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SOMMARIO

Material Culture

L'attenzione alla dimensione della cultura materiale offre un utile terreno comune tra arti performative, musicali, cinematografiche e mediali. Lo studio delle «cose» sembra in grado di offrire una via di accesso privilegiata alla comprensione delle pratiche culturali anche nell'epoca della transizione digitale. Si tratta, cioè, di comprendere gli aspetti immateriali della cultura – i valori, l'immaginario, la memoria, i saperi, i codici con cui una cultura si esprime – attraverso e a partire dai suoi aspetti materiali, dagli oggetti nei loro rapporti con i soggetti. Per quanto lo studio della cultura materiale rappresenti una costante dell'antropologia, solo negli ultimi anni, la ricerca intorno ai media e, in senso lato, alle culture pop ha iniziato a indagare la materialità come fattore costitutivo di più complesse pratiche culturali, rilevando, ad esempio, processi di «singolarizzazione» e «densificazione» delle merci nel loro rapporto con i soggetti umani.

Le diverse discipline che compongono la macroarea 10/PEMM-01 stanno dunque iniziando ad adottare tale prospettiva anche in relazione ai propri oggetti di studio privilegiati. Gli studi sul cinema, ad esempio, a partire dalla recente revisione e riconfigurazione dei film studies in funzione di una New Cinema History hanno dimostrato un sempre maggiore interesse nei confronti delle pratiche produttive, distributive, esperienziali, sociologiche e antropologiche legate al medium, anche in relazione alla produzione di memorabilia, manifesti, ecc.

Tale prospettiva, d'altra parte, è perfettamente in linea con lo sviluppo di una scienza musicologica pienamente «culturale» e che superi le tradizionali gerarchie valoriali e funzionali, come è nelle ambizioni dell'etnomusicologia contemporanea. Lo studio delle pratiche musicali muove anche dalla materialità degli oggetti sonori, incorporando l'organologia ed estendendone i confini nella direzione della comprensione dei nuovi strumenti e delle nuove creatività musicali e degli aspetti materiali che riguardano le tecnologie di riproduzione del suono.

Un rinnovo di interesse si registra inoltre nell'ambito degli studi teatrali, presso i quali la cultura materiale è oggi indagata metodologicamente in chiave antropologica e storiografica. L'attenzione alle condizioni materiali del teatro, già presente nella storiografia moderna di estrazione settecentesca, conosce infatti dal secondo Novecento un'inedita riscoperta. In particolar modo l'approccio teorico e pratico offerto dall'antropologia teatrale ha inaugurato una via di indagine "interna" alla messa in scena e al lavoro dell'attore che ha portato sempre più ad assumere anche storicamente l'evento teatrale come "oggetto culturale". Proseguendo lungo questa linea, l'analisi della cultura materiale del teatro conosce oggi

nuova espansione con riferimento anche alla produzione editoriale e digitale del teatro e ai diversi mezzi entro cui esso si esprime.

La ludicità, da tempo considerata una delle dimensioni emergenti di maggior interesse nello studio dei media, è inevitabilmente legata alle proprie manifestazioni materiali. Progetti europei come il Digital Ludeme Project (finanziato tramite ERC all'Università di Maastricht) hanno dimostrato l'importanza di studiare gli oggetti utilizzati per giocare al fine di ricostruire la storia e la rilevanza di giochi tradizionali e commerciali. Inoltre, la disciplina dei game studies sempre più spesso affianca allo studio dei videogiochi come oggetti informatici, analisi legate alla dimensione paratestuale, e dunque materiale, del medium.

In maniera trasversale ai diversi percorsi di ricerca, lo studio degli «oggetti domestici» – dai giochi ai memorabilia, ai dischi, ai libri – consente di riflettere sulle dinamiche della cultura materiale anche in relazione alle modalità di percezione, ricezione e rappresentazione, mettendo in relazione la cultura materiale con la costruzione delle identità sociali e politiche e con la definizione di standard estetici.

Questo dossier prende le mosse dal progetto *Spirits In The Material World. Percorsi di cultura materiale nella popular culture*, realizzato all'interno del Grant For Internationalization 2021-2023 e finanziato dall'Università di Torino. Il progetto ha promosso, attraverso numerosi incontri, seminari e convegni, lo sviluppo di collaborazioni internazionali fra diverse Università europee, tra cui l'Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour (partner UNITA), e ha indagato la rilevanza e i metodi di studio della cultura materiale nella popular culture contemporanea. Alcuni degli interventi proposti da relatori e relatrici in occasione di seminari e giornate di studio sono ora qui raccolti in questo dossier, unitamente ad altri contributi proposti da colleghe e colleghi di Università italiane. Le curatrici del numero desiderano ringraziare i membri del gruppo di ricerca Giulia Carluccio, Riccardo Fassone, Giovanna Maina, Leonardo Mancini, Ilario Meandri, Jacopo Tomatis e la PI internazionale Laurence Roussillon-Constanty. Desiderano inoltre ringraziare tutti i colleghi e le colleghe che hanno contribuito alla realizzazione di incontri e occasioni di scambio.

Giulia Muggeo, Ekaterina Ganskaya

RESEARCHING IN CIRCLES:
MATERIAL CULTURE, HISTORY AND METHODOLOGY

Leonie Hannan

In this essay, I want to tell a story backwards. First, I will share some examples of my recent work on the eighteenth-century home as a site of knowledge-making and then I will turn to a decade-old project concerned with methodologies for material culture research. I conducted the recent research alone and using primarily textual forms of evidence to uncover material practices and ways of knowing. The earlier project was collaborative and aimed at disrupting traditional, efficient and – often – teleological modes of historical enquiry by prioritising objects (as opposed to texts) and testing non-linear research practices.

The threads of the collaborative project are recognisable in the findings of the solo endeavour. For example, my book exhibits the qualities of material culture research in that it is a compilation of examples that don't really fit clean narratives and which jostle messily together, disrupting ingrained assumptions about where the main action takes place and the identity of its protagonists.[1] Like my own research and writing over these last ten years, this essay will loop back on itself. This is an attempt to show the value of returning to themes and questions and also to show how a material culture lens promotes a generative, non-linear mode.

As a social historian, I am interested in what non-elite people are doing and experiencing in their lives several centuries ago. Traditionally, historians have paid a lot of attention to rich people, important people, royalty and nobility. Historians have also typically looked to the written record to understand the past. We are trained to think through words, through text. Class, race and gender all play their parts in deciding which textual records are saved and carefully archived for the future. Countless documents, written in pen and ink, were cast into the fireplace shortly after they were written. Others were destroyed later to keep the secrets they told or simply because they were considered unimportant, not worth saving. Many people did not leave any kind of written record at all. A couple of centuries ago, many people could not read or write or lived busy working lives that left them little time for such activities. As a cultural historian I work on the way these 'ordinary' people engaged with ideas – whether they were ideas about literature, art or nature. I look inside the walls of the home to investigate the way they engaged with and contributed to popular and intellectual culture. As might be expected, historians primarily categorise themselves temporally and my

1 Leonie Hannan, *A Culture of Curiosity: Science in the eighteenth-century home* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023).

period of study is the 'early modern', more specifically any time between 1660 and 1830. In this sense, my interpretations come from another, rather alien place: a long time ago.

Now, there is something to be said here about the terms we use to describe popular engagement with ideas. I use the word 'intellectual' when discussing the cultural activities of unknown individuals precisely because it is a word usually reserved for the privileged. I do not think that the cultural work of non-elite people should be categorised differently, as something lesser. In many ways my work strives to be an intellectual history from below. In the 1970s, historians started to work on 'history from below' in the sense that they took the perspective of the working man or woman, the so-called 'ordinary' person.[2] They often turned their attention to those who were marginalised by society. However, those historians concerned with questions of culture and knowledge, have stuck longer to the idea that important culture and important knowledge was produced by the top of society, it came from scholarly institutions, great men of letters, *literati* or *savants*. Now, none of this is news to scholars of media and popular culture, or to anthropologists or scholars of cultural studies and many other disciplines besides. In these fields, a focus on the everyday, the ephemeral and the intangible is central. Nonetheless, in speaking across such disciplinary boundaries there is potential for insight and, what follows, is an attempt to use historical examples to unpack questions of mutual interest, including material culture, gender, power and the domestic.

The Significance of Domestic Space

First, why the home? The early modern home was a complex space, through which people, things, materials and knowledge circulated. Mistresses, masters and servants exercised a wide range of technical competencies and material literacies in activities that were necessary, sociable and exploratory in nature. In many ways, when we compare this environment to a modern home – it seems strange. Gone are the technologies that can help reduce the labour of laundry, of cooking or cleaning. Largely absent are the shops that provide ready-made consumable goods. Instead, people made from raw ingredients most of the products of everyday life – from bread to ink. As such, the pre-modern home offers us a space populated with people and things that is driven by material practices and embodied experience, which generates multiple, diverse ways of knowing and understanding the world. The home has changed a great deal in the intervening centuries, but it remains an incredibly important space for the production of culture and social relations.

Thinking of the household as a networked and dynamic space casts a different light on the work of home. Far from being a discrete space set apart from the main action of

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2 History from below in an anglophone context was exemplified by the work of historians such as E. P. Thompson and Natalie Zemon Davis. See also Claire Langhamer, '"Who the hell are ordinary people?" Ordinariness as a category of historical analysis', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 28 (2018), pp. 175-95.

cultural life, the home framed people's engagements with other spheres and was a centre of activity in itself. Moreover, the household produced varied kinds of interrelated labour. Much as I am interested in blurring lines between concepts such as intellectual culture and popular culture; blurring the line between work and other kinds of activity also seems fruitful. Domestic work in particular has a bad reputation, it is highly gendered – considered to be women's work (today as well as historically) and it is often thought of as mindless or unskilled. None of these things are entirely true. Of course, the home produces much drudgery, of a narrow and difficult kind. But it also produces other kinds of work, knowledge and creativity too. So, part of what I want to do here is re-imagine domestic labour as something encompassing, porous and generative.

Bread-making, Star-gazing and Silkworm-breeding

One vital domestic commodity that demanded especially careful treatment was the starter or 'barm' used in the leavening of bread. This substance consisted of flour, water, bacteria and yeast. This example reveals the technical expertise of domestic knowledge and I became aware of it through the letters of Church of Ireland Bishop, Edward Synge (1691-1762). On 16 July 1751, he began a letter to his daughter, Alicia, with a detailed re-telling of his servant, Jane's method of creating, maintaining and using barm. He was interested in Jane's technique because, in his own words: 'her Bread is Excellent, and almost constantly so'.[3]

However, Synge struggled to describe in words, rather than showing in person, the instructions he had received. Only a few lines in and Synge broke off: 'For fear of writing wrong or imperfectly I stopp'd here, and sent for Jane. My caution was not amiss'.[4] Synge had the steps in the wrong order.[5] Putting tacit knowledge, learned by doing, onto the page was proving a challenge.

Synge also commented that the 'Best Barm is that which works out of the Vessels of Ale when drink is tunn'd [stored]'. Thus, bread-making made use of another aspect of home production – brewing, revealing the transfer of materials and knowledge from one to another. This note also points to the temporal connection between brewing and baking, the rhythm of brewing providing material for baking and indicates the complex overlapping timeframes for domestic tasks. Preparing and maintaining the barm was an iterative process, 'What she uses one day, she prepares constantly the day before' and it was responsive to the changing needs of the household: 'Her quantity is in proportion to the Bread intended'.[6]

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3 Marie-Louise Legg (ed.), *The Synge Letters: Bishop Edward Synge to his daughter Alicia, Roscommon to Dublin 1746-1752* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1996), p. 326. Synge to Daughter, Elphin, 16 Jul. 1751. Winters were spent in the city and away from the Roscommon estate where Jane baked her bread.

4 Legg, *Synge Letters*, pp. 325-6. Synge to Daughter, Elphin, 16 Jul. 1751.

5 Legg, *Synge Letters*, p. 326. Synge to Daughter, Elphin, 16 Jul. 1751.

6 Ibid.

Jane's decision-making was necessarily responsive to a wide range of factors – the demand for her bread, other tasks she had to do, the weather and conditions for fermentation, having the right equipment to hand. The barm harvested from the brewing process was not a uniform product, having 'had another conference with her on the Subject', Synge reported Jane's response: 'Indeed, My Lord, says she, I get Barm sometimes as red as a Fox, sometimes black, full of Hop-leaves, Bog-bane, Wormwood, Artichoak leaves, and a long &c. of other like ingredients.'[7] This list of ingredients offers a glimpse into the diverse material world of home production.

Now, clearly, Jane is making bread, not a cultural artefact. However, I find her example instructive as to our concerns with domestic space as generative, and creative. According to Synge, Jane described her use of barm as a 'doctrine and practice', highlighting both her belief in her own methods and their refinement through repetition. Throughout Synge's re-telling of her method, the challenge of putting the practice into words is ever-present. Moreover, the profoundly asymmetrical power relationship between Synge and his servant emerges, as Synge finds himself both reliant on her expertise and sceptical of her intellectual capacity to really 'know' of what she speaks.

So, through Bishop Synge and servant Jane's engagement with bread-making, we can see the unequal power relations that determine who can be credited with knowing things. We also see experience and authority derived from knowing through doing. Non-human actors make themselves felt in this story too, the yeast, the weather, the utensils.

My next example involves two young men, working as apprentices in Dublin in the mid-eighteenth century who were also keen astronomers: Robert Jackson (1748-93) and Thomas Chandlee (dates unknown). Apprentices were young people in a status of indentured labour while training in a particular trade. Only Jackson's letters survive, and he acted as an informal tutor to his friend Chandlee in matters of star-gazing. Jackson was apprentice to his father, the printer and publisher Isaac Jackson of Meath Street in Dublin and Thomas Chandlee was apprentice to a linen-draper a few streets away.[8] This pair were working hard to establish themselves and they lived in busy households with their master, his family, other apprentices and servants.

The letters reveal their detailed knowledge of astronomy and their ability to make calculations concerning the position of celestial bodies. They also cast light on networks of exchange facilitated by almanacs, magazines and newspapers in this period. Given his trade, Jackson had a particularly detailed grasp of the print market and good access to a wide range of these publications.

At home, Jackson was able to make himself a small study that he referred to as the 'Hygrometer closet' on account of its containing such an instrument.[9] He made resourceful

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7 Legg, *Synge Letters*, p. 331. Synge to daughter, Elphin, 23 Jul. 1751.

8 On Isaac and Robert Jackson's careers in printing, see Mary Pollard, *A dictionary of members of the Dublin book trade, 1550–1800* (London: Bibliographical Society, 2000), pp. 311-13; 314-15.

9 See, for example, Friends Historical Library Dublin (FHLD), Fennell, MSS Box 27, folder 1, letters 56 and 75; folder 3, letters 97, 99 and 110; a hygrometer is an instrument used for measuring the amount of humidity and water vapour in the atmosphere, in soil, or in confined spaces, see Mateus, 'Searching', p. 163.

use of domestic space, describing a method for making a meridian line using the shadow cast by a casement window on the floor of a room.[10] Another letter speaks to the chance sightings possible at home, as Jackson sighted Saturn as he was going upstairs on 3 December 1769.[11] On occasion, to gain an improved view of the 'Western side', Jackson leaned out of a 'back Garrett [attic] window', which he described as 'my best Uraniburg' in reference to the sixteenth-century Danish observatory of the same name.[12] One evening, Jackson enquired: 'Hast thou seen lucida lyra peeping late over the houses (not yet to be seen from the street but from a window) towards the N. East?'[13] This example shows that eighteenth-century investigators pushed the spatial and material affordances of their homes to accommodate enquiry.

Two intense years of apprenticeship and astronomy came to a close in 1769, when Jackson's indenture expired and he became a journeyman. This period of regular corresponding casts light on their incredible curiosity and determination. Despite instruments that lacked precision and a heavy daily workload, the depth of engagement was significant – their knowledge was considerable.

The final example builds on these themes of gender, material culture and cultures of knowledge. In the second half of the eighteenth century, an English postmistress embarked on breeding silkworms in her home and reported her findings to a learned society in the hope of a prize. She was not alone in this endeavour, as many women across Britain and Ireland attempted the same. At this time, centres of silk production were predominantly in the far East and also in Italy and France. In a European context, silkworm breeding was often done by women and as an adjunct to other domestic tasks. In London and Dublin there were neighbourhoods renowned for their silk-weaving, but the raw product had to be imported at considerable expense.

As Reverend Samuel Pullein commented to the Dublin Society in 1750, it was thought that: 'many thousand Spinsters of a more curious Nature, without the Expence of Wages' could become the workforce for this new silk manufacture and by doing so 'be of publick Good to their Country'.[14] Williams' letters reported in great detail how she managed her community of silkworms, tested different techniques for breeding and feeding them and observed the effects of her strategies on their production of silk. Here she describes the re-purposing of her domestic possessions to accommodate the silkworms:

> I keep them in a woman's large hat box, feed them every day at Ten o'clock; at Four in the afternoon, and Eleven at night; keeping them very clean. When I clean them I remove them as follows: In a Morning they are always upon the leaves, I take them out gently upon them,

10 FFHLD, Fennell, MSS Box 27, folder 2, letter 52; although in folder 3, letter 99: n.d., Jackson noted: 'But it's likely thou are not possessed of a room convenient to do it in. So I may spare my labour.'

11 FHLD, Fennell, MSS Box 27, folder 1, letter 31: Jackson to Chandlee, 3 Dec 1769.

12 FHLD, Fennell, MSS Box 27, folder 3, letter 85: Jackson to Chandlee, 3 May.

13 Ibid.; 'lucida lyra' most likely refers to 'Vega' – the brightest star in the northern constellation of Lyra.

14 Samuel Pullein, *Some hints intended to promote the culture of silkworms in Ireland* (Dublin, 1750), pp. 12, 15.

and when the box is cleaned, I lay them in, on the same leaves, with fresh ones over them, (with the dew on, if I can get them) and the fibre side of the leaves up: when they are all on the upper leaves, I remove the old ones; by this method a quantity of silk is saved, for, from the moment they are hatched, they move themselves by a silken web; the silk continually issuing from their mouths.[15]

When the weather turned cold, Williams took special measures to preserve her colony:

I put the papers with the Eggs, into a pidgeon-hole in a Cabinet, nearly opposite the fire. As soon as the frost set in, I covered the hole with paper several times double, to keep out the night air; the event answered my most sanguine wishes, they came according to expectation.[16]

She was proud of her achievements and boasted:

They are extremely strong, keep hatching every day, and are uncommonly large. I joke and tell all whom curiosity induces to see my little family, they shall be as big as bulls and cows.[17]

More than once, Williams referred to her colony as 'my little family', she inferred from their behaviours that her silkworms were 'innocent', 'satisfied', that they were in 'pain', she noted when she thought they seemed to 'play' and when they reacted with 'horror'. However, for every anthropomorphic suggestion there were many paragraphs of detailed observation and Williams made clear that she 'observed every minute circumstance', drawing on contemporary ideals of scientific practice to demonstrate rigour.[18] She was no doubt aware of her diminished credibility on the grounds of gender and social status as a working woman and was, therefore, at pains to demonstrate the validity of her observations by emphasising a meticulous approach. Ultimately, her success was rewarded and the society's officials bestowed a prize upon her.

Approaches to understanding a material world

Having explored some specific historical examples, I will reflect on the way interdisciplinary work on material culture has helped me to think differently about material practice in the historical past but also the practices we employ as scholars in the present. I'll do this by

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15 *Transactions of the Society, instituted at London, for the encouragement of arts, manufactures, and commerce*:, vol. 2 (1784), pp. 158-9.

16 *Transactions of the Society*, vol. 2 (1784), p. 156.

17 Ibid., p. 170.

18 Lorraine Daston and Elizabeth Lunbeck (eds), *Histories of Scientific Observation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 115.

introducing a project I led with Kate Smith ten years ago. Its insights stay with me, despite the fact that it did not lead to many traditional academic outcomes.

We decided to create a project which incorporated the analytical power of 'close looking' with a ritual of repetition and sustained attention to 'think through things' and we called it '100 Hours'.[19] This title referred to the 10 researchers who spent 10 hours each with a chosen museum object, accumulating collectively 100 hours of looking. The team of ten early career researchers came from many disciplines, including cultural geography, history of science and of art, literature and we also attracted a practising artist and a curator. The chosen objects were a ten-legged stool, dodo bones, a drawing in red chalk, Edison wax-cylinder tubes, a photograph album, a section of a meteorite, plaster models of Floraminifera, an oracular bust, lantern slides and weather map printing plates.

At intervals we came together as a group to discuss how our individual, repeated engagements with an object were going and to learn from senior specialists, again from a range of disciplines. One such session, ran by performance artists, initiated our group of researchers into a ritual – where we paid a given object our attention in an intense way.[20] This process moved people into a strange, playful and even uncomfortable space – but it served an important purpose. We became a bonded group who were incapable of *just looking* at an object and were, instead, bound to a more ritualised approach to object study. In this way, ten individuals collectively clocked up 100 hours of looking, considering and discussing their chosen objects. We aimed to document the researchers' thoughts and findings in real time and provide ourselves with a record of emerging ideas and also a method of tracing connections between individual reflections.

There were many lively outworkings from this first 100 Hours. Each of the researchers took this experience on to new ventures. The outcomes were difficult to capture and encapsulate in a traditional academic form. For years after we finished the project, Kate and I troubled over writing it up, we wrote and re-wrote, it was a slippery subject and we felt inconclusive, unsure even though we knew we had gained a great deal from this work. In the end, what we came to was a reflection on the importance of repetition and return in our engagement with the material world.[21] We wrote from our own positions as historians, but we hoped the ideas would land with other researchers and creative practitioners within the arts, humanities and social sciences. We drew on the work of literary scholars (Michael Riffaterre; Patricia Spacks); art historians (T. J. Clark and Jules Prown) and theorists (Bruno Latour, Graham Harman, Jane Bennett).

We argued that it is necessary for practitioners to do more than simply return to the objects of their study. Through repeated encounters we argued for cultivating a 'critical intimacy' with objects through developing a broad repertoire of methods to enrich and enliven

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19 https://ucl100hours.wordpress.com/ [accessed 29.02.24].

20 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6IV5rE-RIgk [accessed 14.03.24] and D. Graham Burnett, Catherine L. Hansen and Justin E. H. Smith (eds), *In Search of the Third Bird: Exemplary essays from the proceedings of ESTAR (SER), 2001-2021* (London: Strange Attractor Press, 2021).

21 Kate Smith and Leonie Hannan, 'Return and Repetition: Methods for material culture studies, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 48:1 (2017), pp. 43-59.

research practice over time. Rather than trying to 'read' objects, we thought that a closeness of observation and understanding could benefit our research. Nevertheless, opening a form of awareness and attention that allows for such encounters to occur remains problematic. Jane Bennett has written eloquently about the importance and challenges of developing 'a perceptual style open to the appearance of thing-power'.[22] In this light, we hoped to promote the benefits of developing knowledge of objects through *repeated* interactions, each of which allowing for a new lens to be actively applied and reflected upon in order that we might attend to the fullness of what is before us. By returning, the researcher has the opportunity to follow directions that, at first, seem obscure or tangential. Or, at least, to proceed with their investigation with enhanced critical insight around the assumptions they had held on first seeing the material in question. As I moved to work on the eighteenth-century home as a site of enquiry, I took these ideas with me. Whilst my research on the home remained very archival, I became attentive to a different repertoire of connection and meaning within that space and to ways of knowing that sit uneasily on the written page.

In the intervening years, methods of Reconstruction, Replication and Re-enactment (known for short as 'RRR') have become much more mainstream within my discipline.[23] Taking features of practice that had been on the margins of historical work (weekend battle re-enactments; makers and collectors) and placing them front and centre, some fields of study have really run with this material-focused approach. The history of science is a good example of this, with the Making and Knowing Project as a key example.[24]

It is possible that in our age of increasingly transformative digital technologies, virtual reality and AI that some part of us hankers for a return to the tactile and embodied. In a period of built-in obsolescence in many of our everyday consumable goods – we perhaps crave the ability to mend things once more. Post-pandemic, many remain affected by the prescriptions and prohibitions of that time. The Material Turn is now many years old, and yet it seems to be still with us and maybe there is something instructive in that. So, in summary, this essay aims to persuade its reader of the value of attending to the material in the very many different ways it is possible to do so and to use these methods collectively to test out new ideas and ways of working together. All of this is much easier to say than it is to do. Many of us work in hectic environments that prioritise expediency over exploration. In straining against those currents and some of the dogmas of our different research cultures, perhaps we can realise multiple modes of resistance and attention.

