 1924. Holding a deep belief that psychology was rooted in a person's physiognomy, he oriented anthropology and forensic medicine toward physiological and experimental studies. During the First World War, he and Agostino Gemelli coordinated a psycho-attitudinal screening process for aspiring aviators. With solidly humanistic background, he also explored the psychology of artistic creation and genius, particularly in his 1916 *Nuovi saggi di estetica e di scienza* (*New Essays on Aesthetics and Science*).

### **Pier Maria Rosso di San Secondo**

(b. 1887, Caltanissetta, d. 1956, Lido di Camaiore)

Although he earned a degree in jurisprudence in Rome, he had been so interested in literature at the university, particularly in theatrical writing, that he introduced himself to Luigi Pirandello. Pirandello, who was still an unknown writer, would become his guide and *maestro*. He made



his theatrical debut in 1908 with *Madre (Mother)*, which was produced in Milan by the company of noted Sicilian character actor, Angelo Musco. In this same period, he began working in publishing, where started out with the theatre journal *Lirica (Poetry)* in Milan. His work reached maturity, however, only in 1914 with the novella *Gli occhi della signora Liesbeth (The Eyes of Madame Liesbeth)*, which was published in 1914 in the Florentine literary journal *Nuova Antologia (New Anthology)*. This was more or less simultaneous with the publication of the volume *Elegie a Maryke (Elegies to Maryke)*—which the important literary critic Antonio Borgese liked very much—and with the beginning of his contributions to *L'Idea Nazionale (The National Opinion)* in Rome, a daily paper that he worked for until 1918. In 1916, after being introduced by Giuseppe Antonio Borgese to the Milanese publishing house Treves, he created a number of works published in series. What motivated him was a strong sense of the grotesque, a feeling that for him was always suspended between surreal humour and bitter disillusion. Although already present in the 1916 novellas of *Ponentino (Westerly Breeze)*, this state of mind became all the more intense after the war, coming through in a 1919 collection of short stories *Palamede, Remigia ed io (Palamedes, Remigia, and I)*, *Io commemoro Loletta (I Commemorate Loletta)*, and in the short story 'La mia esistenza d'acquario' ('My Life in Fish Tank') as well as in his 1917 novel, *La fuga (The Escape)*, and the 1918 novel, *La morsa (The Grip)*. Even his most famous play *Marionette che passione! (Puppets, What Passion!)*, which was produced in March 1918 at the Manzoni Theatre in Milan thanks to Pirandello, should be read in this light. In the 1920s and 1930s, his writing became less incisive, gradually losing its substance, as he continued in the same subject matter and style. Before *Vita, teatro di vetro (Life, Glass Theatre)*, he dedicated his novella *Pur che non si parli (So As Not to Speak)* to the cinema, which was published in January of 1918 in the Roman *In Penombra (In the Shadows)*.

### Mario Ponzo

(b. 1882, Turin, d. 1960, Rome)

While studying medicine in Turin, he had the opportunity to frequent the experimental psychology laboratory directed by Friedrich Kiesow, at the University of Turin, and then to become his teacher's friend and colleague. After graduating in 1906, he became teaching experimental psychology in Turin in 1911. Although he carried his research in the area of associationist

psychology, on many occasions he crossed over into the cinema, which he studied both from a psychological and a socio-educational point of view. In 1931, he won a professorship at the University of Rome—a position that was previously held by Sante De Sanctis. After the Second World War, he sought to have an Italian section within the Society of Filmology. The centre, which operated out of the Institute of Psychology at the University of the Rome, calls attention to the presumed Italian dominance in applying psychological research to film. In 1952, he reached the mandatory retirement age, but he continued to teach. In 1958, he received the title of Professor Emeritus.

**g. pr. [Giuseppe Prezzolini]**

(b. 1882, Perugia, d. 1982, Lugano)

Writer and journalist. A self-taught intellectual, he actively participated in the Italian cultural debates of the early 1900s, gradually aligning himself with pragmatism, nationalism, the idealism of Benedetto Croce, Syndicalism, and Catholic modernism. With his friend Giovanni Papini, he founded the Florentine journal *Il Leonardo* in 1903, and *La Voce* (*The Voice*) in 1908, which would be one of the most important Italian cultural periodicals of the twentieth-century. When Italy entered the First World War, he enlisted as a volunteer, and eventually became a captain. He was connected with the Right, but he was split with regards to fascism. Starting in the second half of the 1920s, he spent more and more time in the United States, finally becoming an American citizen in 1940—all while maintaining strong ties to his native land. In 1955, he returned to Italy where he contributed to the daily newspapers *La Nazione* (*The Nation*) in Florence and *Il Resto del Carlino* (*The Rest of the Change*) in Bologna. Starting in 1950, he was among the primary contributors to the journal *Il Borghese* (*The Bourgeois*) in Rome. He died in 1982 in Lugano, where he had relocated in 1968.

**Saverio Procida**

(b. 1867, Amantea, d. ?)

Journalist and writer, he worked primarily at newspapers in Naples. He began his career in 1890 with *Fortunio* in Naples, a literary journal that he founded. That same year, though, he also worked at *Il Pungolo* (*The Cattle*

*Prod*) in Naples, where he was first the news editor, and then, starting in 1894, a theatre critic. He remained there until 1911, but from 1900 until 1903, he also contributed to the Roman *Cronache musicali illustrate* (*The Chronicle of Illustrated Musicals*). In 1913, he moved to another Neapolitan newspaper, *Il Giorno* (*The Day*), still as a theatre critic. He left it, however, the following year to move to its competitor *Il Mattino* (*The Morning*), which later became the *Corriere di Napoli* (*The Courier of Naples*), where he remained to become both the literary critic and the director in 1914. From 1918 until 1928, he was the theatre critic for *Mezzogiorno* (*The South*) in Naples. In 1929, he assumed the same role at *Roma*, another very important daily paper in Naples. He was father of the journalist and musician Antonio Procida (Josquin). In 1916, he contributed to Neapolitan *L'Arte Muta* (*The Silent Art*) with various articles about cinema.

### Ernesto Quadrone

(B. 1887, Mondovì, d. ?)

Journalist and writer. He began his career in 1919 as the editor at the Turin's newspaper *La Gazzetta del popolo* (*The People's Gazette*), before moving in 1924 to the rival newspaper *La Stampa* (*The Press*). He then became director of *Paese Sportivo* (*Athletic Nation*). He wrote stories and accounts set in Africa. Due his knowledge of the continent, during the 1930s he worked with Carl Theodore Dreyer for a never-realized movie with an African location. He also worked with the well-known Almirante-Rissone-Tofano Theatre Company, which staged his comedy *La casa dei tordi* (*The House of Simpletons*).

### Corrado Ricci

(b. 1858, Ravenna, d. 1934, Rome)

Man of letters, arts writer, and cultural organizer. He graduated with a law degree, and studied literature with the poet Giosuè Carducci. He began to dedicate himself to art history starting in the second half of the 1870s. In 1887, he was the first in the world to dedicate a complete study to *L'Arte dei bambini* (*Children's Art*), based on his work of collecting children's drawings. In 1896, he wrote about the use of the magic lantern in the artistic education

of children. By 1906, he was already the head of the important Musei e Gallerie del Regno (Museums and Galleries of the Kingdom) and was named General Director of the Antichità e Belle Arti del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione (Antiquities and Fine Arts Division of the Ministry of Public Education), a role that he would occupy until 1919. In addition to putting motion great excavation and cataloguing projects into motion, he also used photography as a way of documenting and promoting the country's cultural discoveries. He had many publications focused on the country's artistic treasures, eventually becoming President of the Istituto Nazionale di Archeologia e Belle Arti (National Institute of Archaeology and Fine Arts). Decorated with many high honours, he was he was named Senator of the Kingdom in 1923, at the beginning of the fascist period.

### Pasquale Rossi

(b. 1867, Cosenza, d. 1905 Tossano)

Doctor and scholar of social sciences. Together with Scipio Sighele, he was the most authoritative Italian scholar of collective psychology. His scientific reflections contained traces of loosely applied positivism, interwoven with a dedicated, socialist political engagement. Some of his most important works—which had already gained international recognition—include: *L'animo della folla* (*The Mind of the Crowd*) in 1898, *Psicologia collettiva. Studi e ricerche* (*Collective Psychology: Studies and Research*) in 1899, *Psicologia collettiva morbosa* (*Pathological Collective Psychology*) in 1901, and *Sociologia e psicologia collettiva* (*Sociology and Collective Psychology*) in 1909.