22 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A political ecology of things* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 5.

23 Sven Dupré, Anna Harris, Julia Kursell, Patricia Lulof, Maartje Stols-Wilcox (eds), *Reconstruction, Replication and Re-enactment in the Humanities and Social Sciences* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020).

24 https://www.makingandknowing.org/ [accessed 29.02.24].

'MUSIC EMBODIED IN LIFE': ROCK MUSIC, MATERIALITY AND 'LIFE-CREATION' IN 1970S LENINGRAD

Polly McMichael

One of the many texts about the Russian-Soviet rock group Akvarium is a 'biography' written by the rock music journalist Aleksandr Startsev in 1986, in which he described a duality he believed was inherent to the band in the 1970s:

> The well-worn phrase 'such-and-such a group is not just a group, but a way of life' is most apt to describe what Akvarium represented in the 1970s. This was a community, a team, call it what you will, of young men and girls who spent almost all their time together, moving from apartment to apartment. That was what you might call 'diluted Akvarium' [*Akvarium-ras-tvorennyi*]. Between ten and forty people, united by their shared passions – rock, theatre, a synthesis of both these, philosophy, fun [*razvlecheniia*] – in short an open way of life [*otkrytyi obraz zhizni*] for anyone who wanted it as long as they suited the person and the person fitted in with them. You could call it a 'musical-communal community' or 'music embodied in life' [*muzyka, voploshchennaia v zhizn'*]. [...] And there was, so to speak, 'concentrated Akvarium' [*Akvarium-kontsentrirovannyi*], i.e. several people who for an hour or so stepped out of this company to take up their places on the stage, to bring joy to themselves and others, and then once more became part of the community. It's unlikely that anyone will immediately appreciate the whole spirit of this, but it's vital to take note of it, because it is the key to understanding certain aspects of Akvarium's creativity, in particular questions of the exchange of energy and the concept of joy.[1]

Akvarium lived out a long formative stage before beginning to make canonical recordings at the turn of the 1980s.[2] It first came into existence in July 1972, more as an idea than anything else, when nineteen-year-old Boris 'Bob' Grebenshchikov came back to Leningrad after holidaying in the South and announced to his best friend Anatolii 'Dzhordzh' Gunitskii that it was high time they started their own group.[3] Dzhordzh (because he looked a bit like George Harrison) and Bob (later he would stress the connection to Dylan, though he also felt an affinity with many other figures from Western rock and roll) began writing songs,

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1 Aleksandr Startsev, 'Istoriia gruppy "Akvarium"', in Ol'ga Sagareva (ed.), *Akvarium 1972-1992: Sbornik materialov* (Moscow: Alfavit, 1992), pp. 53-65, pp. 54-55.

2 See discussion in Polly McMichael, 'Prehistories and Afterlives: The Packaging and Re-packaging of Soviet Rock', *Popular Music and Society* 32:3 (July 2009), pp. 331-350, pp. 335-336.

3 Boris Grebenshchikov, 'Pravdivaia avtobiografiia "Akvariuma" (Pis'mo Artemiiu Troitskomu, 1980-i god)' in Ol'ga Sagareva (ed.), *Akvarium 1972-1992: Sbornik materialov* (Moscow: Alfavit, 1992), pp. 9-14, p. 9.

but they also wrote plays and poems, and continued to speak in their own strange, funny language; they hung out in the well-known bohemian café known as Saigon, and they saw established rock groups like Mify and Sankt-Peterburg perform. Eventually they performed themselves at such so-called 'sessions' – the English word had made its way into the Russian language as *seishn* or *seishen* to denote an informally arranged concert. As the 1970s wore on, Dzhordzh realised that his true talents lay in writing for the theatre, and Bob began playing with actual musicians.

When appearing at a *seishen* in the 1970s, Akvarium had a particular affect, a projection of friendship and a commitment to hanging out and conversation that, though conveyed by sound and performance, somehow sat apart from the music itself and counterbalanced the obvious creative ambition of Grebenshchikov, its songwriter and frontman. As Akvarium's music and image spread more widely in the 1980s and the band became famous beyond Leningrad circles this became central to the group's mythology, and the description Startsev had given of the collective's life in the 1970s seemed emblematic of their special appeal to listeners.[4] This loose collective of the 1970s that attained fame in the 1980s, though, was just one incarnation of the values and spirit associated with rock and roll, which fostered a scene of interconnected rock groups, but just as many other types of creative actors. A rich social world coalesced around rock music and spread out from experiences of listening to rock music on a record or at a *seishen* into the entirety of life. When Startsev refers to the synthesis that existed between rock and theatre, and their coexistence with philosophy and fun, and wraps all of this up in the phrase 'an open way of life', what strikes me now is a blurring of the line between creativity and simply living. Juliane Fürst's pioneering work on the hippie movement in the Soviet Union, with which the rock community of Leningrad overlapped substantially during this decade, has been a particular inspiration here, and I follow her lead in seeking to pin down aspects of life-as-creativity, a self-sustaining world made within the parameters of late socialism, and which Fürst suggests also contributed to the peculiar multimodality of late socialism.[5] While examining adherents of rock who did not always produce music as a cultural output, but who undoubtedly, like the hippies, saw their day-to-day existence as an aesthetic statement, parallels come to mind with the 'life-creation' [*zhiznetvorchestvo*] espoused by the Russian Symbolists in the early 20th century, in which 'art was claimed to be a force capable of, and destined for "the creation of life" […] while "life" was viewed as an object of artistic creation or as a creative act'.[6] Many of Leningrad's rock lovers testified to similar beliefs about the transformative force of the music they listened to. But it is the life lived as if an object of artistic creation that

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4 See Polly McMichael, '"A Room-Sized Ocean": Apartments I the Practice and Mythology of Leningrad's Rock Music' in William Jay Risch (ed.), *Youth and Rock in the Soviet Bloc: Youth Cultures, Music and the State in Russia and Eastern Europe* (Lanham MA: Lexington Books, 2015), pp. 183-209; for discussion of the particular place of Startsev's description in Akvarium's mythology, see pp. 188-191.

5 Juliane Fürst, *Flowers Through Concrete: Explorations in Soviet Hippieland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 435-437.

6 Irina Paperno, 'Introduction' in *Creating Life: The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Modernism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 2.

seems more pertinent still: for a time in their lives, these figures used their whole lives as canvasses on which to display their need for rock music, their understanding of it; daily routines pivoted to acquiring information and objects that facilitated a working through of what rock meant, and as they walked through the streets they felt they were channelling its energy and transmitting it back out into the world, using the objects and materials they had around them.[7]

In the 1970s, Leningrad's musicians felt materially impoverished. The prevailing understanding of rock music in this city at this time, as elsewhere, was that it needed to be loud – amplified to fill a space and to thud inside human bodies. Vladimir Rekshan, who founded Sankt-Peterburg in 1969 and led it to being one of the most successful bands in Leningrad in the 1970s, recalled his frustration at the mismatch between this hard-won popularity and the meagre sound the musicians were often limited to on stage: 'Crappy [*poganye*] speakers, crappy amplifiers and wires! We had already got used to glory, and we wanted blissful sounds [*blazhennye zvuki*]'.[8] The scarcity of instruments and equipment and absence of technologies that rock groups in the West could use was a similar trope of complaint. In the 1970s, Grebenshchikov intoned words like 'fuz' [fuzzbox] and 'kvak' [wah-wah] almost as a mantra, weaving these strange sounds into early songs in lines like 'He came from the foggy distance, and took away my fuzzbox' and 'Baby Wah-Wah, oh I love you,/ Baby Wah-Wah, oh I pray to you,/ Baby Wah-Wah, be mine today'.[9] A little later, he wrote a 'true autobiography' of his band and explained that he 'like[d] to compare Akvarium to the American group the Grateful Dead. The only difference is that they have equipment [*apparatura*], money and all the rest, while Akvarium has nothing'.[10]

If we move outwards from musical events themselves and into the broader patterns of everyday life, however, the life-creation of the rock community begins to look materially more replete, and even cluttered. Will Straw observes that 'bits of music come to stick to other material configurations […] Music sticks to contexts of sociability'.[11] Leningrad of the 1970s was a sociable place if you loved rock music, furnished with all manner of surfaces to which music stuck. As the sounds swirled around rooms and met objects and bodies

7 Elena Zdravomyslova is perhaps also thinking of the Symbolists' *zhiznetvorchestvo* when she writes of the habitués of the Café Saigon, in amongst whom aspirant rockers drank and conversed, 'lifestyle itself was a creative act'. See Elena Zdravomyslova, 'Leningrad's Saigon: A Place of Negative Freedom', *Russian Studies in History* 50:1 (Summer 2011), pp. 19-43, p. 31.

8 Vladimir Rekshan, *Samyi kaif* (St Petersburg: Amfora, 2008), p. 419.

9 'Он пришел из туманной дали/ И унес с собою мой фуз': 'On prishel iz tumannoi dali' in Boris Grebenshchikov, *Pesni* (Moscow: Nota-R, 2002), p. 12; 'Бэби Квак, о я люблю тебя/ Бэби Квак, о я молю тебя/ Бэби Квак, будь сегодня моим': the lyrics of 'Bebi kvak', written in 1974, were provided to the website *Akvarium: Spravochnoe posobie dlia 'BG-ologov' i 'Akvariumofilov* by Armen Hayrapetyan, sound engineer of some of Akvarium's early recordings. The full text is available at https://handbook.severov.net/handbook.nsf/Main?OpenFrameSet&Frame=Body&Src=1/CB24754E1B7F0AACC325679D006AECBB%3FOpenDocument.

10 Grebenshchikov, 'Pravdivaia avtobiografiia', p. 14. Discussion of the process of getting hold of instruments and other kit can be found in Diusha Romanov, *Istoriia Akvariuma. Kniga fleitista* (St Petersburg: Neva, 2000), p. 17; Vladimir Marochkin, *Povsednevnaia zhizn' rossiiskogo rok-muzykanta* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2003), pp. 156-181; Il'ia Smirnov, *Vremia kolokol'chikov: Zhizn' i smert' russkogo roka* (Moscow: INTO, 1994), pp. 38-40.

11 Will Straw, 'Music and Material Culture' in Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert and Richard Middleton (eds.), *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 227-236, p. 232.

they gave rise to new formations, creative products in their own right. In the period before it made sense to focus on making recordings and when seishens were infrequent pleasures, embedding rock music into everyday life entailed meticulous, frustrating activity – finding out the frequency and schedules of foreign radio stations, trawling the black markets for records and clothing, recording and re-recording copies of albums, amassing a collection of other visual and verbal material and displaying oneself to the world at large – but which when accomplished facilitated quasi-spiritual transformation. This was enacted in the material world. A widely-circulated hippie manifesto from 1982 by authors calling themselves 'Children of the Dungeon' [*Deti podzemel'ia*] referred to this as the 'decorative and applied meaning of ROCK':

> Cool clothes [*prikol'nye klouza*], embroidered with hallucinatory plants and insects […] Surrealist frescos and collages on the walls of underground flats [*flety*] […] Home-made decorations, amulets and talismans […]] […] Psychedelic drawings in the margins of exercise books or in exhibition halls […].

As these authors conceptualised it, in reaching for these forms of expression, hippies were not expressing themselves as individuals but constituting a semantic unit in the language of rock – 'an non-existent language of a non-existent tribe'; hippies were like monks painting icons and putting forward the word of God without regarding themselves as artists.[12] When applying this kind of logic to the 'diluted rock bands' milieu that I am defining here, I wish to classify these kinds of processes not just as expressions of local understanding of what rock music meant, but as creative acts themselves. Active listening, discussion, collecting and curating one's own body were all ways of *doing rock* as much as writing songs, performing or recording tracks was.

I have attempted to trace the flow of ongoing conversations via a variety of texts, including memoirs and texts created at the time, or shortly thereafter. The most eloquent genre of activity may be the one Alexei Yurchak calls 'obshchenie' (from the word meaning communication/conversation) – a form that is simultaneously associated with language and with emotion: 'both an exchange of ideas and information as well as a space of affect and togetherness'.[13] My hope is that in referring to a plethora of different voices – analysing the conversations taking place in and around the activities of musicians like Grebenshchikov and Akvarium bandmates like Gunitskii, Diusha Romanov, Seva Gakkel' and Mikhail Fainshtein, as well as other musicians like Zhora Ordanovskii, Iurii Morozov, Vladimir Rekshan and Maik Naumenko, and those whose main creative outputs were not music, including Valerii Cherkasov, Kolia Vasin and the Zaitsev brothers, Volodia and Gena – a

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12 Arkadii Slavorosov and Sergei Shutov, 'Kanon' in Aleksandr Kushnir (ed.), *Zolotoe podpol'e: Polnaia illiustrirovannaia entsiklopediia rok-samizdata* (1967-1994), pp. 200-201, p. 201. This text is discussed in detail as part of a definitive account of hippie 'kaif' (defined below) in Fürst 2021, pp. 236-240.

13 Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until it Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 148-151.

larger set of practices can be understood. In the 1970s, before rock in Leningrad was clearly and continuously rock *music*, it existed in conditions that felt (and were) constrained and impoverished, yet fostered creativity, sometimes in unexpected ways. What follows is an attempt to show some of the elements of the material reality and the spiralling imagination of the 'fun [*veseloe*], still long-haired [*volosatoe*] generation' of Leningrad rock music.[14]

1. Connecting

In the reception of rock music as a global phenomenon making its way into the Soviet space, intangibles are frequently placed to the fore, but they arrive into and exist in a world that is intensively material, readily transferring themselves into the world of objects and bodies that the listeners lived in. The Moscow hippies who wrote as the Children of the Dungeon exhorted the reader to 'get switched on and get high' [*vrubis' i kaifui*]:

> this is what it means to be not from this world, **turn on–tune in–drop out** all at once, the Great Refusal, the Switch On [*Vrub*]. With your diaphragm open like a morning flower, catch the divine vibration that permeates everything, sing, dance, get high [*torchi*], go beyond the limits of yourself, the Cosmos, Eternity, go from glory to meet glory halfway.[15]

Like Timothy Leary, whose famous doctrine they inserted into the text in English, the Children of the Dungeon saw getting high as a tool to enable the expansion of consciousness. Leary taught that this process must be initiated by detaching the self from external reality as it appeared (turning on, for which taking LSD or other psychedelic drugs was instrumental), after which a profound exploration of consciousness was possible; this would eventually allow a new kind of connection with the external environment (tuning in).[16] In their dense, richly allusive manifesto, and the earlier one in similar style titled 'Kanon', the Children of the Dungeon use language familiar to adherents of the rock community. They make much of the term 'kaif', meaning an altered state of mind, or state of bliss – often a drug-induced high, but also engendered by other pleasures, including music.[17] Here kaif appears as 'kaifui', a verb in the imperative form, a close echo of Leary's imperatives, and the reader is also implored 'get high' (or 'take drugs' – or perhaps just 'hang out') in the imperative 'torchi'. Where kaif means near-mystical bliss, *torchat'* seems somehow more grounded in physicality, with perhaps a greater emphasis on the temporality and even the

14 Aleksandr Startsev, '"Ty pomnish', kak vse bylo desiat' let nazad?..."', *Sumerki* 1 (1988), pp. 76-83, p. 79.

15 'Situatsiia TAV', *Tverdyi znak* 3 (1994), pp. 131-139, p. 138. Here and below, text in bold indicates English in the original.

16 Timothy Leary, *Turn On, Tune In, Drop Out!* LP (New York: ESP Disk, 1966). Audio available at https://archive.org/details/TurnOnTuneInDropOut1966/.

17 Fürst 2021, pp. 229-234. Fürst has established that hippies in the Soviet Union in the 1970s did not have access to LSD (p. 278), but describes in detail the drugs that were widely used in the hippie community, their creation and circulation, and contemporary experiences of and understanding of their effects (pp. 278-289).

pain of addiction.[18] The other slang term is 'vrubat'sia'/'vrub', a verb that means 'to under-stand' and a noun that means 'understanding'. Elsewhere, discussing the social function of musical taste as referenced in an article by Grebenshchikov in the opening issue of the samizdat rock journal *Roksi*, I have suggested that this can be translated as 'getting it' or 'digging it'.[19] Here, additionally, it is useful to note its derivation from the verb 'vrubat'', which means, in the same slang, 'to switch [something] on', meaning that the reflexive verb 'vrubat'sia' can be 'to switch oneself on'.[20]

Ideas about entering into a state of bliss, dropping out of society and into something more meaningful, abound in discussions of rock music relating to this period in Leningrad. At their heart we find this notion of divine, pulsating energy, and in many instances it is the body of the listener that connects, just as the Children of the Dungeon exhort, by listening, feeling vibrations, sensing a connectedness. In passing it may be worth noting that Marshall McLuhan, who had a personal connection with Leary and may have had input into the creation of his slogan, saw 'a sympathy between the electric and the psychedelic'.[21] Many of rock's adherents studied physical sciences or engineering, and these were circles in which sound technologies were the subject of experiments – taking apart short wave radio receivers and using soldering irons.[22] A generation first heard rock music via a radio set around in around1964-1965 and for some this was the beginning of a search for connections between the recorded sounds and the intense bodily experiences they seemed to convey. They grasped for parallels between chemically induced highs, recorded sounds and electricity itself, seeking to understand how these forms of energy interacted with their own bodies.

As this generation of listeners heard rock music for the first time, domestic surround-ings and consumer electronics determined and mediated the experience. Would-be listeners carefully set up and switched on electronic equipment. Their accounts often emphasise poor sound quality and distortions, through as listeners they somehow experience something transcendent. A collective narrative emerges that is embedded in the material world, encom-passing the material culture of audio – a radio receiver, speakers, perhaps a tape recorder to capture the moment and make it re-playable – but also the body that apprehended the

18 The verb *torchat'* means 'to protrude' or 'to stick up' in standard Russian. Its slang usage covers a variety of different meanings, mainly clustering around states in which a person is removed from the everyday for a spell, in a positive or a negative sense: in addition to those above, meanings include 'to serve a prison sentence', 'to be in a state of alcoholic intoxication', 'to receive pleasure from something', and 'to be in love'; see V. M. Mokienko and T. G. Nikitina (eds.), *Bol'shoi slovar' russkogo zhargona* (St Petersburg: Norint, 2000), p. 593.

19 McMichael 2005, pp. 678-680.

20 Mokienko and Nikitina, p. 110.

21 Peter Sachs Collopy, '"Video is as Powerful as LSD": Electronics and Psychedelics as Technologies of Consciousness' in Erika Dyck and Chris Elcock (eds.), *Expanding Mindscapes: A Global History of Psychedelics* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2023), pp. 333-355, p. 337.

22 According to Aleksandr Kushnir, Akvarium founders Grebenshchikov and Gunitskii caught the amateur radio bug while still at school and, together with their friend Alena Bender, broadcast their own programmes from a tiny room on the premises of School number 429: see Aleksandr Kushnir, *'Akvarium': Geometriia khaosa* (Moscow: Metamorphoses, 2023), pp. 13-14. Leonid Tikhomirov recalls his friend and sometime bandmate Valera Cherkasov's love of taking apart and soldering 'little radios and little tape recorders' [*priemnichki, magnitofon-chiki*]: see Andrei Khlobystin (ed.), *Pervoprokhodets. Pamiati Valeriia Cherkasova (1946-1984)* (St Petersburg: Borey Art Centre, 2003), p. 28.

sound, as well as the sound itself, as vibrations transmitted into air, a sonic manifestation of kaif. The dominance of the music of the Beatles in these accounts is no doubt partly the result of these being retrospective accounts, reflecting the magnification of the group's significance as time went on, but it probably also testifies to the relative accessibility of the music, in terms of broadcast saturation. It may also owe something to the easy, youthful appeal of the sound of the Beatles' early singles for those whose minds were open to this kind of music.

The multi-instrumentalist Iurii Morozov was a teenage shortwave radio enthusiast and regularly tuned in to Radio Beirut's music programming, as well as the 'sea of music, round the clock' that he discovered was provided by domestic 'radio hooligans'.[23] It was exposure to a station broadcasting 'Can't Buy Me Love' in 1964 that brought him his epiphany:

> A few times I came across this transmitter, but, once I'd listened to the song to the end, twisted the dial away from it… And then one time I found myself stopping there, and I'm listening to it once, twice, three times, and suddenly… ad infinitum, and at the point of the heartrending scream before the chorus a shiver runs through me, as well as some kind of aesthetic feeling of future or past happiness. The next day I listen again until I'm completely dazed. I wrote down the words being sung, roughly, in a transcription like this: 'ken pamiloh oh evdibadi set mi so', etc. Then the singing in imitation began. In this gruff voice that I'm now ashamed to think of I muttered the nonsense words to myself, singing along with this 'Bitlz' guy [*vtoria etomu "Bitlzu"*].[24]

Morozov expanded his awareness via the programming of Radio Beirut, which regularly played the Beatles, the Shadows, the Hollies, the Byrds, the Beach Boys, the Kinks and the Trogs.[25] At the same time, in another part of Leningrad, Kolia Vasin tuned in to the BBC to hear a programme about the Beatles. Much later, his account of this 'great moment in my life' involved a reenactment of the sounds of the music as it was drowned out by jamming:

> A boy from the house next door dragged over a radio receiver, and a tape recorder with tape, and we recorded the Beatles, and he left me the recording, the tape, that musical programme about the Beatles. With noises, with jamming [*glushitel'*], the Soviets [*sovki*] jammed at that time. A wave of horrible sounds, like a motor, constantly attacked the Beatles: 'Boom-boom-boom-boom-boom-boom-boom-boom – [singing] She loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah, she lo-boom-boom-boom-boom'. That was how we listened to the Beatles in 1964.[26]

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23 Iurii Morozov, *Podzemnyi bliuz* (St Petersburg: Al'manakh 'Zero predstavliaet', 1994), p. 26. On radio 'hooliganism' and amateur broadcasts, see Stephen Lovell, *Russia in the Microphone Age: A History of Soviet Radio*, 1919-1970 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p.147. On shortwave radios as a locus of the 'imaginary West', see Yurchak 2006, pp. 175-181.

24 Morozov 1994, p. 27.

25 Morozov 1994, p. 27.

26 Filipp Klibanov, 'Kolia Vasin – Istoriia avtografa Dzhona Lennona'. Interview, 30 August 2016, *YouTube*. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JHjsKKNmvN0.

A year or so later, aged just eleven, Boris Grebenshchikov sat with a radio receiver and a tape recorder ready. He knew that the station to find was Voice of America, had found out what time the Beatles would be broadcast, and sat poised to listen and record. He later recalled his reaction to first hearing their music as being a physical change, imagining himself almost as a mechanical device set in operation: 'from that moment onwards, as soon as the lock clicked, everything became clear, everything came into focus, and since then I have never come out of this focus'.[27] Fellow musician Zhora Ordanovskii first experienced the Beatles aged thirteen, on a music programme broadcast on Soviet radio, amid a cloud of vituperative comment. The life-changing potential of the moment was still vivid to him years later:

> I remember myself, sitting alone in the room, I remember the situation, the walls, what the day was like – down to how it smelt. It was a music programme, but the music was just a backdrop for me. A letter from a dissatisfied listener was read out: 'Why don't you say anything about the Beatles?" After that a horrible scolding began. They poured abuse on the Beatles, said that they were just shouting and so on, the way that in this country they can talk about what they haven't accepted yet. Then they broadcast one thing [*veshch'*]. I think it was 'A Hard Day's Night'. I won't tell you that I grabbed a guitar as soon as I heard this song, especially as I didn't have one. But what did happen was that it sank into my soul, perhaps because forbidden fruit is sweet.[28]

The Beatles began as an idea – a rumour, even – which then crystalised as the experience of sound. An encounter with them was with disembodied voices, and the sounds of electric guitars and drums, and this met, but also intensified, a far more deep-seated need of which the listener had perhaps not previously been aware. Next came a search for ways to repeat and prolong the experience and to supplement it with information, visuals and discussion.