### Nino Salvaneschi

(b. 1886, Pavia, d. 1968, Turin)

Journalist, short story writer, lecturer, and screenwriter. Beginning in the early years of the twentieth-century, he contributed fiction works and articles to a variety of daily newspapers: including *La Tribuna* (*The Tribune*) in Rome, *La Gazzetta del popolo* (*The People's Gazette*) in Turin, *Il Resto del Carlino* (*The Rest of the Change*) in Bologna, *Corriere della sera* (*Evening Courier*) in Milan, and *La Sera* (*The Evening*) in Milan. For this last publication, he also worked as the art critic. At the same time, he also contributed

to various journals, from *La Lettura* (*Literature*), a Milanese paper connected to the *Corriere della Sera*, to the more specialized journals, such as *La Rivista mensile del Touring Club Italiano* (*The Monthly Journal of the Italian Touring Club*) and *L'Aviazione* (*Aviation*) in Rome. He also was the founder and director of other journals, such as the Milanese art periodical active up until 1918, *Bianco e Nero* (*White and Black*) and *L'Époque Nouvelle* (*The New Age*), based in Brussels, from 1921–1926. For the cinema, he wrote the scripts of four movies: *L'ombra misteriosa* (*The Mysterious Shadow*) and *Il sogno di Rirette* (*Rirette's Dream*), which were produced by the Milanese production house Astra Film in 1915; *Il figlioccio di Rirette* (*Rirette's Godson*) produced by Milano Films in 1916; and *La donna che aveva troppo cuore* (*The Woman with Too Much Heart*), which was produced by the Turin-based production house, Italo-Egiziana Film, in 1917. After going blind in 1923, he remained active primarily in the area of literary production.

## Matilde Serao

(b. 1856, Patrasso, d. 1927, Naples)

Journalist and writer. In 1860, she moved with her family to Naples, where her father was from. After getting her teaching diploma, she worked for three years at the *Telegrafi dello Stato* (State Telegraph Service). Her first literary works were written in the style of *bozzettismo* and published in 1877 in the *Giornale di Napoli* (*Newspaper of Naples*). The following year, as her collaborations with Neapolitan newspapers expanded to include *Il Piccolo* (*The Small Format*) e *Il Corriere del Mattino* (*The Morning Courier*), she began to write her first collections of short stories under the pseudonym, Tuffolina. Between the end of the 1870s and the beginning of the 1880s, she published in numerous other papers, including the *Gazzetta letteraria piemontese* (*Literary Gazette of the Piedmont*) based in Turin, *La Farfalla* in Milan, and *Roma Capitale* (*Rome Capital City*). In 1882, she moved to Rome, where she began to collaborate under the pseudonym Gibus for the city's primary newspapers, *Nuova Antologia* (*New Anthology*), *Domenica Letteraria* (*Literary Sunday*), *Fanfulla della Domenica* (*Sunday Fanfulla*), *Cronaca Bizantina* (*Byzantine News*), and *Capitan Fracassa*, where she became the first woman in Italy to secure the role of editor. In 1885, she married the Neapolitan journalist Edoardo Scarfoglio, with which she founded the *Il corriere di Roma* (*The Courier of Rome*). The short-lived paper was succeeded in 1887 by *Il Corriere di Napoli* (*The Courier of Naples*) thanks to a Greek sponsor. In 1892, she and her

husband founded *Il Mattino* (*The Morning*) in Naples. In 1904, separated from her husband, she founded *Il Giorno* (*The Day*) on her own. The Naples-based daily ended up being in fierce competition with the paper of her ex-husband. Central to all of these newspapers was the worldly and modern column, ‘*Ape, mosconi, vespe*’ (‘Bees, Flies, and Wasps’), an innovative, regularly updated, ‘confidential’ section intended for female readers that Serao herself wrote under the penname Gibus. In 1882, she published her novel, *Fantasia* (*Fantasy*), and began to intensify her output, diving it between novels, publishing over 40 by the end of her career, socially committed works, such as the 1884 *Il ventre di Napoli* (*The Belly of Naples*), and political works, including *Erviva la guerra* (*Hurrah for the War*) in 1912 and *Parla una donna. Diario femminile di guerra* (*A Woman Speaks: A Woman’s War Diary*) in 1916. In 1926, the year of her death, she was a candidate for the Nobel Prize, which went to another Italian instead, the Sardinian writer, Grazia Deledda.