2. Collecting

Although there was clearly a collective, generation-defining buzz in classrooms, courtyards and stairwells, for those listening on radios it may have been possible to avoid acquiring any visual sense of the Beatles for a time. Morozov claims not to have realised at first that the person going by the strange name 'Bitlz' with whom he was so enraptured was in fact four people: despite the repeated listening, his musical ear had not yet developed to be able to pick apart the textures of the instruments and vocals.[29] Others met all four Beatles in photographs before they had heard the music, or when access to the music had been

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27 '"Muzyka – eto to, chto daet vozmozhnost' vere!" (Dialogi s Borisom Grebenshchikovym)', in Andrei Matveev, *Live Rock'n'Roll: Apokrify molchalivykh dnei* (Ekaterinburg: U-Faktoriia, 2001), pp. 87-146, p. 89.

28 'Interv'iu s Georgiem Ordanovskim', *Roksi* 4 (January 1981).

29 Morozov 1994, p. 27.

very limited. The musician Leonid Tikhomirov saw their photographs on card inserts from Finnish chewing gum that were circulating at his school when he was in the senior classes, probably in 1964 or 1965.[30] Seva Gakkel', Akvarium's cellist, had hardly heard the Beatles' music yet when his cousin Marina gave him a box full of newspaper clippings about the group, some of which had photo illustrations. He proudly showed these off at school and then, lacking a room of his own in the family apartment in which he could display them, stuck them all over one of the walls at the dacha.[31]

If funds allowed, the object of desire with most pull was the authentic rock album, an original vinyl record, brought into Leningrad by the fortunate few who went on a trip abroad, or by foreign tourists or sailors. Like authentic Western items of clothing, these were given the appellation 'firmennye' (from 'firma', meaning company or brand), to denote that they came from abroad.[32] Acquiring them entailed buying or bartering at some benches in the area surrounding the Engineers' Castle (also known as the Mikhailovskii Castle), or at Apraksin Dvor. Periodically the police would disperse the sellers and their customers.[33] Hanging out with other members of Akvarium on the steps of the Engineers' Castle, flautist Diusha Romanov looked on in fascination as they bought and sold 'all manner of Jethro Tulls and Spooky Tooths', believing that any album anyone might desire would be available here.[34] Often visitors turned up for the sake of conversation, to talk to those they shared interests with, and to pick up information about the latest albums. If a purchase was being considered, though, given that the sum involved was a huge proportion of the average monthly wage, a careful inspection was required. Vladimir Rekshan was practised at this:

> a certain ritual had to be followed: carefully examine the sleeve [*paket*], then carefully remove the vinyl itself, without touching its surfaces. You had to sniff it – some sellers wiped the surface with cologne in an attempt to make it like new, which harmed the spiral groove. You looked at the record itself from an angle, trying to see what state it was in, to spot scratches.[35]

Rekshan had acquired an enviable collection while still in his teens, and by the summer of 1970, when he turned twenty, he possessed several Beatles and Rolling Stones albums, including the newly-released *Let It Bleed*, plus 'other discs in the same avant-garde progressive vein [*avangardno-progressivnyi dukh*]'.[36] He understood his collection to be 'rated' [*kotirovalas'*], and that it thus granted him entry into the elite of rock collectors.[37] That summer, a friend made the suggestion that they could take Rekshan's records to his hometown

30 Richard Mayer and Leonid Tikhomirov, *Shule Aroon. Milyi putnik: NeZAkonchennaia istoriia russko-amerikanskoi gruppy 'ZA'* (St Petersburg: Shoal Creek Sound, 1994), p. 9.

31 Vsevolod Gakkel', *Akvarium kak sposob ukhoda za tennisnym kortom* (St Petersburg: Sentiabr', 2000), p. 15.

32 As Yurchak explains, this referred to an item's Western provenance and was conferred on something 'not because it was of a known Western brand, but simply because it was "Western" at all': Yurchak 2006, p. 197.

33 Vladimir Rekshan, *Leningradskoe vremia ili ischezaiushchii gorod* (St Petersburg: Amfora, 2015), p. 36.

34 Diusha Romanov, *Istoriia Akvariuma. Kniga fleitista* (St Petersburg: Neva, 2000), p. 29.

35 Rekshan 2015, p. 36.

36 Rekshan 2015, pp. 33-34.

37 Rekshan 2015, p. 36.

and 'mow' [*kosit'*] them. Rekshan claims to have been baffled by the term until Aleksandr explained that it was a question of demand for copies of sought-after albums: 'We spend five rubles recording a disc. And we sell *Let it Bleed* for ten rubles'.[38] The operation was a success, but ended badly when his co-conspirator drank away their profits, and then, a year later, when their provincial contact and his friends visited Leningrad and stole Rekshan's entire collection.[39] He acquired another, only to sell most of it when he became a father at the end of the 1970s.[40]

Possession of original vinyl records conferred status on collectors, in part because using them in the way Rekshan and his friend tried could be financially useful. Valerii Cherkasov went from being a student drop-out and aspiring musician to living as an outsider artist, sustained by a small pension and the money he made from trading records.[41] The kitchen in the apartment Cherkasov shared with his mother became a place to which the community was drawn; they sat on a mattress and immersed themselves in unworldly sounds. The space was filled with small sculptures made from cardboard, understood to be imbued with the sounds of psychedelia, like Jimi Hendrix's guitar solos, that Cherkasov so revered (friends rescued these pieces from rubbish bins after Cherkasov's death – relatives had assumed they were just a hoarder's junk).[42]

Monetary value, social capital and spiritual significance all intersected in these settings. As rare items, highly sought after, with a genuinely foreign origin and perhaps a storied journey into the Soviet Union, original records attracted friends and acquaintances to gather. At his friend Olia Golubeva's apartment, Seva Gakkel' was one of a crowd that listened to *Dark Side of the Moon* and *Jesus Christ Superstar* as if partaking in a solemn ritual: 'Each time it was a sacrament. At that time it really was perceived this way, it wasn't possible to talk, you could only absorb the music'.[43] Grebenshchikov recalled himself at around twenty years old roaming the city with a bag full of books and 'a thirst for new sensations'. In 1974, he was rewarded with a mind-altering experience when someone from Cherkasov's circle introduced him to the music of Frank Zappa:[44]

At some point my friends asked me, 'have you heard Zappa?' 'Of him, yes, but I haven't heard him.' 'Then go and see Kolia tomorrow.' The next day I went to the place as instructed, a remote sunny little courtyard [....] [A] man crawled out of a basement in the corner. He had hair down to his waist and was wearing a black skirt that he had put on over his jeans, and he beckoned to me. I entered the cool darkness, and they put me in an armchair and shoved a record sleeve into my hands that showed a naked, moustachioed Zappa sitting on a toilet,

38 Rekshan 2008, p. 417.
39 Rekshan 2008, pp. 417-418.
40 Rekshan, Samyi kaif, p. 425.
41 Timur Novikov, in *Pervoprokhodets*, p. 16; Oleg Kotel'nikov, in *Pervoprokhodets*, p. 20.
42 Novikov, pp. 13-14.
43 Gakkel' 2000, p. 35.
44 Boris Grebenshchikov, in *Pervoprokhodets*, p. 41.

wearing hunting boots. Before I could come to my senses, they played it at full volume. […]
From that day on I loved Zappa with all my heart [*bezzavetnoi liubov'iu*].[45]

Some of rock's aficionados clearly felt the need for their records to be displayed in all their beauty but also surrounded by as much contextualising information as possible. They worked hard to acquire visual material – photographs, posters and memorabilia – and went on a mission to gather information, in the form of newspaper clippings, and foreign books and rock magazines. They became collectors, curators, librarians, educators. In an interview, Maik Naumenko, who was thought of by his friends as a 'rock-*intelligent*',[46] gave his hobby as 'collecting materials about Marc Bolan and T Rex'.[47] After his death in 1991 his mother, herself a librarian, regretted not appreciating enough during his lifetime the depth of knowledge her son had acquired about rock music, admiring how he had 'painstakingly and patiently, sparing no effort, time, or money, collected his record library [*fonoteka*] and complied its catalogue'.[48] In the home, or perhaps one room of an apartment shared with parents or others, men like Naumenko created vivid displays devoted to their beloved musicians. The main room of Naumenko's small apartment was dominated by a large portrait of Bolan that his wife claimed followed her around the room with its eyes.[49] When his friends socialised and drank with him, one remembered, it was as if the people on the walls – Bolan, David Bowie, Lou Reed and John Lennon – stepped out of the posters and became interlocutors and friends.[50]

Some such apartments achieved a semi-public status as locations on a rock-themed map of the city. The brothers Volodia and Gena Zaitsev attempted to articulate what this might mean in terms official Soviet cultural curators could understand when they drafted official paperwork for a 'club' in which knowledge about rock music might be exchanged:

The ultimate aim of the club is to cultivate fine aesthetic feelings [*vysokie esteticheskie chuvstva*], which is achieved by means of a complete and deep insight into the essence of musical creativity, of other forms of art, and also into the essence of natural phenomena and humanity itself. In connection with this goal, it is essential that the club uses such examples of creative work that have a strong emotional impact and thereby develop a culture of feeling and thinking, without which the moral and spiritual progress of the individual and society is impossible.[51]

45 Boris Grebenshchikov, *Aerostat*, 3 June 2007, *Radio Rossii*. The transcript was published on Akvarium's official site www.aquarium.ru, and is now available here: https://web.archive.org/web/20200221160656/http://www.aquarium.ru/misc/aerostat/aerostat107.html.

46 Gakkel' 2000, p. 47.

47 'M. Naumenko. "Zoopark", "Zerkalo", aprel' 1982' in Natal'ia Naumenko (ed.), *Maik iz gruppy 'Zoopark': Prodolzhenie sleduet…* (Moscow: Nota-R, 2004), pp. 325-329, p. 328.

48 Galina Florent'evna Naumenko, 'O syne', in Naumenko 2004, pp. 6-42, p. 38.

49 Natal'ia Naumenko, interviewed in Kirill Serebrennikov (dir.), *Posle leta* (2018).

50 Aleksei Rybin, *Maik: Vremia rok-n-rolla* (St Petersburg: Amfora, 2010), pp. 88-89.

51 In Gennadii Borisovich Zaitsev, *Tiazhelye oduvanchiki ili khronika proshedshikh sobytii* (St Petersburg: Goil', 2019), p. 177.

Even without the support of the cultural authorities that these documents suggested they sought, the Zaitsev brothers had arranged their home as a place to gather and listen to music, decorating the walls with posters and accumulating numerous recordings (including recordings of seishens by Leningrad groups). In a letter to a journal Volodia described it as 'our own home-based club of music lovers', equipped with 'our own library about the musical creativity of our contemporaries'.[52] The letter also gave an example of how such gatherings might work if they were less structured (he claimed to have heard about places where this had happened but not visited himself):

> Imagine a small modern apartment. A room about eight metres square. In it there's a record player, a tape recorder, a bed, and about twenty young people who look like hippies. You can't breathe because everyone's smoking, and it's very difficult to talk, because the tape recorder is playing so loud, people are leaving, others are arriving, so there's no room to stand.[53]

In 1966, when Kolia Vasin was wild with enthusiasm for the album *Revolver*, he too had started holding gatherings at his flat in the relatively far-flung district of Rzhevka. By the turn of the 1960s-1970s, Vasin was a significant character in Leningrad's network of serious rock fans, hosting concentrated listening accompanied by bottles of wine, and facilitating the sharing of recordings and other information. Vasin loved Lennon above all, and in later interviews was wont to say that there was no one in the world closer to him than 'Johnny'.[54] This devotion was sealed by an extraordinary instance of connection. In October 1970, aged twenty-five, Vasin sent a telegram to the Apple Corps office in London in anticipation of Lennon's thirtieth birthday, and, with his birthday wishes, included a request for a signed copy of Lennon's most recent album. To his astonishment, he received a reply in the form of a parcel containing the Plastic Ono Band live album *Live Peace in Toronto 1969*, which Lennon had signed twice, on the outer and inner sleeve, plus a 'John and Yoko' calendar for the year 1970.[55] Vasin's collection expanded to huge proportions, through gifts and deals with illegal traders. As he put it:

> The word 'got hold of' [*dostal*] generally applies to my whole collection. I actually have nothing bought in a shop. Without the 'black market' life would be hopeless! This is what makes my collection valuable![56]

52 The letter was written in January 1975 to the editors of the journal *Klub i khudozhestvennaia* s*amodeia-tel'nost'*. It was not published. Reproduced in Zaitsev 2019, pp. 275-267, p. 266.

53 Zaitsev 2019, p. 265.

54 Klibanov interview 2016.

55 Klibanov interview 2016; Kolia Vasin, 'Russkii rok na kostiakh. Rok memuary', *Rumba: Finsko-sovetskaia rok-gazeta (*1989), pp. 8-9, p. 8. Available at https://web.archive.org/web/20221108123034/http://naunaunau.narod.ru/articles/0531-gazeta-rumba/rumba-1989.pdf.

56 Vasin 1989, p. 8.

When Gakkel' visited Vasin in Rzhevka in the autumn of 1974, he found an imposing assemblage:

> All the space in the dimly lit room was filled with posters and portraits of the Beatles, and in the corner stood a mannequin that looked like Ringo. There were some people sitting and looking through huge albums, and the Beatles' music was playing very loudly. […] It was cramped. He in fact lived high up near the ceiling, under a canopy that had written on it: *Gentlemen, let's collapse into grooviness!*[57]

Vasin saw himself as fighting a 'struggle against informational hunger'. He scoured domestic and foreign newspapers and magazines for relevant material, becoming practiced at picking out fragments of information: 'any tiny thing or note containing the words "Beatles", John Lennon, Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr, Liverpool or rock and roll becomes the object of my desire'.[58] Large black-bound ledgers – by 1989 he had twenty-two of these – served as display cabinets for this information. He pasted in articles and fragments of text, as well as photographs. To be able to reproduce photographs he had constructed a tripod and a stand to hold his Zenit camera in place so that he could lay photographs out below the lens and re-photograph them. 'It was a marathon lasting years: re-photographing [*peres"emka*] – developing prints [*pechat'*] – the layout [*oformlenie*] of the "family" albums', he wrote. As befitted the familial relationship he felt, he placed himself in them too. One important page narrated his personal connection with Lennon, with captions reading '1970' and, in English, 'LP from John' and 'SENSATION!'[59] In the centre of the page Vasin placed a black and white photograph of himself, in jeans and a white T shirt printed with a Beatles emblem of the four stylised faces. He proudly holds his *Live Peace In Toronto 1969* LP (as well as another flat, square object, possibly the calendar sent to him with the record). Behind him are portraits of the Beatles and the group's name spelled out in large decorative Latin letters. Accompanying this main photograph are two photographs of Lennon, which look to date from the late 1960s. The tint of these photographs is noticeably paler, indicating that they are the result of a series of reproductions achieved by photographing photographs. On the right of the central photograph is an annotation, handwritten in English and Russian:

> **HEY! I AM** with a present just received from John Lennon! [*s tol'ko chto poluchennym podarkom ot Dzhona Lennona*]

Looking down on the scene is Vasin's face, cut out from another photograph. A line-drawn cloud surrounds it, and a caption reads, in English: 'ON THE SKY NO. 7'. The page shows two Vasins, one in the curated reality of his Rzhevka apartment, and the other transported to

57 Gakkel' 2000, p. 38.
58 Vasin 1989, p. 8.
59 A photograph of the page can be viewed as part of *Dekoder.org*'s richly illustrated special project *Byt' drugim: Inakomyslie v SSSR*, which has a section on Vasin. Available at https://dissident.dekoder.org/kolya-vasin/.

a heavenly realm. Photographed in the earthly realm of his apartment, as in life, Vasin stood in proximity to multiple images of the Beatles as a group in the central photograph – and he is also holding in his hand an item signed, and touched, by one of them. Vasin's collection was unique in that it served as a kind of reliquary, centring on an object that represented direct connection with the physical world that Lennon, McCartney, Harrison and Starr lived in. While epiphany was a common template through which lovers of rock and roll understood their discovery of the music and its continued influence on their lives, Vasin's experience was something different, a fully theophanic experience, in his possession of tangible object from the lived reality of the originators of the message that he espoused as the basis of an entire belief system. But although his connection was unusually direct, this accumulation of different media in a palimpsest intended to connect rock's meaning at its source and its reception and interpretation in Leningrad was characteristic of the community as a whole.

3. Embodying

When Boris Grebenshchikov thought back to early listening experiences, he recalled a mismatch between the music and the items that suggested themselves as a supplement to it, at the time in the form of photographs. As he explained it:

> rock and roll for me was the magical combination of sounds coming from the speaker. These sounds were just like religious revelations […] and they cancelled out forever the bland world of my parents – or rather my bland perception of it; and no living beings – for example, musicians – could be discerned behind them. The poorly reproduced photographs of the Beatles sold in the schoolyard had a purely theoretical connection with the sorcery of 'I Want to Hold Your Hand', which could have brought the dead back to life [*ozhivliaiushchee mertvykh volshebstvo*].[60]

Perhaps like Iurii Morozov when he did not know who exactly had produced the scream that sent shivers down his spine, Grebenshchikov preferred to forestall the onset of more banal knowledge. Whereas collectors like Vasin saw photographs, however faint and insubstantial, as way of concretising the music, for Grebenshchikov and some others the Beatles as outlines on photographic paper were of less interest in themselves than the pure sound. This was *vrub* embodied, a tapping into something that was spiritual, even supernatural, but which had an energy that was felt viscerally. Slavorosov, the hippie ideologue, wrote in the 1980s that rock was fundamentally a vibration, and that 'the main thing is to catch the rhythm and the melody with your fingertips, your skin, your eyes, your eardrums, your memory'.[61]

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60 Boris Grebenshchikov, 'Kratkii otchet o 16-godakh zvukozapisi', in *Ne pesni* (Moscow: Antao, 2002), pp. 173-210, pp. 174-175.
61 Arkadii Slavorosov, *Rok-n-roll: Roman* [1982-1985], *Tverdyi znak"* 3 (1994), p. 100.

Grebenshchikov would probably have concurred with this in the 1970s. As he said of his encounter with the Beatles via Voice of America, apprehending these sounds propelled him into a new identity, enacted through the body: 'What came next was a question of how I used my own organism and my own capabilities to catalyse this thing [*veshch'*] that was around me'. A little later in the same discussion he described in more detail the process he felt had been unleashed in him:

> at that moment I connected to it [*k nemu podkliuchilsia*], and from then on it was all just a question of how I could engage [*zavesti*] all this that was around me… That is, to what extend I would be responsible for transmitting it into the surrounding space. It's clear, you see, that unlike everything else this is a thing [*shtuka*] that appears not for us to passively receive, but to actively translate into our surroundings [*transformirovat' v okruzhaiushchee*].[62]

The sense of being immersed in rock, which was imagined as music but simultaneously as a kind of palpable force, a vibration or a feeling of euphoria, but also a material *something*, seems to have been felt quite widely in the community. Using the body as a site in which this energy was absorbed and transmitted outwards was open to initiates in various ways, sometimes just in attitude – a gesture or a pose. When the Children of the Dungeon described rock as a series of objects and behaviours found in everyday reality, they began from the notion that rock could be embodied by someone merely spitting between their teeth in a particular way.[63] Fleeting glimpses of attitudes exuded and poses struck in every-day life rather than on a stage reveal themselves occasionally in the written record – the appearance of Grebenshchikov as a supposedly anonymous 'specialist' interviewed about punk, sitting in a cloud of cigarette smoke as he talks about rock, punk, ska and reggae, or Natasha Vasil'eva's photographs of Zhora Ordanovskii taken as he allowed someone's pet snake to twine itself over his face and arms; she wrote: 'I love to photograph him. He has a rare quality – an amazing plasticity of the face, a plasticity of movement in general'.[64]

Ordanovskii, the charismatic frontman of the hard rock group Rossiiane, was known for his thick, dark long hair, which he claimed not to have had cut since 1 June 1970, when he was sixteen. Asked by an interviewer whether length of hair influenced a person's way of thinking, he was able to reply with the authority of many years' experience:

> Without a doubt. You place yourself in an exceptional situation, you position yourself in opposition to the surrounding environment – every day, every hour, walking the street, on the tram. This action in itself means that you need to defend yourself psychologically, and this influences the way you think.[65]

62 Matveev 2001, pp. 90-91.
63 Kushnir 1994, p. 200.
64 'Chto takoe pank, i gde ego mesto v nashei zhizni', *Roksi* 5 (1981); Natasha Vasil'eva, 'Ob Ordanovskom', *Roksi* 7 (June 1984).
65 'Interv'iu s Ordonovskim', *Roksi* 4 (January 1981).

In a more positive sense, styling oneself to reflect a love of rock made this fact visible and legible to those with whom you were likely to share interests and values. When Mikhail Fainshtein met Grebenshchikov for the first time in 1973, he simply found himself walking towards a young man with long hair like his own, who was carrying a John Mayall LP; Fainshtein had with him a Moody Blues album and, each recognising a kindred spirit on sight, the two went straight to a friend's apartment together to make recordings for each other, barely uttering a word.[66] For his part, Grebenshchikov spoke of a compulsion he had felt since being a teenager to look different, describing this as a generational response to how hippies in the West looked: he referred to an article in the youth magazine *Rovesnik*, after which 'we absolutely had to draw a line in between ourselves and that boring world'.[67] He himself was the lucky owner of authentically Western [*firmennye*] jeans that his mother had brought back from a trip to Italy. His childhood friend Dzhordzh Gunitskii, with whom he founded Akvarium, used thirty-five rubles given to him by his parents to buy a pair of dark-blue cords, also *firmennye* – Grebenshchikov referred to their fabric 'with great solemnity, as "real Jagger corduroy"'.[68] It is worth noting that these two most prized fabrics, used for close-fitting but flared jeans, denim and corduroy, each had a characteristic feel – denim was tough but softened to the wearer's body, and corduroy was warmer, even sensual, suiting a lithe silhouette.

A short play in verse written by Grebenshchikov, 'V ob''iatiakh dzhinsni' [In the Embrace of Jeans], captures the symbolic value of such items and their role in constituting community. It used in its title a term that played with the accepted term used to refer to denim jeans – the word that had entered the Russian language was 'dzhinsy',[69] but Grebenshchikov and Gunitskii liked their own coinage, 'dzhinsnia', singular, a half-rhyme for their adaptation of the slang-anglicism 'shuz' (singular, meaning a pair of shoes) as 'shuznia'. The text, typed up as a few pages, was really a vehicle for this kind of in-joke, its rhymes encouraging such verbal antics. It was hardly meant to be taken seriously, let alone staged, purporting to have been dashed off by its author 'on the 31 December 1971 on the number 2 bus on the way to a *seishn* in Avtovo' (a distant suburb but still only an hour on the bus).[70] Still, the manuscript was passed around at the café Saigon, a celebrated bohemian hangout referred to in the opening lines. The plot concerns two young denim-clad lovers and their temporary separation at the hands of an evildoer [*Zlets*]. When the pair are reunited, she cannot recognise her beloved because he is not in his habitual clothes:

66 Mikhail Fainshtein, quoted in *Pustye mesta* 70 (11 May 2000). Available at https://web.archive.org/web/20071031095444/http://aquarium.lipetsk.ru/MESTA/arhiv/070.htm.

67 Aleksandr Zhitinskii, *Puteshestvie rok-dilitanta. Muzykal'nyi roman* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1990), p. 222. This is probably the article published in 1967 that Fürst suggests was perhaps the first to include photographs of hippies in the West – in this case protesters in Hyde Park in London; see Fürst 2021, pp. 41-42.

68 Dzhordzh Gunitskii, 'Tak nachalsia "Akvarium" in *Ostorozhno! Igraet 'Akvarium'!* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2018), pp. 325-406, p. 371.

69 On the use of the term in the Soviet Union, see Natalya Chernyshova, 'The Great Soviet Dream': Blue Jeans in the Brezhnev Era and Beyond' in Graham H. Roberts (ed.), *Material Culture in Russia and the USSR: Things, Values, Identities* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 155-172, p. 156.

70 Boris Grebenshchikov, 'V ob''iatiakh dzhinsni', in *Kniga prozy* (Moscow: Alfavit, 1992), pp. 7-16, p. 8.

SHE:

> Oh, stranger! A strange look
>
> You have – like an invalid.
>
> You have no *dzhinsy*, no *shuznia*,
>
> No discs and no long hair [*volosnia*]…
>
> But your face [*feis*] is dimly familiar.
>
> Oh God! What a downer [*oblom*]
>
> Why are you taking off your trousers?

The man – HIM:

> So that my *dzhinsy* can be seen.
>
> See my threads [*prikid*], see my allure [*prikhvat*].
>
> I'm pleased to see you once more![71]

The text found favour because of its references to lifestyle and language, and the absurdist depiction of a familiar obsession with denim and other rock and roll paraphernalia. It boiled the rest of Soviet society down to hostile archetypes that the rock community had to contend with, including the black market traders [*tsentroviki*] who were out to con them and the citizen militia empowered to exert authority over them (in usual language *druzhenniki*; here *prikhvatchiki*, 'grabbers').[72]

Putting on foreign or otherwise outlandish clothing and wearing hair long made people feel different. The sensations produced existed on a continuum with other bodily experiences, like drinking alcohol or getting high. Feeling different via all these means complemented listening, and created a sense of the music being absorbed into the body. The space of the *seishen* was where all these different varieties of sensation and kaif came together. Zhora Ordanovskii described the state he reached when performing as akin to intoxication:

When a person gets high [*torchit*] on stage, he is so taken up in the musical process that he starts to behave in a way that (to the uninitiated) seems unnatural, not a way that's acceptable in official musical organisations. Excessive expression is considered unacceptable. We've experienced some unpleasantness because of this; many have said: "They are just drunk!" We

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71 'V ob"iatiakh', p. 14:
ОНА:
> О, незнакомец! Странный вид
>
> Имеешь ты – как инвалид.
>
> Ты без джинсов, ты без шузни,
>
> Без дисков и без волосни...
>
> Но смутно мне твой фэйс знаком.
>
> Ах, Боже мой, какой облом!
>
> Зачем снимаешь ты штаны?

Человек – ОН:
> Чтоб джинсы были там видны
>
> Вот мой прикид. Вот мой прихват.
>
> Тебя я снова видеть рад!

72 Ol'ga Pershina, *V ob"iatiakh dzhinsni / Innokentii* (Otdelenie 'Vykhod', 1997). CD album (sleeve notes).

always give ourselves over wholly to the musical process on stage. Many people think that we work on the movements and gestures we make on stage, but it's not like that, we don't need to think up and work through anything in this respect. Even in rehearsals we try to play, sing and create in a specific state – a state of psychological overexcitement [*vzvinchennosti*].[73]

In 1975 Grebenshchikov fictionalised a concert by Rekshan's group Sankt-Peterburg in a section of a rock-infused novel:

The music came in unexpectedly, and no one could catch the exact moment when the people on stage stopped being people made of flesh and blood and became embodied in sound. Blood rushed to David's temples and the wonder of this embodiment overwhelmed him. The world, shuddering in the wind, melted, and, like dry grass, his heart caught fire. […]

The hall, packed with people, was slowly coming to the boil, normal conversations were cut off as if by a knife. You wouldn't be able to hear them anyway. And the faces looking at the stage, as the heads themselves, began to straighten themselves in this storm of sound. Hearts that were beating out of time merged in with the pulse of the song.[74]

For the musicians and the crowd around them, music was something to be experienced physically, one of a range of other ways of entering an altered state and experiencing a high. The body was the most important material site on which rock could be enacted, and when this happened collectively in a loud concert the effect was transcendent.

Conclusion: We have nothing/we have everything

Writing in memory of his one-time creative collaborator Maik Naumenko, Boris Grebenshchikov cast his mind back to an evening in 1979 or 1980, and to Maik's demonstration of a new song:

I remember the evening when we sat in Maik's kitchen and he sang 'Trash' [*Drian'*]', which he had just written, and there was no feeling of being in any kind of rock and roll backwater [*provintsiia*], or that THERE they could do it and we couldn't – no way! That complex that the majority of our so-called Soviet rock musicians suffered from – *they* can do it, *there* they have the fuzzbox and the wah-wah [*fuz i kvak*], and processing [*obrabotka*], and everything… we didn't have any need for it. Those were some kind of added-on parts, and it was only this that was the right feeling, that if you had written the right song and sung it right once – that was it! The rest would follow.[75]

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73 'Interv'iu s Ordanovskim' 1981.

74 Boris Grebenshchikov, *Roman, kotoryi nikoga ne budet okonchen*, in *Kniga prozy* (Moscow: Alfavit, 1992), pp. 25-95, pp. 52-53.

75 Boris Grebenshchikov in Natal'ia Naumenko (ed.) *Maik iz gruppy "Zoopark": Prodolzhenie sleduet…*

In the 1970s Leningrad was in many respects removed from the mainstream of global rock culture. Western rock bands did not perform there, and their albums were not released to Soviet consumers. But Soviet listeners paid intense attention to the music, tuning in, and finding their own ways to join the movement. Some did become musicians, but they were surely outnumbered by a community of concerted listeners, experts, and collectors. Perhaps it was no wonder that artefacts that had come from elsewhere, like vinyl records, photographs and denim had unrivalled status in instilling a feeling of connectedness. In this sense, all this creative work could be classified under Alexei Yurchak's header of the 'imaginary West', a conceptualisation of what the West looked like to someone who had not been there via its symbols and language.[76] Yet as well as acquiring words, symbols and knowledge, rock music's adherents and proselytisers were responding to something they encountered as sound, and in some ways their efforts, as much as concretising a notion of 'the West', were about imagining something that seemed untethered from human life as they knew it. Their task was to make this pure, sonic energy into something that had material form in the lives they lived, via which, like the hippies, they found a kind of agency in distinguishing themselves from the rest of society.

By the end of its decade as a live form, rock music in Leningrad became a little more like rock music everywhere else: bands made records, records circulated, and audiences grew. Once the average Soviet youth was also wearing jeans, denim began feeling less special on the skin. Yet the live decade, which left few recordings, continued to animate understanding of rock music as a wider constituency of listeners became accustomed to it as an integrated part of life under late socialism.

(Moscow: Nota-R, 2004), pp. 75-76.

76 Yurchak 2006, p. 159.

PORNOGRAPHY, THE EVERYDAY AND MATERIAL CULTURE

Feona Attwood

Pornography appears frequently in public debate and academic discussion, but despite the development of porn studies (with its own journal established in 2014) it is usually presented as a problem, emblematic of the terrifying power of media and of sex. This presentation is evident in a wide range of writings, across political debate, in many popular settings and in academia. In *The Right to Sex: Feminism in the Twenty-first Century*, her highly acclaimed bestselling book, the philosopher, Amia Srinavasan, argues that «porn does not inform, or persuade, or debate. Porn trains. It etches deep grooves in the psyche, forming powerful associations between arousal and selected stimuli bypassing that part of us which pauses, considers, thinks. Those associations, strengthened through repetition, reinforce and reproduce the social meaning assigned by patriarchy to sexual difference».[1] Assuming that porn always comes in cinematic form, she argues that it needs «nothing from us – no input, no elaboration […] only our enthralled attention, which we are compelled to give, and give willingly. In front of the porn film, the imagination halts and gives way, overtaken by its simulacrum of reality».[2]

In this kind of account, pornography is envisaged, not as a form, but as an abstract force, with no particularity. It turns people into things. It is "not real", replacing real relations with something that is inauthentic, spoiling relationships, resulting in people being disconnected from each other and from their own imaginations. In Srinasavan's account, human beings become a kind of medium through which porn plays, simply responding to its stimulation, devoid of thought or complexity of emotion. Neither does porn appear to exist in any kind of human world; the spectator and their life is simply presented as a blank.

It is much less common to encounter discussions of porn that focus on its ordinary, material, everyday dimensions or on people's diverse engagements with it. As Susanna Paasonen and her colleagues note, introducing their own study of Finnish people's memories of pornography, the study of porn is one «of the most obvious knowledge gaps in studies of media history» with little known «of people's everyday encounters with pornography as these have taken shape over the decades, in a range of media».[3] Work like this, in contrast to the abstractions and generalizations of writers such as Srinavasan, is concerned with

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1 A. Srinavasan, *The Right to Sex*, Bloomsbury, London-Dublin 2021 (2022), p. 64.
2 Ibid.
3 S. Paasonen, K. Kyrölä, K. Nikunen, L. Saarenmaa, *"We hid porn magazines in the nearby woods": Memory-work and Pornography Consumption in Finland*, "Sexualities", 18(4), pp. 394-412 (p. 395).

pornography's relation to the material and to different forms of culture – media, popular, sexual – consumption, with thinking about porn in terms of its various forms and formats, as grounded in particular spaces, places and times, as part of the connections and relations with other people or as part of a relation to or with the self.

Over ten years ago we began a project that was take up many hours – and then years – of our time.[4] We wanted to find out what would happen if we asked about people's ordinary everyday engagements with porn, what they accessed and why, where they were and who they were with when they did it, what motivated them, how it connected to their feelings about themselves, their bodies, and about sex. We wanted to know how people found their porn, how they searched for it, what patterns of use there might be, how their relationship with it might change over time. We used an online questionnaire to ask our questions and we received replies from 5490 people. What we gathered is still highly unusual, all these years later, as a collection of ordinary people's words on the subject of pornography.

In the following discussion, I draw on some of those responses, focusing on people's first experiences with porn, how they search for porn, and the idea of what we termed a porn "career" or history with porn. My object here is not to develop a strong argument about what porn "is" or "does", but to follow our participants' accounts in order to sketch out something of their engagement with a range of pornographies and to see where this might lead us in developing a view of porn as located in the material world.

In our project we adopted the idea of the porn "career" as a way of thinking about how people might first encounter porn, how their relationship with it had developed over time, and how their engagements might have related to the various contexts of their lives. We asked people to use the sentence beginning «I first came to porn…» as a way into this, to give an account of their history with porn, ending with a sentence that started «Most recently I have…». Looking at people's descriptions of their first time with pornography, it's striking that what our participants counted as porn is very diverse, unlike the monolithic "pornography" that Srinavasan assumes, and even going far beyond the usual range of pornographic sub-genres that academics have written about. For example, participants listed software magazines, publications aimed at teenage girls, tabloid newspaper "sexy" imagery such as the UK's "page 3" models, lingerie adverts, forbidden books such as *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *Portnoy's Complaint*,[5] Japanese graphic novels, self-help books like

4 For discussions see: M. Barker, *The "Problem" of Sexual Fantasies*, "Porn Studies", 1(1-2), 2014, pp.143-160; C. Smith, M. Barker, F. Attwood, *Why Do People Watch Porn: Results from* PornResearch.Org, in L. Comella, S. Tarrant (eds.), *New Views on Pornography: Sexuality, Politics, and the Law*, Praeger, Santa Barbara 2015, pp. 277-296; C. Smith, F. Attwood, M. Barker, *Queering Porn Audiences*, in M. Laing, K. Pilcher, N. Smith (eds.), *Queer Sex Work*, Routledge, Abingdon-New York 2015, pp. 177-188; F. Attwood, C. Smith, M. Barker, *Porn Audiences Online*, in P. Messaris, L. Humphreys (eds.), *Digital Media 2: Transformations in Human Communication*, Peter Lang, New York 2017, pp. 235-244; F. Attwood, C. Smith, M. Barker, *"I'm just curious and still exploring myself": Young People and Pornography*, "New Media & Society", 20(10), 2018, pp. 3738-3759; F. Attwood, C. Smith, M. Barker, *Engaging with Pornography: An Examination of Women aged 18-26 as Porn Consumers*, "Feminist Media Studies", 21(2), 2021, pp. 173-188.

5 D.H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, The Modern Library, New York 1959 (1928); P. Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint*, Random House, New York 1969.

The Joy of Sex,[6] library books on human sexuality, the work of Nancy Friday, feminist theory addressing porn, and fantasy novels such as Terry Goodkind's *Wizard's First Rule*.[7] While there are a number of conclusions we might draw from this, what I think is most important to notice here is the gulf between the kind of account presented by Srinivasan and the very wide range of sexual materials that become important to individuals in their own everyday lives, belonging to different cultural fields and with very varied aesthetics and modes of address.

The distance travelled, between first and most recent encounter can be glimpsed in many participants' accounts; from a brother's bootleg VHS copy of *New Wave Hookers* (Gregory Dark, 1985) to later searches for «midget porn, group/gangbang scenarios, costume play», from "Playboy" where women looked like «living art» to «amateur porn that was just raw, low/no production sex», from smuggled copies of "Mayfair" at school to «photos I took of my lover». Tastes often change throughout the porn career, though sometimes it is the resonance of a particular kind of content and the continuity it provides that gives it its value – one participant notes: «Pornographic fanfiction and fanart has continued to be one of my main sources of entertainment and socialization, leading to many lasting friendships». For this participant, porn is also a focal point for relationships and connections with others, and not just sexual partners.

Whether it is shared like this or consumed alone in private as a shameful secret or a treasured source of solitary pleasure, porn is rooted in the material world. It is encountered in particular places and spaces. Encounters with pornography take a variety of forms, and this variety can be glimpsed within the accounts of individual participants. Here is one describing a range of formats, genres, and aesthetics, and telling us something not only about the content of the porn they have sought out, but the states of sensation and emotion that they desire:

> I first came to porn in 6th grade where I would masturbate to still images and *literotica*. I eventually began searching for galleries instead of using Google. As I got a better internet connection I discovered videos and would watch the previews for pay porn. Eventually the topics of the video went from softcore to lesbian to hardcore, and very occasionally I would find myself watching things like gangbangs and bestiality. Sometimes I like porn that makes me angry or insecure, such as cheating girlfriends or wifesharing.

Another is more specific about their current interests and the important particularity of an unfolding type of scene:

> Most recently I realized I like amateur and teen porn the best, but it has to meet certain criteria: hot girl, doggystyle among other positions, very hot if she keeps some clothes on and

6 A. Comfort, *The Joy of Sex*, Crown, New York 1972.
7 Terry Goodkind, *Wizard's First Rule*, TOR, New York 1994.

gradually removes more and more during intercourse, no panning to the guys [sic] face for his reaction, and no cumshot, or at least I can exit as the cumshot starts.

At the beginning of a porn career, individuals often make do with whatever is at hand, but after this, porn is found through active searches using a variety of routes; «my boyfriend's search history», friends and partners, sex review sites, Twitter tips, rss feeds, the writings of sexual health professionals and sex advice columnists, email newsgroups or dating sites. Participants describe how, as with other forms of cultural engagement, searching for media is improvised and then finessed – for example, through the use of specific search engines, sites, image boards, text fragments, keywords, focused on specific authors, performers or directors. Some also develop practices and skills of collection, curation, tagging, storing and organizing their materials, and others go on to write or make their own pornography.

People's relationships with porn may vary over time; it might be used regularly, becoming an important part of the routines of life, or only sometimes, occasionally, rarely. Interest in pornography may wax and wane, wane and then wax again, and not always in ways that we might expect. Sometimes it is fascinating and compelling, at other times it becomes dull and tiresome. It may resonate particularly strongly when it is novel, but equally the familiarity of a particular scene or a relationship with a particular performer or director may become central to its importance. Participants describe how they have used it all the time, for a few seconds or minutes, saved it for particular occasions, lost interest. Their relations with porn shift according to the conditions of their changing lives; to age, relationships, what they can and can't do, to their developing sexual identities, desires and fantasies. In this account, a participant suggests how porn may provide a way of engaging with the specific conditions of their body, desire, access and opportunity for sex, and how it may be generative of a range of thoughts, feelings and actions that cannot be reduced to the kind of enthrallment that Srinavasan describes in her account:

> As a male with a disability, porn allows me to indulge in some fantasies and helps relieve some level of sexual frustration. I did not get to enjoy high school and college as some people do. I first came to porn as way of dealing with this. Seeing and hearing the act of sex on screen helped to an extent. I saw certain fetishes, such as pegging, depicted and began to explore that facet of my sexuality. And most recently, I have started to wonder if porn with people with disabilities could be made.

There is an enormous amount to say about people's engagement with porn and while we might find patterns within and across their accounts of that engagement, we might usefully resist the pressure to draw firm or sweeping conclusions about pornography until we know much more about the materialities and particularities of people's engagement with porn and its significance in their lives.

"IT WAS SOMETHING TO BE DONE IN SECRET": REFLECTING ON THE MATERIALITY OF PORNOGRAPHY IN THE FAMILY HOME

Clarissa Smith

> I first came to porn when I opened my dad's secret drawer. I was 10 yrs old. It was exciting and fun. I started to use porn regularly in my early teens. Porn helped me greatly in recognising my sexual preferences. And now I am a happy porn user with vast sexual experience and everlasting curiosity for incredible world of sexuality (1742, male, bisexual, 25-36).

This short exploration of the secret of pornography in the family home emerges from a broader project into the motivations and experiences of individuals of all ages and sexual orientations engaging with pornography. The larger project focused on individuals' recollected histories with pornography, exploring narratives that complicate the framing of young people's encounters as "exposure to pornography" likely to result in negative "effects".[1] Previous articles have acknowledged widespread concerns regarding the impact of sexual media on the well-being of young individuals while advocating for more nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding sexual materials throughout one's life.[2] That research highlighted the evolving landscape of porn consumption, emphasising its potential in the development of sexual identities,[3] as a form of leisure and play,[4] and its connections to the broader emergence of mediated intimacies.[5]

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1 M. A. Horvath, L. Alys, K. Massey, A. Pina, M. Scally, J. R. Adler, *"Basically... Porn is Everywhere": A Rapid Evidence Assessment on the Effects that Access and Exposure to Pornography Has on Children and Young People*, Office of the Children's Commissioner, UK, London 2013.

2 F. Attwood, C. Smith, M. Barker, *"I'm just curious and still exploring myself": Young People and Pornography*, "New Media & Society", 20(10), 2018, pp. 3738-3759; F. Attwood, C. Smith, M. Barker, *Engaging with Pornography: An Examination of Women aged 18-26 as Porn Consumers*, "Feminist Media Studies", 21(2), 2021, pp. 173-188; C. Smith, F. Attwood, M. Barker, *Queering Porn Audiences*, in M. Laing, K. Pilcher, N. Smith (eds.), *Queer Sex Work*, Routledge, Abingdon-New York 2015, pp. 177-188.

3 C. Smith, F. Attwood, M. Barker, *Queering Porn Audiences*, cit.

4 C. Smith, M. Barker, F. Attwood, *Why Do People Watch Porn: Results from* PornResearch.Org, in L. Comella, S. Tarrant (eds.), *New Views on Pornography: Sexuality, Politics, and the Law*, Praeger, Santa Barbara 2015, pp. 277-296.

5 Our research methodology involved the distribution of a questionnaire through social media channels, completed online to gather comprehensive data. Rather than aiming for a representative sample, a diverse demographic was sought, encompassing individuals of various ages, sexual orientations, and levels of engagement with pornography. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, both quantitative and qualitative questions were employed to explore consumption patterns and delve into detailed accounts of porn consumption. The resulting dataset comprised over 5,000 responses, enabling exploration of gender patterns and frequency of engagement with pornography, while qualitative data provided nuanced insights into participants' experiences, enriching our understanding of the significance of pornography in individuals' lives. See: C. Smith, F. Attwood, M. Barker, *Queering Porn Audiences*, cit.; C. Smith, M. Barker, F. Attwood, *Why Do People Watch Porn: Results from* PornResearch.Org, cit.

In this piece I delve into an aspect of the domesticity of pornographic encounters,[6] examining the integration of porn into the household and its impact on familial relationships and individual biographies. The incorporation of pornography into discussion of the material cultures of home may appear to transgress traditional boundaries, given the portrayal of the home as a sanctuary of privacy and safety, and pornography is often depicted in anti-pornography narratives as an invasive presence in the home.[7] Even so, in what follows I'd like to explore some of the ways the stigmatized object that is porn is a form of intimate media managed within the emotional and social spaces of the family sphere.

Historically, pornography has been relegated to the realm of secrecy, concealed within what has been termed a «secret museum».[8] Even in today's era of widespread accessibility, attempts are made to conceal its contents in public spaces, indicative of prevailing societal attitudes towards sexuality.[9] Similarly, within the home, societal expectations necessitate privacy and boundaries around expressions of sexuality, contributing to the invisibility of certain objects, such as pornographic media. This invisibility, explored through sociological perspectives on secrecy, plays a crucial role in the intricate dynamics of family life, contributing to the complex tapestry of relational and emotional work within domestic spheres, as explored in a recent article by Sophie Woodward and Cornelia Mayr to argue for the significance of hidden objects in negotiating and maintaining secrets in everyday life.[10] Hidden objects, whether «wilfully concealed»[11] or actively involved in creating social relations and identities, serve as forms of communication, expression, and consumption, shaping individual actions and choices within familial contexts.[12] Thus, the concealment of objects, such as pornography, within the home reflects broader societal norms and expectations, influencing the dynamics of familial relationships and interactions.

Our exploration of individuals' histories with pornography revealed a recurring theme of "uncovering a secret", underscoring the significance of sexual discovery. For example, in the quotation which opens this article and in these accounts:

> I first came to porn out of curiosity. I didn't know much but the technical facts about sex, and I barely knew what a vagina looked like. I started out printing pictures online when my parents were out, then masturbating to the pictures after everyone was asleep. More recently

6 J. Juffer, *At Home with Pornography: Women, Sex, and Everyday life*, NYU Press, New York 1998.

7 P. Paul, *Pornified: How Pornography Is Damaging Our Lives, Our Relationships, and Our Families*, Henry Holt and Company, New York 2005.

8 W.M. Kendrick, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture*, University of California Press, Oakland 1996.

9 P. Blake, *Age Verification for Online Porn: More Harm than Good?*, "Porn Studies", 6(2), 2019, pp. 228-237; B. Romney, *Screens, Teens, and Porn Scenes: Legislative Approaches to Protecting Youth from Exposure to Pornography*, "Vermont Law Review", 45, 2020, pp. 44-124.

10 S. Woodward, C. Mayr, *Secret Objects in the Home: Potency, (In)visibility and Everyday Relationships*, "Cultural Sociology", 18(3), 2023, pp. 354-369.

11 A. Barnwell, *Family Secrets and the Slow Violence of Social Stigma*, "Sociology", 53(6), 2019, pp.1111-1126 (p. 1112).

12 D. Miller (ed.), *Home Possessions: Material Culture Behind Closed Doors*, Routledge, London 2021; D. Miller, *The Comfort of Things*, Polity, London 2008.

I've settled into a routine of masturbating to erotic videos before bed every night (2019, male heterosexual, 18-25).

I first came to porn as a kid, we found some of my father's porn. Actively we searched more from paper trash, during lower grade. My first decent boyfriend had great appetite of porn, he and his friends amused themselves with it (1841, female heterosexual, 26-35).

Pornography, as a material object, holds hidden secrets associated with adulthood, sex, love, and inner life, representing a form of sexual socialisation.[13] This process aligns with Michel Foucault's argument that sexuality is a historical and discursive construct shaped by power dynamics.[14] Encountering adult's pornography can introduce young individuals to diverse sexual discourses and communities, potentially influencing their beliefs and behaviours.

I know technically it's not porn, but the first time I watched the first *Emmanuelle*. I was at a friend's house, I was 8-9 years old, parents were out, all we knew was that it was something we weren't supposed to watch. That was exciting. Now I'm older I enjoy moments where I'm doing something I shouldn't and may be caught (2186, male heterosexual, 26-35).