## Emilio Scaglione

(b. 1891, Montenero, d. 1945, Naples)

Journalist. He was the editor of *Il Mattino* (*The Morning*) in Naples, *L’Ora* (*Right Now*) in Palermo, *Il Mezzogiorno* (*The South*) in Naples, and the Roman *Il Mondo* (*The World*), where he curated the page on Naples. Later, he moved to *Roma*, which was based out of Naples, and where he was director throughout the 1940s. During this period, he also wrote many literary and artistic pieces, critical reviews, and stories printed in other publications: from the daily newspapers, such as *La Tribuna* (*The Tribune*) in Rome and *La Gazzetta del popolo* (*The People’s Gazette*) in Turin, to the periodicals, including the Roman publications *Vita Letteraria* (*Literary Life*) and *Novella*. His political activities were also far-reaching. Initially, he was fascinated by nationalism: in 1913, he published a broad anthology of journalistic and literary writings dedicated the Italo-Turkish War (1911–1912), which he described as the ‘Italian Spring’, but as he matured, he developed a different political consciousness. In 1943, he was the representative of the left-wing of the Partito d’Azione (The Party of Action). After the liberation of Naples and at the wishes of the Allied Command, he became the co-director of *Il Risorgimento*, the only daily paper published in Naples in the period immediately following the war. He abandoned this one year later for *L’Azione* (*The Action*), the political organ of the southern branch of the Partito d’Azione.

## Roberto Tanfani

(b.?, d.?)

Author of novels and adventure stories for children. His works, concentrated in the last decade of the nineteenth century often featured colonial or western settings. Among his published books: *Alla ricerca del capitano Wolloston* (*Searching for Captain Wolloston*) in 1889 *Il giaguaro silenzioso* (*The Silent Jaguar*) in 1890, *I figli del deserto. Romanzo d'avventure fra le pelli-rosse* (*The Sons of the Desert: A Novel of Adventures among the Redskins*) in 1891, *Crociera del Condor* (*The Voyage of the Condor*) in 1894, *Il forte delle gazzelle. Racconto* (*The Fort of the Gazelles: A Story*) in 1900. In 1920, he wrote the historical novel *Monte Savello*.

## Emanuele Toddi [Pietro Silvio Rivetta]

(b. 1886, d. 1952, Rome)

Journalist, illustrator, film director, author of alternative textbooks for the study of languages, math, diplomacy, and Eastern philosophy. His first article was published in 1906 in the Roman daily *La Tribuna* (*The Tribune*) and by 1914, he was at the *Epoca* (*Era*). Beginning in 1914, he also began contributing to *Noi e il mondo* (*Us and the World*) and the *Tribuna Illustrata* (*The Illustrated Tribune*). In this final publication, he created articles in the form of collages (made up of a miscellany of photos, maps, drawings, and text), which he took on themes related to the First World War. For *Noi e il mondo*, he primarily wrote articles on scientific and geo-political themes of varied erudition. In 1920, he became the director of *La Tribuna* where he remained until 1927 when he moved to the *Il Tevere* (*The Tiber*) in Rome. In 1929, still in Rome, he became the director of *Il Travaso delle idee* (*The Outpouring of Ideas*). Later, he contributed to *Il popolo di Roma* (*The People of Rome*). A polyglot (he spoke fourteen languages including Japanese and Chinese) and a member of prestigious international phonetics societies, he was assigned to the Embassy in Tokyo in 1910, becoming its consul in 1926. He then obtained professorships in Chinese and Japanese at the Istituto Orientale (Oriental Institute) of Naples. His relationship with the cinema began in July 1916 when he made the first sketches advertising Lucio d'Ambra's *Il Re, le Torri, gli Alfieri* (*The King, the Towers, the Standard Bearer*), and wrote some reviews for *Apollon*. In August of that same year, he announced his imminent move to directing, but this only happened in 1920 when he

began work at Medusa. In the meantime, he was a screenwriter and a set designer. Between 1922 and 1923, he directed eleven films, all comedies, and for the most part ridiculous, under his own production house, Toddi-Selecta. At the Milan Exhibition in 1939, he was among the guests to witness the first Italian television display. Passionate about Eastern philosophy, in the postwar period, he dedicated himself to spreading the art of Zen in Italy.