The experience of discovering adult pornography could be transformative, evoking a range of emotions and thoughts: it might be likened to a "primal scene", triggering a confrontation with parental or authority figures' sexuality that might be confusing or discomforting,[15] although in the accounts we received there seems to be more sense of "celebration" of having uncovered a secret:

I first came to porn when my brother would find my dad's hidden tapes when we visited him. I grew up in a fundamentally Christian home so porn was always forbidden but who can stop a determined boy going through puberty, right? My dad always had videotapes and magazines and I remember snooping in their room to find it. I remember that day the way you'd remember a particularly awesome Christmas morning (683, Male heterosexual, 26-35).

I first discovered porn around the age of 16, when I found my father's porn collection. I knew he was hiding something from me, and I liked the challenge of discovering it without him knowing. I continued to secretly browse his porn collection, out of curiosity, and from the thrill of doing something "forbidden". Though my initial interest was in images, I went on

13 S. Healy-Cullen, T. Morison, J.E. Taylor, K. Taylor, *Performing Smart Sexual Selves: A Sexual Scripting Analysis of Youth Talk about Internet Pornography*, "Sexualities", 27(8), 2023, pp. 1656-1672; S.V. Knudsen, L. Lofgren-Martenson, S.A. Mansson (eds.), *Generation P?: Youth, Gender and Pornography*, Universitetsforlag, Aarhus 2008.
14 M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction*, Vintage, New York 1990 [Ed. or. *Histoire de la sexualité, vol. 1 : La Volonté de savoir*, Éditions Gallimard, Paris 1976].
15 K.R. Allen, E.A. Gary, E.S. Lavender-Stott, C.E. Kaestle, *"I Walked in on Them": Young Adults' Childhood Perceptions of Sex and Nudity in Family and Public Contexts*, "Journal of Family Issues", 39(15), 2018, pp. 3804-3831.

to develop an interest in his collection of erotic fiction, and I later wrote erotic fiction of my own. When I went to university, aged 18, I cut down on my use of porn, and rarely browsed a small selection of images I had copied from my father's collection. Though lack of access to my father's collection was a strong reason for this, I was also slightly afraid of what others might think. I have lived with my parents since graduation, though I no longer browse my father's collection as often as I once did, instead preferring to write and re-read my own erotic stories. I believe my father is still unaware that I have access to his porn collection (2088, male heterosexual, 26-35).

This last account offers significant insights into an individual journey with pornography and erotic material within the familial context. Initially drawn to images, this young man's interest expanded to include erotic fiction, ultimately leading to the creation of his own stories; his explorations were facilitated by access to his father's collection, indicating the influence of familial environment on early sexual experiences. Once at university, his consumption reduced, citing both limited access to his father's collection and concerns about judgment by his peers. Even so, he continued to engage with erotica through writing and re-reading his own stories. A really interesting dimension to this account (which seems to run through many of the accounts of finding an adult's stash) is the veil of secrecy surrounding the interactions with his father's collection, suggesting a desire for privacy and avoidance of potential conflict within the family. This account highlights the complex interplay between personal exploration, familial influence, societal norms, and creative expression in shaping an individual's relationship with pornography and erotica.

Moreover, both accounts above highlight intergenerational boundaries and the taboo nature of discussing parental sexuality within the family unit. The silences surrounding Dad's sexual preferences likely stem from societal norms that dictate a separation between parental and child identities – parents are viewed as authority figures whose sexual desires are considered private and off-limits for discussion. The reluctance to delve into Dad's sexual subjecthood may reflect broader cultural attitudes towards parental authority and the preservation of familial harmony. This silence observed between children and parents regarding pornography discovery is perhaps indicative of the larger communication gap surrounding sexuality within the family where many struggle with discussing sexual topics openly,[16] leading to a lack of understanding and communication about sexual preferences, desires, and boundaries and where stigma, «an often unseen and accretive form of social violence – is experienced and managed within families via secrecy»:[17]

I first came to porn when I found in the street a gay magazine, with pictures and stories. Then I started buying my own mags to "enhance" my masturbation sessions. I did that for years

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16 M.A.J. Noorman, C. den Daas, J.B.F. de Wit, *How Parents' Ideals are Offset by Uncertainty and Fears: A Systematic Review of the Experiences of European Parents regarding the Sexual Education of Their Children*, "The Journal of Sex Research", 60(7), 2023, pp. 1034-1044.

17 A. Barnwell, *Family Secrets and the Slow Violence of Social Stigma*, cit. p. 1111.

and years, while living with my parents, despite the fact that my mother threw away every single mag she came across (5145, queer male, 36-45).

This lack of acknowledgement of the child's sexual preferences reflects gender norms and expectations whereby gay male sexuality is framed as the unnamed secret between mother and son.[18] Here the secret might be understood as «protective»,[19] perhaps his mother hoped to avoid saying the wrong thing or wanted to preserve her son's privacy and autonomy even if her silence might potentially contribute to feelings of isolation or shame. Other respondents were not so fortunate as to have their secrets unacknowledged:

> My mother caught me masturbating and beat me off with a belt, and locked me in a dark room (I used to panic in the dark) with a candle burning and said: you will have to pray for your sins all night and you will only be able to leave this room once this candle has burnt entirely. I cried throughout the night and felt so guilty (my father was travelling and she said that once he would be back, she would tell him about it and he would be so disappointed that only God could know what would happen to me). I carried that guilt until I was 12 (I didn't stop touching myself, but I had crazy thoughts like I'd get pregnant every time I would touch my vagina and then I would pray). When I reach 12 years old, I finally figured that the whole process had a name: masturbating, and it was completely normal for people to do it (even though my mother always made sure to say out loud that she never had touched herself as she had always had men to fulfil her and touching yourself is something for lesbians and therefore, horrible) (5166, heterosexual female, 18-25).

In the above history, a distressing narrative of familial abuse and control is marked by the mother's physical punishment, religious manipulation, and emotional coercion. The secrecy surrounding the incident likely perpetuated stigma and isolation of the teenager, while the strained relationships within the family surely underscore the complex dynamics at play where discovery, shaming and silencing are recurring possibilities in the everyday of family life.

> Porn has always been very important to my life; my first real exposure to sexually explicit media was through Internet porn when I was barely in junior high (and back when the Internet was a novel thing, the ubiquity of porn therein wasn't something kids readily knew about and felt blasé towards). The way my father handled the discovery of my porn viewing was devastating to my young self for years – I was terrified and ashamed at any mention of sex, worried to death he would tell my mother (not for nothing, either; he would occasionally allude to it as I would desperately try to change the subject) (4961, female, queer, 18-25).

18 J.L. Allen, K.Y. Huggins-Hoyt, J. Nobile, D.T. Boyd, *A Descriptive Qualitative Analysis of Gay Men's Recollection of Parental Similarities and Differences in Their Approaches to Talking about Sexual Orientation and Sexual Behaviors*, "Journal of GLBT Family Studies", 17(4), 2021, pp. 393-412.

19 S. Ahmed, *Secrets and Silence in Feminist Research*, in R. Ryan-Flood, R. Gill (eds.), *Secrecy and Silence in the Research Process: Feminist Reflections*, Routledge, London 2010, pp. xvi-xxi.

Both narratives of emotional trauma, highlight the potential impact of experiences of being discovered, suggesting that pornography as an object to be hidden and found can play a significant role in shaping and reflecting familial intimacy dynamics, contributing to the negotiation of emotional and physical distance or closeness among family members.

Thus, the materiality of pornography within the home underscores the negotiation of boundaries between public and private realms, visible and invisible domains, and self and other. There are various ways to think through the secrets and conflicts that are entangled in the place of pornography in the domestic space – how does pornography function within family dynamics, what is its role as a personal, professional, public, and collective secret. If curiosity and exploration of difference drive individuals' engagements with pornography, fostering what Susanna Paasonen has termed «carnal resonance»,[20] then the exploration of moral boundaries and the negotiation of autonomy and adult interests are integral to individuals' experiences with pornography, reflecting broader societal attitudes towards sexuality and intimacy.

20 S. Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 2011.

ANALOG BOARD GAMES AS CITIZEN JOURNALISM

Brian Train*

I have been designing analog wargames for the civilian market for about 30 years, and so far I have published over 65 titles[1]. Many of my games are about conflicts occurring during those 30 years, designed not long after the actual events and sometimes even during the conflict itself. My motivation in doing this is to try to make sense of the world I live in, and to share this understanding with other people, through games.

I believe this makes them a form of amateur or citizen journalism, where the author presents their research on an event or issue in an interactive format. Because it is presented through a set of rules and components that allow other people to discover and explore the event or issue through play, it is unlike other forms of citizen journalism such as magazine articles, blog posts, Youtube videos or podcasts. Yet it is also like these forms because it does have a definite context and selective representation of the events by the game's designer, and certainly does invite discussion, argument and variation by the player.

In this article I will present historical and current examples of these analog games and their various uses under the general objectives of journalism. I will also discuss them as political and commemorative objects, which gives them status as meaningful artifacts of popular culture that exemplify or criticize the culture they come from. And to follow the academic practice of subdividing and classifying everything within reach, I will consider them as illustrations of three distinct genres or types of newsgame.
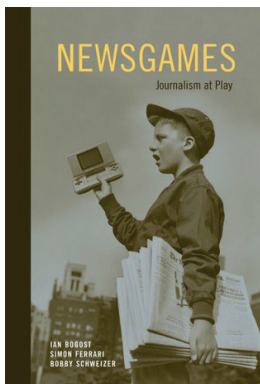
The word "newsgame" was invented in 2003 by the video game designer and academic researcher Gonzalo Frasca, in connection with his satirical video game *September 12th*. The term became much more widely used in the game studies community when Ian Bogost, Simon Ferrari and Bobby Schweizer published *Newsgames: Journalism at Play* in 2011[2]. IIn the book, Bogost described how videogames distributed through the Internet could satisfy the basic objectives of journalism(to inform, educate, criticize and persuade), improve the effectiveness of journalists in achieving those objectives, and possibly rescue journalism itself. Bogost would mention newsgames occasionally in his writing and journalism

for a few more years. Then, in 2020 he wrote an opinion piece for *Convergence*, a journal dedicated to new media technologies, called "Curiosity journalism, or the first decades of newsgames"[3]. In it, he described the promise of the early days of newsgames and concluded that while a number of interesting examples had appeared, newsgames have generally failed to deliver on that promise, for a number of reasons:

– Their creators were not inspired or inspiring;
– They were a lot of work to create, from design to coding;
– It took a lot of time to finish, test, and debug them;
– It was difficult to distribute them widely – for example, a promising website called "GameTheNews" could not get its game about the Syrian Civil War onto the Apple AppStore because it was "too political" until they changed the names to imaginary countries and factions;
– Finally, few people seemed to be interested in the end product for more than a few days.

Put simply, the video newsgame model could not be made to pay. The amount of time and work and money required to do it properly could neither respect the high-speed news cycle nor generate the necessary attention and revenue for it to be viable.

> Journalism games were a long shot, for reasons that had little to do with games and more to do wth everything else happpening in the media and tech industries.... Computers turned out to be the authoring and distribution system for 20th Century media, not hosts for proceudural media like software and simulations. Those circumstances can partly explain the shift from games to gamification.... (p. 574, 576)

So it appeared that one of the original developers of the form, and its best known chronicler, was ready to declare it moribund and move on to the Next Big Thing. I was not that surprised to read this, since neither the original book nor this "bookend" piece mentioned analog games at all (except for a chapter in the book discussing crosswords and puzzles appearing in newspapers). It is well known that this area of cultural studies, particularly in the United States, is almost completely devoted to computer and video games and is persistently ignorant both of its analog history and of the analog games that continue to be published alongside digital games.

The fact remains that the practice of producing analog or analog newsgames predates video games by a very long time, and continues today. Many of them stand as fine examples of citizen-based social criticism and analytic journalism. Bogost's remark in 2020 about computers as authoring and distribution systems for analog games was a belated recognition of a process that had started in the 1990s.

Jeremy Antley [4] has noted that analog games present themselves along three axes: material (components), textual (rules and notes) and procedural (mechanics codified by the other

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3 I. Bogost, *Curiosity Journalism, or the first decades of Newsgames,* "Convergence, The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies", April 27, 2020 Vol. 26(3)

4 J. Antley, *Struggling with Deep Play: Utilizing Twilight Struggle for Historical Inquiry*, in M. Kirschenbaum

two axes). He also noted that "wargames are synthesized reflections of the past situated in the present mindset of their creation." The same could be said of any game whose topic relates to not just war, but social and political issues of the past.

I will present examples of these games divided into three general classes of treatment:
– A classical game design given a reskinning to make a critical or satirical point, that is something about the level of an editorial cartoon;
– An original but mechanically simple game design that makes an obvious polemical point, about the level of an editorial or opinion piece;
– A closely researched, mechanically complex simulation game that resembles the data-heavy "special feature" analytic pieces that still appear in magazines or specialized journals.

I will explain how the three classes of games differ along these axes, and give some examples from the past and present.

Three Axes of Presentation:

- Material (components)
- Textual (rules and notes)
- Procedural (mechanics codified by the above two axes)

Material

Textual   Procedural
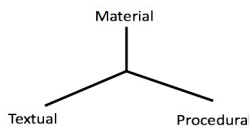
- Jeremy Antley, "Struggling with Deep Play: Utilizing Twilight Struggle for Historical Inquiry".
Zones of Control: Perspectives on Wargaming (463-470)

Before the Internet: reskinning classic games for classic journalism

In *Critical Play*, Mary Flanagan [5] writes on the practice of purposeful remixing or reskinning of classic board games by artists and designers for the purpose of parody, satire or to deliver a moral lesson somewhat altered from the original intent. The simplest form of analog newsgame is one that adopts the appearance and mechanism of a classic board game for familiarity with readers, but replaces the original game's contents with content on a contemporary social or political issue. Hence (per Antley) the procedural and material axes tend to be weak, but the textual axis is emphasized.

One of these classic board games is the "Goose Game" or *Jeu de l'oie*, a European children's game. Traditionally, the game uses a spiral-shaped track of 63 spaces and players move forward and backward on it according to the throw of two dice, attempting to win by landing exactly on the final space. It has been used for imparting morality lessons like

Snakes and Ladders once was in the English-speaking world, but its structure has been used for many other purposes.[6]
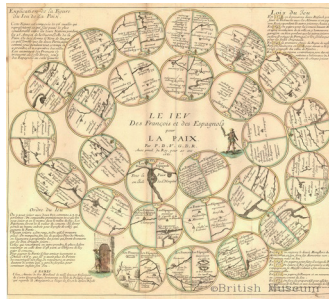
The earliest example I have been able to find of an attempt to document and interpret a contemporary sociopolitical event in the form of a game is *Le Jeu des François et des Espagnols pour la Paix (The Game of French vs. Spanish for Peace)*. The game board is a spiral with 26 spaces, each labelled with a date between 1635 and 1660 and detailing an event in the Franco-Spanish wars. The left side of each space details the French gains and the right side, those of the Spaniards. The final space celebrates the end of the war in 1660, the year this hand-coloured etching was published.
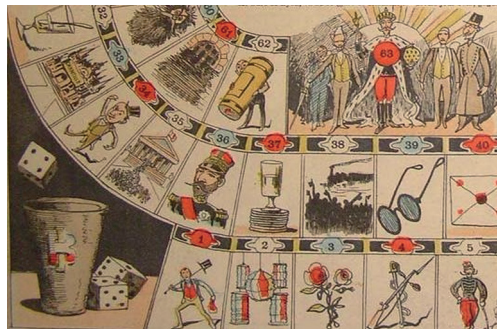
Jumping forward two hundred years, an example of the Goose Game being used for satire is *Le General Boulanger*, a game published in the Paris newspaper *Le Figaro* in 1889. It is about the career of General Ernest Boulanger, a reactionary politician who at the time was threatening to lead a right-wing coup d'etat and become dictator of France. This spiral-track "goose game" format, familiar to readers from their childhood as a vehicle of moral lessons, was subverted as the cellular structure of the game relayed a narrative shot through with sarcastic comments on the stages of the General's military and political career.

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6 A. Seville, *The Geographical Jeux d'oie of Europe*, "Belgeo, the Belgian Journal of Geography", volume 3-4 (2008) 427-444. Also, this Italian language website compiles nearly 3,000 examples, editions and variation on the Goose game: http://www.giochidelloca.it/ricerca.php.

Pank-a-Squith was a board game produced in 1909 on the "Votes for Women" movement in Great Britain. Using a spiral track, small lead Suffragette figures would leave their parlour at home in square 1 and advance past hazards like arrest and detainment by police and judges, hunger strikes and so on until reaching the Houses of Parliament.

An example of war propaganda from early 1945 is *Gioco delle 3 Oche (Game of the Three Geese)*, produced in the Italian Social Republic. Its spiral track is divided into 50 spaces with Fascist and racist messages: space 14 features a caricature of an apelike Black American soldier; space 35 shows American "Liberator" bombers destroying schools while space 37 shows V-1 flying bombs striking London; and space 50, the goal, promises the redeemed honour of Italy through secret weapons and the New Order.

A remarkable adaptation of the Goose Game appeared in the Italian comics magazine *Linus* in April 1976. *Il Gioco de L'Ockheed (The Game of L'Ockheed)* satirized the multinational Lockheed aerospace company bribery scandal, even playing on the assonance of the company's name and "*le oche*" (the geese). Players moved along a classic spiral track of 63 spaces to the ultimate goal. [7]

In the United States, the structure and rules of *Monopoly* would often be used for these kinds of games because the mechanics and conventions (roll and move, acquiring property

7 Italian author, game designer and journalist Andrea Angiolino organized "I Newsgame di fine millennio" (Newsgames at the end of the Millennium), an exhibition of Italian analog newsgames in Modena in March, 2011 as part of a game fair. Many examples of Italian-language games in this article are drawn from documentation of this exhibition: http://www.giochidelloca.it/storia/modena.pdf.

while trying to bankrupt the other players) would already be well-known to readers from their childhoods.

Blacks and Whites (1970 + 2020)

An attempt to explore the issue of race and inequality was *Blacks and Whites*, which was included in the March 1970 issue of *Psychology Today* magazine. It used the general concepts of *Monopoly* and was conceived as a painless way for middle-class whites to try to understand the frustrations of blacks. Examples of game rules that reinforced this included: a White player started with 100 times more money than a Black player and was able to buy property anywhere, while Black players were always the minority of the players in a group, started with less money and collected less on each trip around the board, were unable to buy certain properties and had to draw from a separate Chance deck.

A later redesign of the game encouraged playes to change the rules, after debate, when anyone landed on the "People's Park" space (analogous to Free Parking). The new rules gave Black players an opportunity to use – and even to beat – the System. From the distance of 50 years this revision seems charming in its optimism and earnestness. However, in 2020 a graphic, mechanical and content update underlining how little has changed was made for a 50th anniversary edition; it handily achieved sufficient funding on Kickstarter to be published.


The drug war was parodied in the September 1971 issue of *Playboy* magazine with *Feds n' Heads*, which used underground cartoonist Gilbert Shelton's cartoon characters "The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers". It was a roll and move game somewhat like *Monopoly*

though instead of buying property, players moved around the tracks on the board trying to buy kilos of drugs and stash them at home, while avoiding Burns, Busts and Bummer cards.

   All of the examples given here predate the Internet, and in fact predate video games themselves. Most of them belong to the general roll-and-move genre, as something that would be mechanically familiar to both children and adults. Again, they are not innovative game designs themselves, nor (to be honest) even particularly interesting games, but they are purposeful in their application under the objectives of journalism to variously inform, educate and criticize.

The politically performing object: original game designs as propaganda and polemic

There is also a more modern tradition of socially or politically critical newsgames on contemporary topics that do not imitate the structure of classic board games but are relatively simple mechanically, in order to present the players with the basic features and dilemmas of the situation quickly. Here, the material and textual axes are more prominent than the procedural though the points made through the exercise of the mechanics can be quite strong.
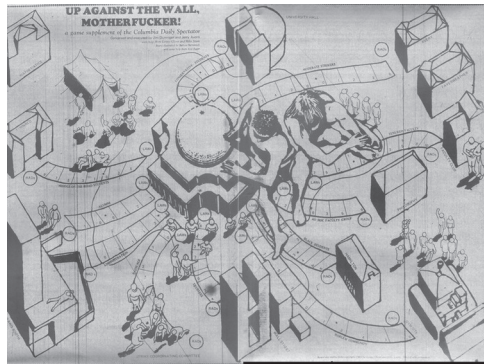
An early example that dealt with the unrest on American college campuses in the 1960s was *UP AGAINST THE WALL, MOTHERFUCKER* which appeared in the *Columbia Daily Spectator*, Columbia University's student paper in 1969. The game board, which is a number of trails winding around the buildings of the Columbia campus, looks like a standard roll-and-move game. Instead, players allocate resources to these trails, which are actually scales of the attitudes of different groups contending within the university power structure – Conservative Students, Alumni, Tenured Faculty, and so on – and rolling dice in hope of changing these attitudes. The game was designed by James Dunnigan, who went on to create Simulations Publications Incorporated or SPI, a company that produced hundreds of historical wargames between 1970 and 1982.
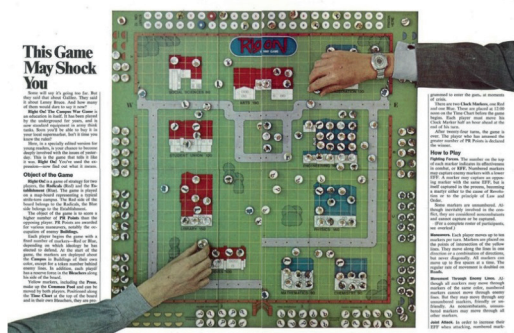
National Lampoon also published "Right On! The Campus War Game" in its October 1971 issue; this was an article presented as the partial rules, pieces and map for a simulation of conflict on an American college campus between red Radicals, blue Establishment, and yellow Common Pool pieces like journalists, Concerned Mothers, and the campus chaplain. Though the game was unplayable, it described several mechanics recognizable in early wargames such as a combat rating on counters, terrain affecting movement, and so on.

Other examples of critical games that appeared in periodicals include *Strike!* in *Games and Puzzles* magazine in 1981. This game was a simple simulation of the British car industry of the 1970s and was a reflection of the tumultuous labour unrest of the period. The game asks players to do the impossible: the game is played in teams of two, one representing the managing director of a car manufacturer, and the other the union leader of its workforce. Each team must work to achieve their diametrically opposed objectives within the company, while helping to sweep the competition (other teams) from the market. *Tchernobyl sur Loire* ran in the French magazine *Jeux & Stratégie* in 1990: in it, two to four players representing industrial conglomerates tried to get as rich as possible by developing polluting industries and manipulating ecologists to interfere with other conglomerates' development.

▲
Business - Il gioco del potere riguarda il controllo trasversale di aziende di vario genere, dalle banche all'informazione pubblica e privata. Dal punto di vista dei meccanismi ludici, echeggia il Go come il dilemma del prigioniero; in copertina Gianni Agnelli (collezione R. Vadalà).

A remarkable but short-lived experiment was the Italian magazine *Il Bel Paese*. It existed only from 1985 to 1986 but each month saw the publication of one or more simple games

in its pages inspired by news and current events. Scandals were plentiful at that time, so the designers had plenty to work with as they made fun of the embarassments of government ministers, politicians and figures like Silvio Berlusconi, then a major media and broadcasting figure before he formally entered politics. The games had simple short typeset rules, many mechanics were based on card play, and a very simple graphic style prevailed. The satirical magazine *Totem Comic* also occasionally produced political satire games [8]

The 1990s saw the mass acquisition of desktop computers in homes and of course the advent of the Internet. One result of these developments was an upsurge in the number of self-published games, due to two things: the development of cheap, easy to use desktop publishing software and the Portable Document Format to produce them; and the use of the Internet to store and distribute them – that is, the Print and Play format. It was now possible for not just large publishers but also small companies and individual people to design, develop and distribute their own games over the Internet for free.