### Federigo Tozzi

(b. 1883, Siena, d. 1920, Rome)

Narrative writer. Hired by the Italian railroad system, he worked there in 1907 and 1908, first in Pontedera (Pisa) and then in Florence. The experience gave rise to a promising literary diary, *Ricordi di un impiegato (Memories of a Worker)*, which remained unpublished until 1927. In 1908, he returned to Siena, establishing himself in a farm in Castagneto. There, he finally dedicated his career to literary issues (especially to the study of religious narrative from the thirteenth and fourteenth-centuries), and in 1913, he founded with Domenico Giuliotti the bi-weekly, Catholic publication with a national-imperialist perspective, entitled *La Torre (The Tower)* and based out of Siena. The publication was characterized by an uneasy mixture of a defence of tradition and a love for political modernity. In the same period, he also wrote his first novel, the innovative *Con gli occhi chiusi (With Eyes Closed)*, which remained unpublished for a long time. Then, with the proceeds of an inheritance from his father, he moved to Rome in 1914, searching for additional outlets for his literary career. When the war broke out, he enlisted as a volunteer in the Red Cross, but since he was ineligible for the war as an epileptic, he worked at the press office. Thanks to the intercession of the poet and writer Marino Moretti, who worked with him at the office, Milanese publishing house Treves, he published the expressionist prose *Bestie (Beasts)* in 1917, which was well-received by critics, who, however, categorized them as examples of late-impressionist *bozzettismo*. In 1918, he began to work for the *Messaggero della Domenica (The Sunday Messenger)* in Rome, where he published numerous essays. In that period, he wrote his greatest novel, *Il Podere (The Homestead)*, which came out practically posthumously (its publication in *Noi e il Mondo* began one month before his death, alongside his only theatrical work, the 1919 drama *L'incalco (The Imprinting)* and the 1920 novel *Gli Egoisti (The Selfish Ones)*). Before dying of pneumonia, he was able to have *Con gli occhi chiusi (With Closed Eyes)*



and two collections of novellas *Giovani* (*Young People*) and *L'amore* (*Love*) published in 1919 and 1920, respectively. The first collection, which includes 'Una morte cinematografica' ('A Cinematic Death'), which was originally published in 1918, in the very refined cinematic and literary journal *In Penombra* (*In the Shadows*), through the intervention of his colleague at the *Messaggero della Domenica*, Luigi Pirandello. (Incidentally, *In Penombra* was directed by the journalist Tommaso Monicelli, the father of the director, Mario). It was Giuseppe Antonio Borgese who brought him into the Italian literary canon three years after his death, with the 1923 essay, *Tempo di edificare* (*Time to Build*). Initially categorized as part of *crepuscolarismo*, a movement which in reality, he firmly opposed since he worked at *La Torre*, he is today considered, along with Pirandello and Rosso di San Secondo, one of the greatest Italian expressionist writers of the twentieth century.

### Pio Vanzì

(b. 1884, Florence, d. 1957, Palermo)

Journalist, writer, comedy writer, screenwriter, and cinema director. In the 1910s, he distinguished himself as the editor of important Roman periodicals, including the satirical *Il travaso delle idee* (*The Outpouring of Ideas*) (which he directed from 1914 until 1921), and the weekly *Tribuna illustrata* (*Illustrated Tribune*) and monthly *Noi e il mondo* (*Us and the World*) (These last two were both connected to the Roman daily newspaper, *La Tribuna* (*The Tribune*)). At the same time, he got involved in the cinema, taking on roles first as a screenwriter for the 1919 film *I topi grigi* (*The Grey Mice*), then as a director for *La Labbra e il cuore* (*The Lips and the Heart*) in 1919 and *La Gola* (*Gluttony*) in 1920. He also tried his hand at musical criticism for *Patatrac* in 1917. With the crisis of Italian cinema, from 1921 onward, he returned to journalism, contributing to the Roman newspapers *Il Paese* (*The Nation*), *Il Sereno* (*Serenity*), and *Epoca* (*Era*), the last two of which were closed in 1925 because of fascism.

### Giuseppe Vidoni

(b. 1884, S. Daniele del Friuli, d. 1951, Genoa)

Psychiatrist, author of several studies on psychiatry, the epidemiology of psychiatric disorders, demography, public health, and criminology. Son of

the famous psychiatrist Giacomo Vidoni, he began his career as a physician at the psychiatric hospital in Treviso before conducting the majority of his work in Genoa. He was the co-director of the principle lab focused on criminal anthropology and later became head of the Istituto Biotipologico (Epidemiological Institute) at that same university (where he was also the professor in charge of demography and the biology of race). In the 1930s, he became director of the Ufficio d'Igiene e Medicina Sociale (Department of Sanitation and Public Health) for the province of Genoa, where he also ran a school for children with psychological disorders. His won an award from the prestigious Accademia dei Lincei for his research on professional aptitudes of young people.

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