TerrorBull print-and-play games (2010-15)

In It Together

Mosqopoly

Bullshit Plug

Our Sonovabitch

*"**TerrorBull Games** are on a mission to rediscover and resurrect the forgotten tradition of using board games to tackle real life dilemmas. Games used to be a tool of understanding, a prism through which to interrogate the world - a fun tool, but a tool nevertheless. Now they're all about trading sheep or wooing princesses."* -- TerrorBull Games Manifesto, 2015

Terrorbull Games published the controversial board game *War on Terror* in 2006 and also produced a number of free print and play games on its website: *Operation BP: Bullshit Plug* (2010) on managing public relations during the BP Deepwater Horizon disaster; I*n It Together* (2015), a simple lesson on perpetuated inequality; *Our Sonovabitch* (2011) on arms sales to countries in the Arab Spring; *Mosqopoly* (2010) about the "Ground Zero Mosque" controversy in Manhattan; *Metakettle* (2011), a game for protesters to play while being confined by the police; and *Deepsea Desperation* (2010) – designed for Greenpeace, a game in which one player creates marine reserve zones on a grid representing the ocean while the other player drills for oil, extracting profits. Each game was only one or two pages long, with short rules and simple principles – for example, *Operation BP: Bullshit Plug* used the Prisoner's Dilemma as a resolution mechanic for players matching cards and trying to maximize their scores.[9]

8 Angiolino exhibition documentation.

9 A. Sheerin, (designer): *Crunch: The Game for Utter Bankers* (2009), *Deepsea Desperation* (2010), *In It*

As noted earlier, Bogost's book did not mention analog games at all. Bogost doesn't seem to have written very much about board games generally, and in this case he was probably even less interested in spending any time writing about the analog past or present of something he was explaining needed to be done in the digital realm. However, in 2011 Simon Ferrari, one of the book's co-authors, wrote a piece for mediashift.org about paper prototyping as a method of developing a videogame. In it, he did a quick review and analysis of several of these Terrorbull print-and-play games and singled them out for praise, saying that they "far exceed the quality and complexity of many editorial video games (and all of the prototype-quality videogames seen on Flash game portals)" and "it shows that the combination of paper prototyping and print-and-play have the potential to make valuable contributions to ludic commentary on both breaking and ongoing issues." [10]

Other illustrations of this can be found on Boardgamegeek.com, a database and information resource on boardgames that has entries for over 84,000 items. A quick search reveals a number of free "web published" games with satirical or critical political content. Examples include: *Final Decrees* (1999); *Run Hippy Run!* (2000); *Bastards Inc.* (2004); *Free at Last* (2006); *#Occupy Boardwalk* (2011); *Austerity* (2015); *Construction Boom* (2020) and many election-themed or party politics games from 2001 onwards that take place in real or imaginary/generic settings. These games are normally small in size, short in length, and are presented with simple graphics or use only a small number of components so that assembling and playing them is not too onerous or complex.

DRONE (2013)
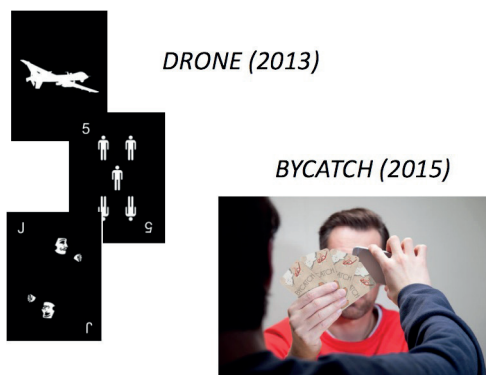
BYCATCH (2015)

Two illustrations of this cheap and cheerful approach can be found in two games dealing with drone warfare: *DRONE* (2013) and *Bycatch* (2015). In the former, the designer Sonny Rae Tempest offers a sheet of free print-and-play instructions to use a deck of ordinary playing cards (a version with more thematic artwork is available for sale through The Game Crafter) to simulate seeking out hidden targets while minimizing "collateral damage" (dead

Together (2015), *Metakettle* (2011), *Mosqopoly* (2010), *Operation BP: Bullshit Plug* (2010), *Our Sonovabitch* (2011), *War on Terror* (2006). Terrorbull Games, 2006 - 2015.

10 S. Ferrari, *Why Newsgame Development Should Look to Paper Protoyping*, Mediashift.org, September 16, 2011. http://mediashift.org/2011/09/why-newsgame-development-should-look-to-paper-prototyping256 [December 20, 2020]

civilians). In *Bycatch*, players hold hands of cards, and choose which cards of their rivals are eliminated based on badly focused cellphone pictures of those hands, taken the previous turn by a phone held backwards. Both are strong statements on the collection and use of intelligence and its human costs, using common objects to follow simple but novel rules.[11]
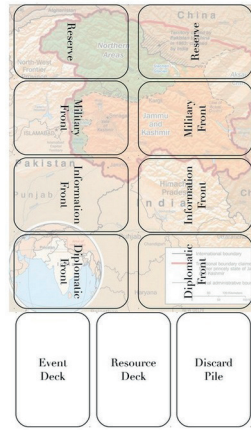
Here is an example of my own work in this vein: *Kashmir Crisis*, a simple card-based game for 2 players. It is about the February 2019 Pulwama suicide bomber incident that caused several months of tension between India and Pakistan. A month or two after the incident an academic researcher and photojournalist at Toronto Metropolitan University in Canada suggested to me that with his research and fieldwork in Kashmir, and my game design experience, we could work together in this "gamer-citizen journalism" vein, to let people find out a bit more about the crisis in Kashmir. So, we did and very quickly we offered it up for free print-and-play, just a few months after the initial incident.

Kashmir Crisis is played with a deck of ordinary playing cards and takes about 15 minutes to play. During each game turn, players will receive a number of cards from the deck and play them onto Diplomatic, Information or Military Fronts. This abstractly shows the scale of effort a country is investing in obtaining a favourable result in that sphere of activity. Players were scored on the cards they had played and there were consequences for winning or losing on different fronts.

We thought that this might have seemed just too abstract for some players, and others who could not imagine what playing a "5" card represents, and why a "5" is better than a "3" but not as good as a "7". So, to give them a bit of a verbal prompt in building the story of the unfolding of the conflict together (which is the goal of playing a game with another person), we included a sheet of "narrative prompts": that is, adjectives, verbs and nouns that might help someone describe or imagine what they are doing in the game.

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11 S. R. Tempest, (designer): *DRONE* (2013) and S. Udayasankar (designer): *Bycatch* (2015)

Later on, a computer science student at Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh made a digital version of this game as a course project, so making it a form of semi-digital newsgame. [12]

Board wargames and historiography

The most complex strain of analog newsgame is the serious board wargame devoted to the study of current or hypothetical events. Where previous examples could be compared to shorter snappier editorials, opinion pieces or satires these are analogous to the analytical, data-heavy "special feature" magazine or journal piece. They can feature considerable depth of analysis as the result of intensive research, delivered to players through innovative mechanics that have been thoroughly developed and tested. Of course, there are also many examples of wargames that fall short of these adjectives, but in the end historical board wargames on contemporary topics are strong along all three of Antley's material, textual and procedural axes.

Matt Kirschenbaum, a professor at the University of Maryland who writes on the digital humanities and new media as well as wargames, calls the unfolding of the play of a board wargame the construction of a "vast procedural narrative": [13]

– vast because the number of permutations and decisions in even a small wargame is much, much larger than those in a game of chess;
– procedural because the decisions are both driven and limited by an elaborate but transparent set of rules; and
– a narrative of the play of the game – optimistically called an "after action report" by players – can read like a very plausible and even entertaining piece of war journalism (depending on the skill of the writer).

The narrative that emerges from the wargame flows from both the dense information packed into the game via its components and from the way the players have processed that information.

In both circumstances the rules are what most strongly affects the processes. A game with detailed rules tends to have a map and pieces with a similar level of sophistication and detail.

But these material components are the medium through which the game takes place, subject to and limited by the (textual) rules which establish procedures. In a well-designed game, the textual element fades into the background while players explore the game world and together create the narrative, the story, the "hook" that a journalist strives to place in their work to achieve their objective.

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12 "A Playful Learning Exercise: Kashmir Crisis". Authors: Charlie Murray, Hans-Wolfgang Loidl, Brian Train. Games and Learning Alliance: 10th International Conference, GALA 2021, La Spezia, Italy, December 1–2, 2021, Proceedings Dec 2021Pages 3–13 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92182-8_1.

13 M. Kirschenbaum, *War Stories: Board Wargames and (Vast) Procedural Narratives*, in P. Harrigan (ed.), *Third Person: Authoring and Exploring Vast Narratives*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2009, p. 357.

In 1969 James Dunnigan founded Simulations Publications Incorporated (SPI) while he was still an undergraduate at Columbia University (where he had designed the *Up Against the Wall* game mentioned earlier). This was one of the first publishing companies devoted to the hobby, and it would publish more than 300 wargame designs before it folded in 1982. About a hundred of them were designed by him, and about a quarter of the company's total output was published in *Strategy and Tactics*, a bimonthly magazine that was the first periodical devoted to wargaming that contained playable games. While the original company is no more, the magazine is still active and has published more than 350 issues as of this writing.

Each issue of *Strategy and Tactics* contained a playable game. These games were something very different for their time. They were sophisticated, researched and modelled simulations, designed by people who were generally not professional analysts or historians. Besides the game, the magazine would also contain articles totalling 5,000 to 10,000 words or more of analysis and context – the history, course and broader aspects of the conflict portrayed in the game. Normally this was also written by the game's designer, so the writer's research would be presented twice: once as a standard written feature in a magazine, and again where the research was quantified and joined with a set of game mechanics to make a game that readers could play and explore the topic for themselves. These are clear examples of amateur analytic journalism, and are a version of the "platform" genre of newsgame described in Bogost's book, where a game is supported by extensive background material.
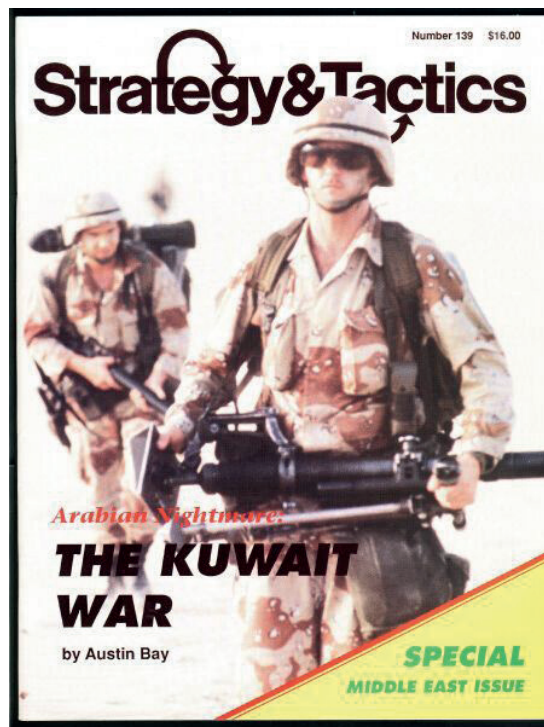
Dunnigan was also fascinated by the ability of board games to explore contemporary and hypothetical conflicts. This wasn't anything that the American professional military wasn't already doing, with good reason. So why shouldn't civilians also explore these problem spaces for themselves, with the benefit of some research and tested game mechanics?

One of the earliest examples of this is *Year of the Rat*, a game on the Easter Offensive in Vietnam in 1972 and published less than six months after the actual event (in 1972 terms, that was still within one news cycle!). In the following year SPI staff, mainly Dunnigan, were working on *Sinai*, a game on past Arab-Israeli Wars, when the actual 1973 Arab-Israeli War started just as they were playtesting a "hypothetical 1970s" scenario. The story is told that several times, a military attache from the Israeli consulate would stop by SPI to see how testing was progressing and what results were being generated from the games. Finally *Arabian Nightmare: Kuwait War* (1991) was probably the first analog wargame to be designed, tested and developed mainly over the Internet. Within days of the Iraqi invasion in August 1990, Dunnigan and his co-designer Austin Bay began to communicate over the GEnie online service with developers, playtesters and graphic artists to create a game that reached subscribers in January 1991, just as the real Operation Desert Storm got underway.

Besides these near-immediate treatments of actual contemporary conflicts, many games on hypothetical topics appeared in *Strategy and Tactics*. Issues published before 1990 deal with large-scale regional wars (*Oil War, Revolt in the East, South Africa, The China War, RDF, Nordkapp, Central Command, Target Libya*) or a World War III in Europe that never happened (*Berlin '85, Fifth Corps, BAOR, Superpowers at War, North German Plain, Donau Front*).

The United States tends to dominate the board wargaming hobby in terms of publishers, titles and players but three examples of hypothetical wargames that did not appear in an American specialty publication were: *Il Golpe (The Coup)*, published in three consecutive issues of the Italian weekly newsmagazine *Panorama* in the spring of 1980; *Polonia '81 (Poland '81)* in February 1981 in *Pergioco*, a monthly game and puzzle magazine; and *La battaglia delle Falkland (Battle of the Falklands)* in the weekly news magazine *Il Mondo* in early 1982. Respectively they dealt with a conjectural military coup in Italy, a Soviet invasion of Poland, and the war for the Falkland Islands (hypothetical when designed, it was published just as the actual invasion got underway, much like *Arabian Nightmare: Kuwait War*). All three of them took the visual form of hex-and-counter games with short rules. [14]

This speculative practice continues to this day, and even got a special focus with the launch of *Modern War* magazine by Decision Games (the current publisher of *Strategy and Tactics*) in 2012. Many issue games reflected current fears and concerns, from piracy off the Horn of Africa to a future collapse of China, a war of all against all in the Middle East, or possible Russian expansionism against all points of the compass.

As a side note, unfortunately that magazine ceased publication in 2022 because of poor sales. After 30 years of designing these games, my conclusion is that while every board

14 Angiolino exhibition documentation.

wargamer may have a deep interest in one or more particular periods of history, often they are no more interested in current affairs than non-gamers. Even after "9/11", the most transformative and psychologically traumatic event for Americans in their recent history, the explosion of books, magazine article, blogs and websites devoted to counterterrorism and counterinsurgency was not matched by any large increase in the number of intellectually demanding commercial board games on the subject.

As noted before, personal computers and the Internet have made distribution of simpler analog newsgames possible through print-and-play. The same factors apply to quick production of analog analytical games on current and hypothetical topics. It has been possible for some time for a person so motivated to produce and distribute an analog newsgame on a particular topic far faster than the video newsgames that Bogost proposed in his book.

Here are some examples, several from my own work.
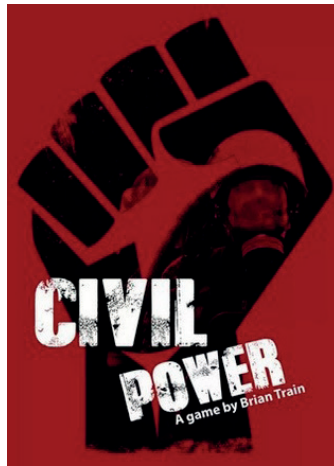
Civil Power was one of the first games I designed, in 1991-92. It was a tactical game about riots and other civil disturbances, an unusual subject for a wargame, but a very common topic in the news. I designed it as a "sandbox" game, a deliberately flexible approach to design with generic components and maps that permit and encourage players to come up with their own situations. So while the game's original list of scenarios included situations from 1968 (Paris and Chicago) and 1975 (Northern Ireland), I also included ones for a student riot in Seoul, a confrontation with neo-Nazis in Pretoria, and the Rodney King riots in Los Angeles. These were contemporary events: while I was working on the game, I would read about an event in the newspaper and come up with a game scenario for it.

The latest edition of the game (2022) has scenarios for anti-government riots in Hong Kong, Venezuela, and Paris and incorporates rules for anti-riot technology that did not exist in 1992 such as drones or the use of focused RF energy to disperse crowds.
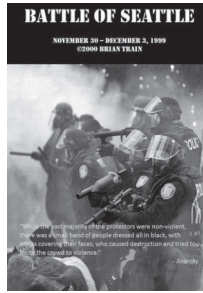
At the end of 1999, there were three days of popular demonstrations against the World Trade Organization conference in Seattle. Within two weeks of the event I had designed the game *Battle of Seattle*. This design reflected some of my thoughts at the time about violent civic confrontations and perceptions of how one side or the other could "win" the battle for image leverage and information dominance. It was a mostly serious game on an important episode of public protest, but I also gave it a satirical quality through the playful images I put on the counters and in some random events like "Paperwork", where a Police unit is removed to spend the rest of the game filling out forms. I've made the game files available for free on my personal website and on Boardgamegeek for years, but they also were pretty promptly "copylefted" and have appeared on some anarchist and radical websites. [15]

In November 2012, in response to the Gaza Missile Crisis, the American designer Paul Rohrbaugh produced a solitaire game called *A Reign of Missiles*. The player attempts to defend Israeli territory from randomized rocket and missile launches from Gaza. What was interesting about this design was not only the speed with which it was produced – again, within two weeks of the actual event – but also that it was featured in the November 28, 2012 issue of *Foreign Policy* magazine. The files to the map, counters and rules were linked to the online version of an article by Michael Peck, a journalist who was also a gamer. Readers were invited to download them, print them out, and make comments and suggestions.

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15 https://brtrain.wordpress.com/free-games/.

In March, 2014, the people of the Crimea held a referendum to decide whether they should stay in Ukraine. This was a drastic escalation of the brinkmanship and potential violence in the region. So, I did what anyone with an interest in current events and a free weekend would do: within 48 hours I designed an analog newsgame on the political, military and information warfare dimensions of the crisis, called *Ukrainian Crisis*. I posted the print and play game files to my webpage for free download on March 16, 2014, the day of the referendum itself. It's been available as a free Print and Play from my website ever since, and the game files have been downloaded over a thousand times.

An important point to repeat about newsgames is that they often have greater temporary value than permanent – that is, they are suited to explore the event as it was understood at the time of its production. The earlier examples I have given were reactions to scandals and concerns of the day, and while some of them are still matters of concern like racism or the drug war, they have to be understood as ephemera.

For example, my *Ukrainian Crisis* game is appropriate only for the first six months of the crisis, ending with the First Minsk Agreement in September 2014. After this the possibility of a large overt Russian invasion faded into the background while a low-intensity war continued. However, this did not stop people from asking me, when that invasion finally came EIGHT years later, when I would design a new scenario for the game.
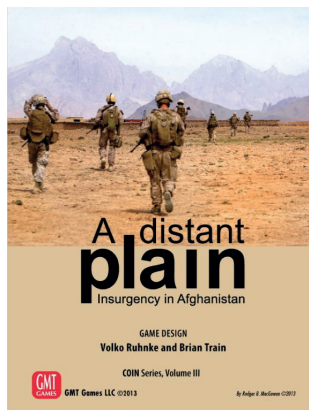
The same thing also happened in 2021, as Afghanistan finally fell under the rule of the Taliban.At that time I was repeatedly asked for an "update scenario" for *A Distant Plain*, a game I had co-designed about the war in Afghanistan in 2012, while the war was still going on, and which ended in 2013/14, to concide with the announced end of NATO's combat mission in Afghanistan. The 2021 situation, in game terms, would have required meta-level events and arrangements far beyond the framework of the original game design, combined with a lot of deliberately bad, illogical and counter-productive play. To reflect these, one would need a new game, one that would reflect those changes in political and operational parameters outside the scope of the original game.

There are occasions when one can be speculative, and also quite wrong in that speculation. A few days after the beginning of the Israel-Hamas War on October 7, 2023 and in advance of the actual ground offensive by the Israeli Defence Forces, I published on my website a variant map and rules for *We Are Coming Nineveh* (a game on the 2017 Battle of Mosul that I had helped to design and develop in 2019) for Gaza City. At the time many analysts and commentators confidently predicted a fierce urban battle, but as it turned out there was no such event and the most intense fighting over the ensuing months was concentrated in the refugee camps to the south.

This is an enduring problem for board wargames on current and hypothetical subjects: people tend to look for answers and predictions in them, but the lessons they teach are generally not as clear or opinionated as the other two classes of game I have described. What they will teach you is that the world can be a lot more complicated than you think, or that your understanding of the situation was quite wrong. And that is also one of the major purposes of journalism after all.

James Dunnigan said about wargames: "if you can play them, you can design them." He meant that the physical act of playing a physical, analog game brings its players into intimate contact with the game's design and mechanics, expressed through its rules. The player cannot help but be exposed to its structure, logic and intent in a very different way from the code that underlies a digital game, simply by handling its pieces, moving them on a map, and consulting the game's rules and notes in a cycle of practice and discovery. Some recent experimental research also indicates that levels of player engagement in manual board wargames are significantly higher than computer versions of similar games. [16] More importantly, this tactile connection, and the simpler physical and mechanical structure of the game gives power to the person who likes to play games and has something to say, in that the game can easily be changed – that is, altered, subverted, parodied or even inverted – simply and quickly to suit their own purposes and inclinations. This is not true of a video or computer game, unless you are comfortable with coding. It's the critical, questioning attitude that seems especially easy to apply to analog newsgames, of all types. These games are truly experiential media, and impart experiential learning. Playing a game is all about building a

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16 Smith J, Ringrose T, Barker S. An experimental intervention to investigate user perceptions of computer versus manual board wargame. The Journal of Defense Modeling and Simulation. 2023;0(0). doi:10.1177/15485129221141711

narrative together and sharing a collective experience. Even someone playing by themself is still spinning a story, interrogating where it came from and exploring where it can go.

Therefore, we can be our own observers and interpreters of events through blogging and use of social media. We can also go deeper and explore the processes that gave rise to these events, or speculate on their direction. And we can prompt others to do the same, not through words on a screen, but through games; games made – and played – on paper.

"AGFA NOTE FOTOGRAFICHE" TRA *PERIODICAL STUDIES* E *FORMAT THEORY*

Elena Gipponi e Costanza Paolillo

La stampa aziendale-industriale italiana è un comparto della produzione editoriale periodica che sta riscuotendo da qualche tempo l'interesse degli studiosi, che ne hanno progressivamente riconosciuto il cruciale ruolo di negoziazione tra la cultura umanistica e quella scientifica[1]. Un sottoinsieme di questo comparto in cui arte e tecnica dialogano in modo particolarmente proficuo è quello degli *house organ* fotografici, emanazione delle fabbriche in cui si produce pellicola sia per gli ambiti professionali sia per il mercato dei fotografi dilettanti e dei cineamatori. Questa stampa ha una relazione particolarmente stretta con gli aspetti più materiali della produzione delle immagini, con la fisicità dei supporti e con l'operatività delle tecniche e delle tecnologie fotografiche e filmiche.

Questo saggio ha per oggetto la testata italiana "AGFA Note fotografiche" (in seguito rinominata semplicemente "Note fotografiche"), *house organ* mensile della società tedesca AGFA, produttrice di materiale fotosensibile e di apparecchiature per il cinema e la fotografia. La pubblicazione di questo *house organ* coincide con l'espansione di AGFA in Italia: l'azienda tedesca aprì infatti nel 1925, prima a Torino e poi a Milano, la propria succursale italiana, AGFA-Foto, poi rinominata S.A. Prodotti Fotografici AGFA[2].

Obiettivo di questo saggio è analizzare secondo una duplice prospettiva la relazioni tra alcuni aspetti materiali di "AGFA Note fotografiche" e i processi di produzione della testata stessa e del sistema mediatico di cui è manifestazione. In primo luogo, il periodico verrà letto alla luce delle trasformazioni del suo layout all'interno di un quadro metodologico

1 C. Vinti, *Gli anni dello stile industriale 1948-1965. Immagine e politica culturale nella grande impresa italiana*, Marsilio, Venezia 2007; G. Bigatti, C. Vinti (a cura di), *Comunicare l'impresa. Cultura e strategie dell'immagine nell'industria italiana (1945-1970)*, Guerini e associati, Milano 2010; D. Forlini, *Produzioni (dis)umane: la fabbrica nella cultura italiana (1945-1968)*, tesi di dottorato, University of Wisconsin-Madison 2017; C. Paolillo, *Tra le pagine di Ferrania & Pirelli: patrimonio artistico e strategie di marketing negli house organ del dopoguerra*, "Notes in Italian Studies", 3, 2025. Per un repertorio online della stampa aziendale italiana nel Novecento cfr. https://houseorgan.net/.

2 M. De Rosa, A. Mariani, *Experimenting in circles: Agfa, amateur cinema, and the art of R&D*, "Necsus", Autunno 2023, https://necsus-ejms.org/experimenting-in-circles-agfa-amateur-cinema-and-the-art-of-rd/; A. Mariani, S. Schneider, *16mm Standardization and Agfa's Strategic Policies in Fascist Italy*, in H. Wasson, G. Waller (a cura di), *16 at 100*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington (in corso di pubblicazione).

che adopera gli strumenti dei *periodical studies*, una branca del sapere che riconosce alle testate periodiche la dignità di oggetto di studio non da saccheggiare alla ricerca dei soli contenuti nobili o delle grandi firme, ma che li qualifica come prodotti culturali di per sé, da esaminare nella loro interezza, "from cover to cover", inclusi i loro aspetti più materiali (AGFA *as* a media format[3]). Applichiamo infatti qui il binomio *as/and* impiegato in due pubblicazioni che distinguono tra l'inquadramento dei periodici *come* media ("magazines as media, rather than texts or repositories of historical information"), e una loro messa in relazione con il più ampio scenario mediale di cui sono parte ("how magazines […] relate to the other media forms that shaped the cultural production and circulation of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including photography, radio, and film"). È questa seconda prospettiva (magazines *and* media) a informare la seconda parte del saggio, in cui "AGFA Note fotografiche" verrà collocato nel più ampio contesto del nascente sistema dei media novecentesco. Per far ciò, saranno convocate alcune delle categorie elaborate dalla recente *teoria dei format*, un approccio teorico ed epistemologico che alla nozione di *medium* preferisce quella di *formato*: termine tecnico qui particolarmente pertinente, dal momento che è stato coniato in seno alla stampa moderna (nel suo significato letterale indica il numero delle piegature del foglio di grandi dimensioni da cui si ricavano libri e riviste), il formato ha di recente conosciuto una feconda espansione concettuale[4]. Considerare la fotografia, oggetto e soggetto principale della rivista qui in esame, in termini di formato, come vedremo, consentirà di leggere in un'ottica sistemica e materiale i processi di produzione, riproduzione e circolazione delle immagini e di riconoscere la centralità in essi di "AGFA Note fotografiche".

1. Le riviste AGFA alla conquista dello spazio commerciale europeo: "AGFA Note fotografiche" as *a media format*

Acronimo di Actien-Gesellschaft für Anilin-Fabrikation, AGFA venne fondata nel 1867 come fabbrica di aniline, coloranti sintetici il cui processo produttivo prevedeva l'uso di alogenuri d'argento, sostanze impiegate anche nella produzione di supporti fotosensibili. Così, tra la

3 F. Hammill, P. Hjartarson, H. McGregor, *Introducing Magazines and/as Media: The Aesthetics and Politics of Serial Form*, "ESC: English Studies in Canada", 41-1, 2015, pp. 3, 6; F. Hammill, P. Hjartarson, H. McGregor, *Introduction: Magazines and/as Media: Periodical Studies and the Question of Disciplinarity*, "The Journal of Modern Periodical Studies", 6-2, 2015, pp. iii-xiii.

4 "Not incidentally, the oldest use of "format" as a technical term stems from the early modern printing industry where it indicated the way a book was folded and the number of pages produced from one paper sheet", M. Jancovic, A. Volmar, A. Schneider, *Format Matters: An Introduction to Format Studies*, in Idd. (a cura di), *Format Matters: Standards, Practices, and Politics in Media Cultures*, Meson Press, Lüneburg 2020, p. 7. Tra i principali studi al riguardo citiamo anche J. Sterne, *MP3: The Meaning of a Format*, Duke University Press, Durham (NC) 2012 e B. Turquety, *Medium, Format, Configuration: The Displacements of Film*, Meson Press, Lüneburg 2019. Per un'applicazione della teoria del format a prodotti a stampa, cfr. A. Morin, J. Ruchatz, *Photography In/Between Media Formats: The Work of Format from Magazines to Books, from Horst. P. Horst to Henri Cartier-Bresson*, in "Interfaces", 45, 2021, http://journals.openedition.org/ interfaces/2234.

fine del XIX e i primi anni del XX secolo AGFA iniziò a produrre lastre fotografiche e in seguito pellicole in fogli e pellicole in bobina. Per sostenere una produzione intensiva di pellicole in grado di rifornire l'industria cinematografica, nel 1915 venne inaugurato nei pressi di Wolfen un nuovo complesso di stabilimenti: complice lo scoppio della Prima guerra mondiale, questo ramo produttivo si rivelò strategico anche a fini bellici e di propaganda[5]. Alla metà degli anni '20 la società tedesca AGFA, prima produttrice europea di materiali fotosensibili, fu acquisita dal colosso IG Farben a seguito di una grande operazione di ristrutturazione del comparto chimico nazionale volta a mitigare gli effetti dell'instabilità dei mercati postbellici e a governare la crescita di volumi produttivi. Nonostante tale processo riorganizzativo, AGFA mantenne massima autonomia nelle scelte industriali e commerciali, concentrando le proprie energie nella competizione sul mercato internazionale con l'azienda americana Eastman Kodak, leader a livello globale nel settore del fotosensibile e degli apparecchi fotografici. Avendo compreso le potenzialità di un'espansione nel segmento amatoriale, il reparto marketing di AGFA decise di mettere in atto delle strategie di vendita più moderne che emulassero quelle della leader di mercato: l'obiettivo dell'azienda era passare «da produttore a produttore di consumatori»[6], insistendo quindi sulla comunicazione con il target di potenziali acquirenti.

Nel luglio 1924, mentre Kodak aveva iniziato a pubblicare nel Regno Unito "The Kodak Magazine", ossia la versione per l'Europa della sua rivista "Kodakery" dedicata agli *snapshooters* – amatori non interessati alla tecnica, per cui la fotografia era puro svago e un modo per collezionare ricordi[7]– AGFA uscì con il primo numero di "AGFA Photoblätter". La rivista venne presentata come uno strumento per rispondere alle domande dei fotoamatori, una versione più maneggevole e accattivante dei manuali che costituivano il prodotto principale di educazione tecnica nella produzione editoriale aziendale. Dal punto di vista materiale, il periodico ha subito diverse trasformazioni nell'intestazione e nella formattazione, in particolare nel layout della copertina, cambiando persino dimensioni che nel corso degli anni hanno oscillato tra i 12 x 18 cm e i 16 x 23 cm. Il fascicolo constava di una trentina di pagine corredate di fotografie illustrative in bianco e nero, più copertina in brossura stampata in bicromia. Il mensile veniva stampato in ottavi su una carta lucida e sottile da rotocalco, ragion per cui, sebbene non sia nota l'esatta tiratura, si può supporre che fosse pensato per un'ampia distribuzione; tali caratteristiche del formato sono rimaste costanti per tutta la durata della pubblicazione, fino alla prima sospensione nel 1944[8] (Figg. 1 e 2).

5 Sulla storia dell'AGFA, cfr. M. Gill, H. Mustroph, *Agfa und die Anfänge der Fotografie. Vom Blutlaugensalz zur größten europäischen Filmfabrik*, "Chemie in Unserer Zeit", 48-6, 2014, pp. 424-438; C. Bustamante, *AGFA, Kullmann, Singer & Co. and Early Cine-Film Stock*, "Film History", 20-1, 2008, pp. 59-76.

6 B. Kolbow, *Box Sells: Die 'Amerikanisierung' des Kamera-Marketings der Agfa, 1925-1945*, in R. Karlsch, H. Maier (a cura di), *Studien zur Geschichte der Filmfabrik Wolfen und der IG Farbenindustrie AG in Mitteldeutschland*, Klartext Verlag, Essen 2014, p. 131 (trad. a cura di chi scrive).

7 N. West, *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*, University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville 2000. Per un quadro sulla produzione periodica aziendale di Kodak negli anni '20 e '30, cfr. C. Paolillo, *Ferrania. Un'impresa, una rivista. Industria fotografica e lavoro culturale dagli albori della società dello spettacolo italiana*, tesi di dottorato, Scuola Normale Superiore 2019.

8 Il mensile tedesco ha avuto una seconda vita a partire dal 1950, durante la quale ha recuperato una grande

Sebbene il periodico fosse chiaramente ispirato dalle pubblicazioni per amatori Kodak, si distingueva per un più spiccato orientamento verso l'approfondimento della tecnica fotografica, grazie ad articoli con un tono decisamente prescrittivo rispetto alle buone pratiche e ai risultati estetici desiderabili: la rubrica "Insuccessi e le loro cause" incarna bene la linea editoriale alla base di "AGFA Photoblätter" secondo cui la formazione tecnica sarebbe in grado di promuovere la formazione del gusto. Allo stesso tempo, la rubrica "Piccola posta", seguendo un modello ampiamente sperimentato nelle storiche riviste dei club amatoriali, permetteva di rispondere ai dubbi dei consumatori, accreditando l'azienda come un interlocutore esperto e disponibile[9]. In questa fase di crescita aziendale, dunque, AGFA avviò un processo di americanizzazione del comparto marketing solo parziale, per quanto quello statunitense fosse il modello di successo globale di riferimento, adottandone non tanto i contenuti, quanto piuttosto l'idea di costruire un canale di comunicazione di massa diretto ai consumatori, manipolabile a fini commerciali e completamente controllato dall'azienda[10].

Le potenzialità della rivista come piattaforma di informazione per il segmento amatoriale furono immediatamente chiare all'azienda, tanto che, quando nel 1925 AGFA aprì la propria sede in Italia, fondò a gennaio dello stesso anno un'edizione italiana della rivista dal titolo "AGFA Note fotografiche", che nasceva come sostanziale analogo del periodico tedesco[11]. Sulla copertina, sulla quarta e con le pagine interne il mensile si creava materialmente nuovi spazi pubblicitari, fornendo un'eccellente vetrina per i propri prodotti.

Proprio le trasformazioni grafiche avvenute in quella manciata di centimetri quadri e susseguitesi nel corso dei suoi due decenni di storia sono testimonianza dell'interazione tra gli interessi industriali tedeschi e lo sviluppo della cultura fotografica amatoriale modernista in Italia, nonché delle frizioni che ne sono derivate. Nella sua prima fase "AGFA Note fotografiche" duplicava aspetto e contenuti di "Photoblätter", di cui conservava veste grafica, illustrazioni e articoli che venivano tradotti sotto la supervisione del direttore responsabile Alfredo Ornano, figura chiave dell'editoria fotografica italiana[12] (Figg. 3 e 4). Nato a La

popolarità fino alla definitiva cessazione nel 1993. Le ricostruzioni relative agli aspetti materiali dei primi anni della rivista sono da considerare parziali e suscettibili di correzioni dal momento che le collezioni sono estremamente lacunose. Considerate pubblicazioni commerciali dallo scarso valore culturale e di fattura economica, le riviste tedesche AGFA non sono state conservate e mancano tanto nelle biblioteche quanto sul mercato antiquario sia in Germania che in Italia, in particolare per le uscite fino al 1932-1933.

9 I titoli originali delle due rubriche erano "*Misserfolge und Ihre Ursachen*" e "*Briefkasten*"; prenderanno i nomi riportati nel testo nella versione italiana della rivista.

10 B. Kolbow, *Box Sells: Die 'Amerikanisierung' des Kamera-Marketings der Agfa, 1925-1945*, cit., p. 166; C. Ross, *Visions of Prosperity: the Americanization of Advertising in Interwar Germany*, in P. Swett, J. Wiesen, J. Zatlin (a cura di), *Selling Modernity: Advertising in Twentieth-Century Germany*, Duke University Press, Durham (NC) 2007, p. 55.

11 Dal numero di agosto 1939 di "Note Fotografiche" risulta che venissero realizzate edizioni straniere della rivista anche per Regno Unito, Argentina, Brasile e Cina.

12 Sulla base della comparazione tra il numero di dicembre 1927 (n. 6, anno 4) di "AGFA Photoblätter" e il numero di gennaio 1928 (n. 1, anno 4) di "AGFA Note fotografiche" si può inferire che l'intera rivista fosse trasmessa alla redazione italiana, che provvedeva alla traduzione degli articoli, pubblicandone una buona parte insieme alla medesima copertina a solo poche settimane di distanza. Sulla base delle lacunose informazioni tratte dai numeri conservati presso la Bibliomediateca Mario Gromo del Museo del Cinema di Torino e la Biblioteca Braidense di Milano, è stato possibile individuare tre fasi nella vita editoriale di "AGFA Note Fotografiche":

Spezia nel 1880, Ornano si formò all'Istituto Fotografico di Stato a Monaco di Baviera; in seguito, passò ad occuparsi di cinematografia trasferendosi prima in Inghilterra a lavorare per la Kinemacolor Company e poi a Torino per la Cenisio Film. Negli anni della Prima guerra mondiale diresse la sezione fotografica dell'Ansaldo a Genova. Alla fine del conflitto, l'AGFA individuò in Ornano le conoscenze tecniche, le qualità dirigenziali e le competenze linguistiche necessarie per affidargli la guida della parte tecnica del settore italiano dell'azienda, dove rimase per oltre vent'anni, fino alla fine della Seconda guerra mondiale, per poi passare alla rivista "Ferrania", di cui fu redattore tecnico e autore di riferimento per quasi un decennio[13]. Grazie alla sua formazione in Germania, Ornano aveva non solo esperienza tecnica ma anche familiarità con la cultura fotografica tedesca, fungendo di fatto da mediatore culturale: attraverso la traduzione della rivista garantiva la corretta trasmissione delle informazioni dalla Germania all'Italia, favorendo la diffusione delle competenze necessarie ad utilizzare il medesimo prodotto AGFA in un contesto culturalmente e tecnicamente diverso, veicolando allo stesso tempo un'idea di buona fotografia. Il ruolo della rivista era dunque quello di fornire attraverso la descrizione di procedimenti tecnici una formazione fotografica di base, rendendola accessibile al maggior numero possibile di neofiti.

Parallelamente alla diffusione di massa della pratica amatoriale sul territorio nazionale, "AGFA Note fotografiche" andava costruendo una relazione sempre più diretta con la crescente rete di appassionati in Italia, come testimoniano le *call to action* per raccogliere e pubblicare foto inviate dai lettori, apparse sulle sue pagine intorno al 1929-1930. Così, man mano che la rivista guadagnava terreno e credibilità tra gli amatori italiani, diventava necessario che le idee e le aspirazioni estetiche e culturali del suo mercato di riferimento trovassero spazio, iniziando a comparire in forma di articoli tecnici e poi di editoriali sullo stato della fotografia moderna nel paese[14].

Questo discostamento dal modello originale tedesco in favore di un'apertura al pubblico italiano si tradusse con l'annata 8 (1931-1932) in un cambio di impaginazione visibile prima di tutto nella copertina: formato leggermente aumentato (16 x 23 cm), la foto a tutta pagina in copertina ad opera di Ornano, caratteri tipografici più moderni senza grazie, immagini a tutta pagina nel corpo del testo e un'impostazione grafica delle didascalie in grado di evidenziare i dettagli tecnici e i prodotti AGFA usati (Fig. 5). Il cambio di layout fu prima di tutto reso possibile dalla scelta di trasferire la produzione della rivista presso Rizzoli, che proprio in quel momento si stava dotando delle macchine rotocalcografiche in grado di stampare altissime tirature illustrate a prezzi contenuti[15]. Insieme alle nuove soluzioni

fase 1925-1930, durante la quale viene stampata presso la Cromotipia Sormani, Milano (nel 1929 si verifica un cambio di numerazione e a luglio viene pubblicato il n. 1 dell'anno 6); durante la fase 1931-1940 è stampata da Rizzoli, Milano (a novembre 1934 la rivista cambia denominazione eliminando la parola "AGFA" dal titolo); nella fase 1941-1942, trasformatasi in rivista autonoma il cui editore non è più AGFA-Foto, viene stampata presso la tipografia Lucini, Milano.

13 *La morte di Alfredo Ornano*, "Ferrania", 10, 1955, p. 2.

14 Cfr. "AGFA Note fotografiche", 5, 1929-1930; 11, 1929-1930.

15 M. Forni, *I modi della produzione grafica in Italia nella prima metà del Novecento. Il caso Rizzoli*, "Storia in Lombardia", 1, 2011, p. 101.

grafiche e alle modalità inedite di utilizzo delle immagini che giungevano dalla redazione tedesca, come il fotomontaggio e il fotoreportage – linguaggi visivi moderni che facevano da ponte tra cinema e illustrazione fotografica –, in questa seconda serie della rivista (1931-1940) trovavano sempre più spazio articoli di amatori italiani, che integravano la linea editoriale AGFA, fondata su una solida ma più arida consapevolezza tecnica e tecnologica, con una più attenta a «buon gusto, tecnica perfetta e modernità»[16].

Allo scoppio della guerra, il rapporto tra AGFA-Foto e "Note fotografiche" giunse ad un bivio per cui le due si separarono: Ornano restava il direttore di una rivista formalmente autonoma, con una politica editoriale completamente rinnovata, che aspirava ad abbracciare l'intero spettro degli appassionati di cinema e fotografia. Sin dal primo numero della terza serie (1941-1942), il mensile si aprì alla collaborazione con figure celebri nel panorama dei circoli fotografici italiani come Luigi Veronesi, Mario Bellavista, Guido Pellegrini, lasciando trapelare l'aspirazione a diventare un punto di riferimento nazionale[17] (Figg. 6 e 7). Con questa mossa il mensile cercava di rafforzare il proprio posizionamento nel mercato editoriale fotografico parlando contemporaneamente a due target, neofiti ed esperti dilettanti: prima che un bollettino industriale, "Note fotografiche" desiderava essere una rivista moderna e sofisticata, che pensava l'immagine fotomeccanica come uno strumento di conoscenza del mondo. Il nuovo corso della rivista passò prima di tutto da una radicale trasformazione grafica: il nuovo layout progettato dal giovane grafico Albe Steiner doveva rendere chiaro al primo sguardo il profondo cambiamento avvenuto nell'approccio della testata e nella modernità del suo messaggio. Per distanziarsi dalla pubblicazione aziendale tedesca e ri-affermare un'identità culturale autonoma, Steiner ne rivoluzionò l'aspetto visivo, lo stile di comunicazione e il ruolo stesso assegnato all'immagine tra le sue pagine, prendendo a modello – paradossalmente – la lezione del modernismo europeo che proprio in Germania si era definito tra Bauhaus, editoria fotografica e fiere specializzate (Figg. 8 e 9). Il sodalizio Ornano-Steiner per "Note fotografiche" ebbe a causa della guerra vita molto breve, con l'interruzione delle pubblicazioni nell'aprile 1942, ma il valore del loro esperimento grafico-editoriale è testimoniato dalla riattivazione della loro esperienza in numerosi progetti della Milano del dopoguerra, primo tra tutti quello della rivista "Ferrania".

2. Forme di autoriflessività: "AGFA Note fotografiche" and the media formats

La storia di "AGFA Note fotografiche" appena ripercorsa ha consentito di mettere in luce come a ogni cambiamento formale e "di superficie" della rivista (assumendo una definizione letterale di formato come layout) siano corrisposte trasformazioni progressive del mandato della rivista, delle sue funzioni culturali. In questa pubblicazione è infatti in atto un processo

16 A. Ornano, *Il secondo concorso nazionale Leica. Autori e opere dimenticati*, "Note Fotografiche", 2, 1935, pp. 35-36.

17 C. Paolillo, *Ferrania. Un'impresa, una rivista*, cit., p. 197.

dapprima di migrazione e in seguito di riposizionamento di un oggetto tecnico in un nuovo contesto culturale, uno scenario prospettato da Madeleine Akrich in un saggio degli anni '90[18]: l'arco di vita prebellico delle riviste AGFA, disegnando i percorsi di un dispositivo – la rivista stessa come oggetto tecnico, come vedremo – mentre si sposta in un luogo diverso da quello in cui era nato, e mentre si adatta a un nuovo territorio, rappresenta infatti un'occasione ideale per comprenderne a fondo il funzionamento tecnico e culturale, in questo caso per cogliere il reciproco modellamento tra la dimensione tecnica e quella sociale della fotografia amatoriale. Insieme, "AGFA Note fotografiche" è un osservatorio privilegiato su questo processo anche in quanto parte della cosiddetta letteratura *how-to* (manualistica tecnica e affini), ovvero uno dei luoghi che per antonomasia, sempre secondo Akrich, rendono visibili e manifeste le prescrizioni in-scritte nelle tecnologie: nonostante si presentino come il grado zero della divulgazione (un livello meramente *de*-scrittivo), gli articoli pubblicati mensilmente su "AGFA Note fotografiche" celano invece precise *pre*-scrizioni estetiche, ideologiche e culturali su come realizzare buone fotografie (e buoni film), sui modi in cui i prodotti AGFA debbano essere impiegati e sui loro ambiti d'uso privilegiati. Se di formato assumiamo quindi una definizione meno letterale di quella da cui siamo partiti – «Formats typically consist of specific sets of descriptions and requirements of how to arrange and present information. […] These descriptions affect the aesthetic and perceptual qualities of media and instruct human users and technological devices how media content should be handled»[19] – possiamo affermare che sulle pagine di questa rivista sia in atto un processo di formattazione nella misura in cui i discorsi veicolati dal mensile consistono precisamente in «serie specifiche di descrizioni e requisiti» su come gestire al meglio la pratica fotografica (e cinematografica)[20].

Sebbene applicare questo concetto di formato ai *discorsi* sulla fotografia e sul cinema amatoriale veicolati da "AGFA Note fotografiche" sia dunque legittimo e fecondo, in quest'ultima parte del saggio si intende ricondurre questa idea di formato al *processo di produzione* della rivista medesima. In questo caso l'oggetto tecnico in esame non è più la fotografia (fissa o in movimento), ma lo stesso mensile inteso come dispositivo intermediale di cui semmai la fotografia è una delle "materie prime". Su questo *house organ* è infatti in atto un riposizionamento della fotografia non solo, come già evidenziato, da un punto di vista culturale, ma anche da una prospettiva *materiale*: il medium della fotografia sta cono-

18 M. Akrich, *The De-Scription of Technical Objects* in W.E. Bijker, J. Law (a cura di), *Shaping Technology/ Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change*, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 1992, pp. 205-224.

19 M. Jancovic, A. Volmar, A. Schneider, *Format Matters*, cit., p. 7.

20 Questa pubblicazione tradisce insomma la contraddizione di fondo comune a tutta la cosiddetta letteratura *how-to* nell'ambito dei supporti fotosensibili: da una parte è promossa la qualità automatica e meccanica della fotografia e del cinema, forme di espressione "facili", "naturali" (con tutta la carica problematica e in realtà "culturale" che questo aggettivo porta con sé), che possono finalmente prescindere dalle abilità manuali e artigianali dell'esecutore; dall'altro è dichiarata con forza la necessità di una formazione tecnica e teorica per poter approdare davvero a un controllo e una padronanza della pratica foto-cinematografica. La tensione contraddittoria tra l'esaltazione di una pratica libera e la necessità di una sua codifica è bene analizzata, ad esempio, da Elena Mosconi in *Il cinema per tutti: statuto e retorica dell'amatoriale nella pubblicistica e nei manuali degli anni Trenta*, in L. Farinotti, E. Mosconi (a cura di), *Il metodo e la passione. Cinema amatoriale e film di famiglia in Italia*, "Comunicazioni sociali", 3, 2005, pp. 451-462.

scendo proprio tra gli anni '20 e gli anni '30 un processo di formattazione per adeguarsi a un altro medium nascente: la moderna stampa illustrata. Sulla rivista che stiamo analizzando compaiono infatti alcuni articoli che tradiscono autoriflessivamente l'iscrizione di "AGFA Note fotografiche" in questa più ampia ecologia mediale: prima ancora che promuovere la diffusione di massa della pratica fotografica e cine-amatoriale, questo prodotto editoriale dimostra di partecipare pienamente al processo di diffusione di massa di pubblicazioni periodiche illustrate, un settore in cui la fotografia sta guadagnando sempre più terreno e nel quale AGFA rivendica la propria centralità.

Basti guardare, ad esempio, al servizio *Fotoreportage*, nel numero dell'aprile 1933, in cui è rimarcata l'importanza di questo nuovo linguaggio, vecchio di soli dieci anni, la cui fortuna è ricondotta proprio all'incremento del numero dei periodici illustrati: «Tutti i giorni appariscono centinaia di giornali e riviste illustrate e si fanno clichés da migliaia di fotografie che poi si stampano per essere presentati ai lettori […], prove evidenti della grande importanza che ha la foto-stampa quale fattore culturale nel plasmare la vita moderna»[21]. A corredo del testo, sono pubblicate sette foto, tra scene sensazionali e scatti più ordinari, e in alcuni casi vengono fornite in didascalia le specifiche tecniche (supporto, lunghezza focale, tempo di esposizione) (Fig. 10).

Altri due articoli sono pubblicati a distanza di un mese, rispettivamente nel febbraio e nel marzo 1935, entrambi firmati da Umberto Foà. Il primo si intitola *La fotografia nel giornalismo odierno* ed è un elogio della nuova stampa illustrata, più precisamente del quotidiano "La Stampa", sviluppato attraverso un'accurata descrizione delle condizioni tecniche che rendono possibile una tale proliferazione di immagini fotografiche, ovvero la telefotoricezione, la trasmissione a distanza delle fotografie, un processo indispensabile per far sì che le redazioni di quotidiani e settimanali possano tempestivamente corredare le proprie pagine con testimonianze fotografiche degli eventi e dei fatti di cronaca esposti[22]. Dopo aver preso a esempio un'altra testata, tuttavia, l'articolo torna in chiusura a svolgere una funzione promozionale nei confronti di AGFA, che si posiziona come agente cruciale, pioniere di questo processo di affermazione della fotografia nella stampa, poiché fornisce il materiale necessario per la telefotografia, «un tipo particolare di film molto sensibile, di particolare sottigliezza, che permette una recezione ottima e ben modulata»[23] (Figg. 11-14). Analogamente, in *Fototelegrafia*, Foà descrive il processo menzionato nel titolo del pezzo, in questo caso spiegando nel dettaglio il funzionamento di una stazione (valigia) fototele-

21 W. Golidt, *Fotoreportage*, "AGFA Note fotografiche", 10, 1933, p. 291. Cfr anche R. Rossmanith, *Il fotografo come soggetto*, "Note fotografiche", 12, 1934, pp. 367-372.

22 U. Foà, *La fotografia nel giornalismo odierno*, "Note fotografiche", 8, 1935, pp. 229-232. Per un quadro complessivo dei problemi e delle soluzioni che favorirono lo sviluppo su larga scala del settore della stampa illustrata a partire dagli anni '20 del '900 (oltre al già menzionato trasferimento delle fotografie tramite la tecnologia del telegrafo applicata alle immagini anziché alle parole, citiamo brevemente le tecniche di stampa dei mezzitoni, della rotocalcografia e in offset, la commercializzazione di macchine fotografiche più piccole e maneggevoli, la nascita delle agenzie di stampa fotografiche) cfr. E. Gipponi, S. Locati, D. Boemia, *Dall'illustrazione al fototesto. Il rapporto tra testo e immagine nei periodici*, in Idd. (a cura di), *Immagine e testo nei periodici illustrati italiani degli anni Trenta e Quaranta*, Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2024, pp. 19-46 (in part. pp. 25-38).

23 U. Foà, *La fotografia nel giornalismo odierno*, cit., p. 231.

trasmittente portatile e di un apparato fototelericevente. Ancora una volta l'azienda tedesca è centrale, dal momento che «La Casa AGFA con la preparazione di speciale materiale sensibile per la recezione contribuisce […] al progresso e alla continua evoluzione della fotografia»[24] (Figg. 15-16).

Seppure apparentemente marginali nell'impianto comunicativo complessivo della rivista, e marcati da un chiaro intento promozionale, i contributi in esame (ma se ne potrebbero citare altri[25]) consentono di slittare dall'idea di medium a quella di formato, da intendersi come la declinazione, la manifestazione specifica e situata della fotografia, la forma materiale che la fotografia assume e che le consente di raggiungere un vasto pubblico di fruitori. Se davvero la fotografia sta diventando la materia prima di una comunicazione sempre più visiva, impiegare la nozione di formato consente insomma di seguire con maggiore chiarezza i successivi "cambiamenti di stato" cui questa materia di partenza viene sottoposta. In particolare, gli articoli citati illustrano uno dei requisiti chiave in ogni processo di formattazione, vale a dire l'*interoperabilità*[26]: per poter circolare attraverso infrastrutture complesse, informazioni e contenuti mediali devono essere formattati sulla base di un criterio di interoperabilità. In questo caso, la fotografia come lastra o pellicola impressionata deve essere smaterializzata per poter essere trasmessa a distanza; la stazione ricevente provvederà poi a ri-materializzare le immagini su appositi supporti, forniti in questo caso da AGFA, e queste immagini saranno a loro volta rilavorate dalle redazioni per poi comparire in formato cartaceo sulle pagine di quotidiani e riviste, conoscendo quindi un ulteriore cambiamento materiale, oltre che di layout. Concepire il formato in termini di funzionamento infrastrutturale dei media consente insomma di far luce sulle condizioni di esistenza dei media stessi in una prospettiva materiale: «Formats act as gates through which media must pass»[27]. Se, citando nuovamente Akrich, i formati possono essere concepiti come programmi o "scripts" che regolano la circolazione e l'uso degli oggetti tecnici, nel tipo di discorsi meta-mediali appena citati "AGFA Note fotografiche" è partecipe di un processo di formattazione nella misura in cui, appunto, svela i protocolli, gli script, i meta-dati operativi sul funzionamento del settore della moderna stampa illustrata e sull'impiego della fotografia in questo nuovo dispositivo intermediale. Ancora una volta, attraverso la de-scrizione delle condizioni materiali di produzione delle pubblicazioni illustrate, "AGFA Note fotografiche" si connota come prodotto avanzato della tecnica e posiziona l'omonima azienda come uno dei «critical nodes, which mediates between the content and the material constraints of media»[28].

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24 U. Foà, *Fototelegrafia*, "Note fotografiche", 9, 1935, p. 270.

25 Ad esempio, A. Ornano, *Il nuovo Agfacolor e le arti grafiche fotomeccaniche*, "Note fotografiche", 10, 1939, pp. 222-225, in cui Ornano promuove la nuova pellicola Agfacolor nell'ambito della riproduzione fotomeccanica, parlando del processo di selezione cromatica dei colori primari necessario – di nuovo – per *stampare* fotografie a colori su riviste e pubblicazioni periodiche.

26 "One basic effect of media formats is to determine how medial artifacts and information can pass through vast media infrastructures and ensure interoperability over diverse industries and ecologies of media devices", M. Jancovic, A. Volmar, A. Schneider, *Format Matters*, cit., p. 7.

27 Ivi, p. 13.

28 Ivi, p. 7.

I contenuti del mensile, sia quelli richiamati nel primo paragrafo sia quelli di carattere più autoriflessivo appena esaminati, configurano dunque la rivista come agente cruciale nei processi di interoperabilità su un piano *culturale* (l'adattamento di un'idea di fotografia moderna dal contesto tedesco a quello italiano) e, insieme, su un piano *materiale* (i processi di produzione e circolazione dell'immagine fotomeccanica su supporti a stampa). Rimandando a se stessa e alle proprie condizioni materiali di produzione, oltre che promuovere la fotografia e il cinema in formato ridotto come mezzi espressivi moderni per eccellenza, "AGFA Note fotografiche" è di per sé un agente di rinnovamento della cultura visiva contemporanea, e ciò in virtù della sua posizione intermedia (e intermediale), di mediazione tra un soggetto industriale che produce i supporti, le materie prime, per la fotografia e per il cinema amatoriale, e un pubblico, un target nascente di fotografi e cineamatori, ma anche, come li ha felicemente definiti Raffaele De Berti[29], di lettori-spettatori di stampa illustrata.

Didascalie

Fig. 1. Collezione parziale di "AGFA Photoblätter" annate 1925-1926, disponibile online sul mercato antiquario tedesco a dicembre 2024.

Fig. 2. Collezione parziale di "AGFA Photoblätter annata 1932, disponibile online sul mercato antiquario tedesco a dicembre 2024.

Fig. 3. Copertina di "AGFA Photoblätter", a. 4, n. 6, dicembre 1927, disponibile online sul mercato antiquario tedesco a dicembre 2024.

Fig. 4. Copertina di "AGFA Note Fotografiche", a. 4, n. 1, gennaio 1928, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Milano.

Fig. 5. Copertina di "AGFA Note Fotografiche", a. 8, n. 7, gennaio 1932, Bibliomediateca "M. Gromo", Torino.

Fig. 6. Albe Steiner, Copertina di "Note Fotografiche", a. 18, n. 1, luglio 1941, Bibliomediateca "M. Gromo", Torino.

Fig. 7. Sommario e prima pagina di Guido Piovene, *La fotografia muta l'uomo*, "Note Fotografiche", a. 18, n. 1, luglio 1941, p. 3, Bibliomediateca "M. Gromo", Torino.

Fig. 8. Albe Steiner, *abbonatevi per 24 lire*, campagna per l'abbonamento a "Note fotografiche", quarta copertina, "Note Fotografiche", a. 18, n. 1, gennaio 1941, Bibliomediateca "M. Gromo", Torino.

Fig. 9. "Note Fotografiche", a. 18, n. 2, febbraio 1941, pp. 2-3, Bibliomediateca "M. Gromo", Torino.

Fig. 10. Walter Golidt, *Una scintilla fatale*, illustrazione dell'articolo Fotoreportage, "AGFA Note Fotografiche", a. 9, n. 10, aprile 1933, p. 297, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Milano.

Figg. 11-14. Umberto Foà, *La fotografia nel giornalismo odierno*, "Note Fotografiche", a. 11, n. 8, febbraio 1935, pp. 229-232, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Milano.

Figg. 15-16. Umberto Foà, *Telefotografia*, "Note Fotografiche", a. 11, n. 9, marzo 1935, pp. 268-269, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Milano.

29 R. De Berti, *Il nuovo periodico. Rotocalchi tra fotogiornalismo, cronaca e costume*, in Id., I. Piazzoni (a cura di), *Forme e modelli del rotocalco italiano tra fascismo e guerra*, Cisalpino, Milano 2009, pp. 3-64.
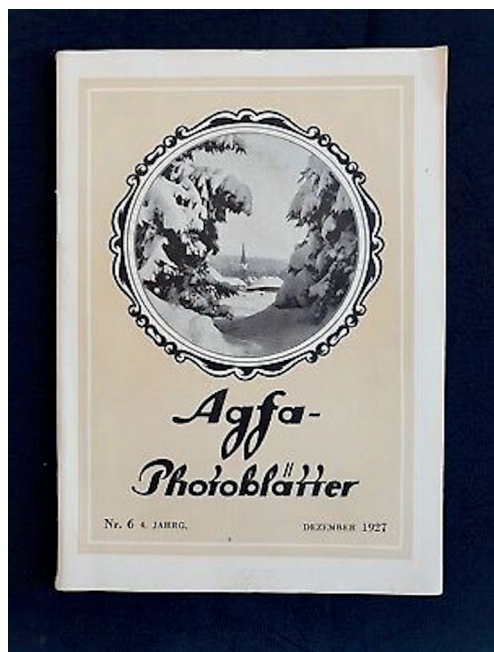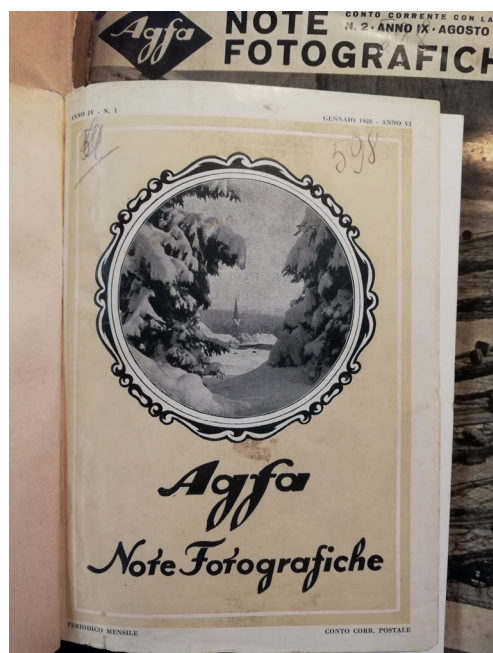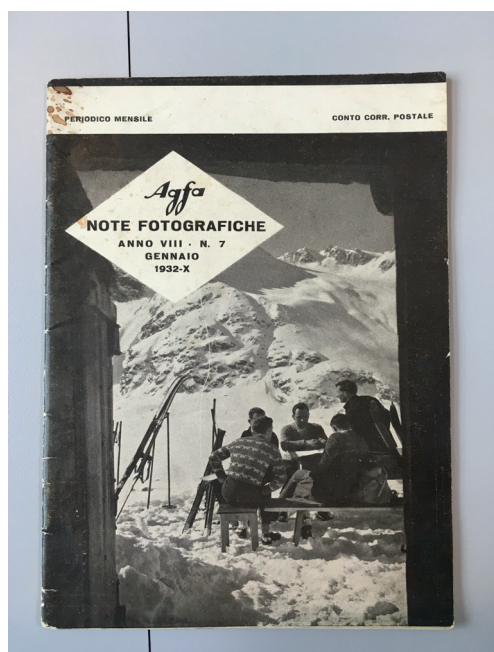
Fig. 1

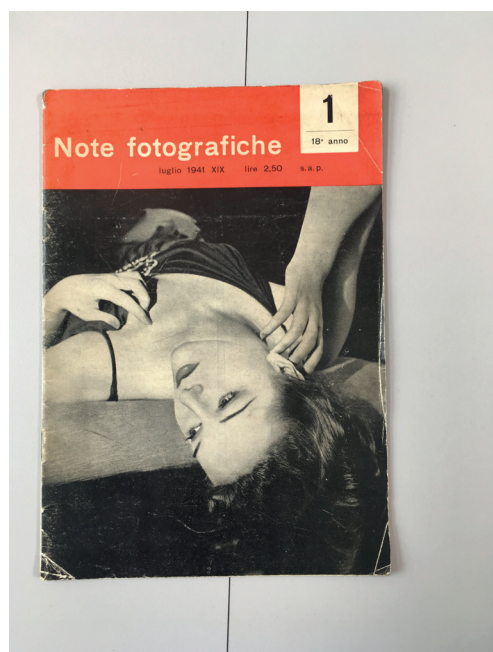
Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

Fig. 9

UNA SCINTILLA FATALE
*Esplosione di olio minerale che ha
provocato un incendio durato un mese*

297

Fig. 10

Umberto Foà, Torino
LA FOTOGRAFIA NEL GIORNALISMO ODIERNO

Da qualche tempo la stampa italiana, alludo soprattutto a quella quotidiana, è entrata in un periodo di trasformazione. Le numerose conquiste della meccanica, in ogni campo dell'attività umana, non hanno dimenticato i giornali. Prodigiose macchine che stampano oltre 300.000 copie in un'ora, hanno invaso i mercati del mondo, suscitando tra le grandi aziende giornalistiche un grande spirito di progresso, e lanciando gli editori in una vera lotta per il possesso della macchina più completa e veloce.

Questi nuovi perfetti impianti, non solo permettono una più celere tiratura, ma favoriscono inoltre in modo particolare la nitidezza delle illustrazioni, le quali oggi sono entrate in pieno nel gusto del pubblico. Alle vignette sono ormai succedute su vasta scala le illustrazioni fotografiche, veri documenti che permettono, per la loro natura, la riduzione del testo rendendo quindi più rapida e piacevole la consultazione dell'argomento.

Le nuove macchine quindi favoriscono largamente lo sviluppo e la volgarizzazione della fotografia in tutte le sue manifestazioni.

In Italia il primo tentativo di cronaca fotografica in grande stile è stato effettuato da « la Stampa » e con un successo così brillante, che in breve volgere di tempo, è stato e sarà seguito dai maggiori quotidiani nazionali.

« La Stampa » sta realizzando per prima in Italia, quello che « Paris-Soir » ha realizzato in Francia passando in pochi mesi — tecnicamente parlando — all'avanguardia del giornalismo francese; infatti « Paris Soir » realizza quotidianamente la sua prima pagina con poco più di una colonna di testo dedicando il massimo spazio alle fotografie ed ai titoli dei vari avvenimenti (fig. 1-2).

Dalla qual cosa si conclude, poiché il quotidiano parigino della sera conta la maggiore tiratura dei giornali continentali, che il pubblico francese si è orientato con piacere verso la lettura di lunghi articoli eccellenza, lieto di poter fare a meno della lettura di lunghi articoli pur tenendosi al corrente dei più importanti avvenimenti in maniera sintetica e soprattutto molto rapida. Il titolo richiama l'attenzione sull'avvenimento, la fotografia lo illustra, ed il brevissimo testo completa, coi dati assolutamente indispensabili, l'inquadratura dell'argomento.

Anche in questo campo la Casa Agfa è pioniera, e può giustamente vantarsi di aver preceduto e previsto il nuovo orientamento giornalistico, fornendo tempestivamente il materiale necessario per tutti gli

229

Fig. 11

scopi e per tutte le lavorazioni. I nuovi sistemi di trasmissione delle fotografie a distanza (Belinogramma e Telefotografia) compiono miracoli che la folla sino a ieri riteneva irrealizzabili, ma che oggi con pronto spirito di comprensione... già reclama.

« La Stampa », per prima, comprendendo le nuove necessità del pubblico italiano, oltre ad una attrezzatura formidabile di macchine, possiede un perfezionatissimo impianto di ricezione radio-telefotografico per cui può presentare ai suoi lettori, con brevissimo intervallo di tempo, una ricca documentazione fotografica di qualsiasi importante avvenimento svoltosi nelle principali città europee.

230

Fig. 12

Infatti, la sera stessa del memorabile incontro calcistico Italia-Inghilterra, svoltosi a Londra il 14 novembre « La Stampa », uscita in edizione straordinaria, pubblicava alcune fasi della partita; il successo di questo primo riuscito tentativo, (fig. 3), e quello avuto dall'edizione più ricca del mattino successivo, dimostrano come anche il pubblico italiano si sta decisamente orientando verso la redazione eminentemente fotografica.

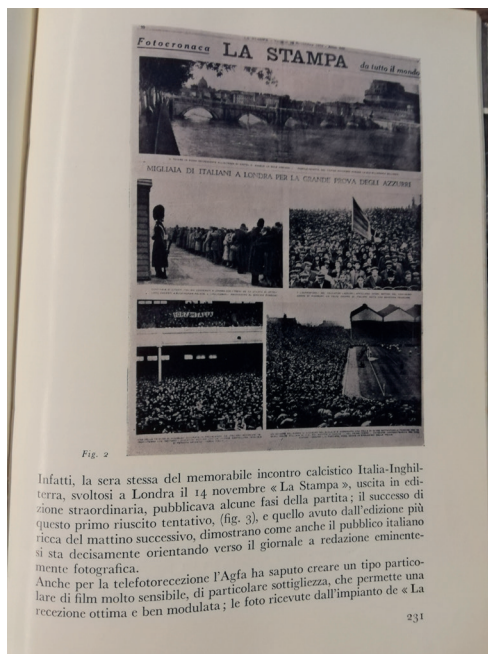Anche per la telefotoricezione l'Agfa ha saputo creare un tipo particolare di film molto sensibile, di particolare sottigliezza, che permette una recezione ottima e ben modulata; le foto ricevute dall'impianto de « La

231
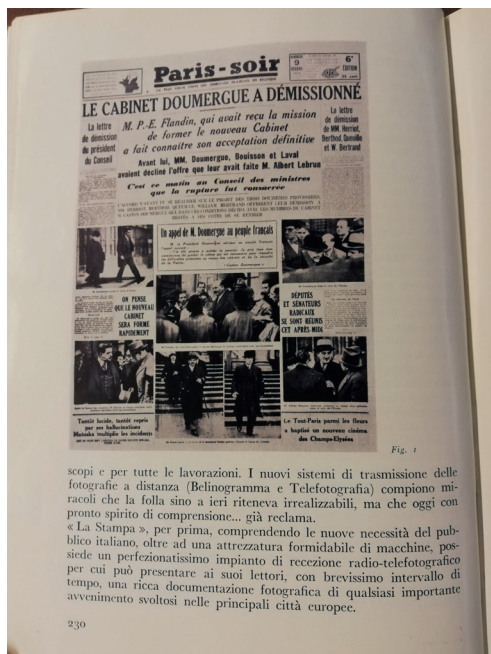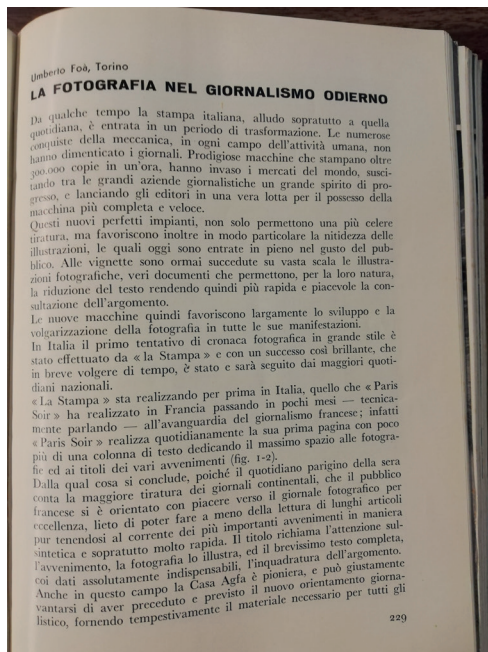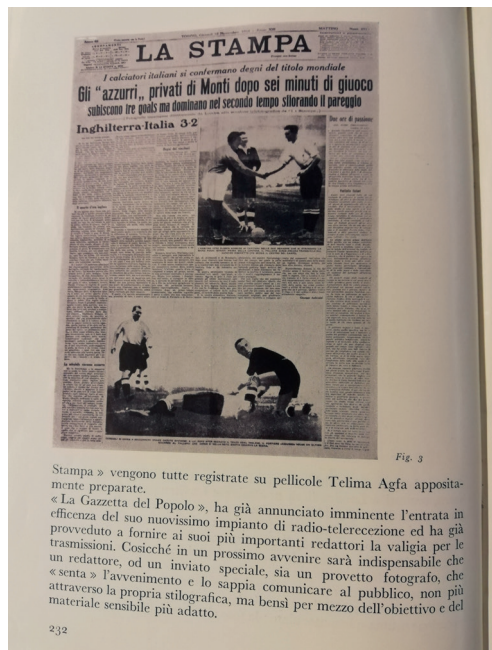
Fig. 13

Fig. 14

Fig. 15

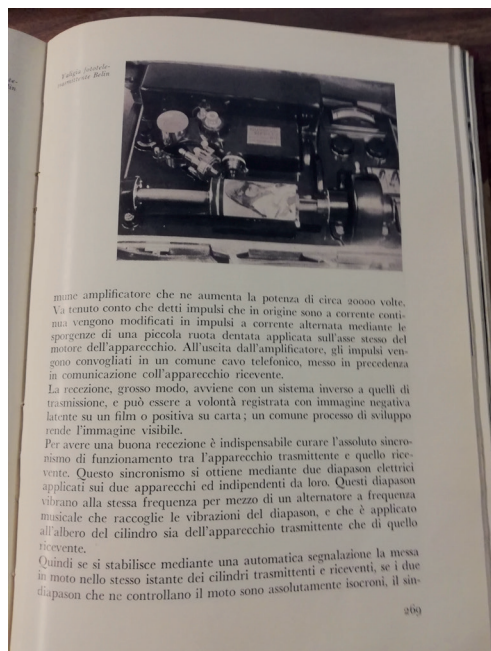Fig. 16

THE UNBEARABLE COST OF DEVELOPMENT AND PRINTING PLANTS. TECHNOSPES, LITMUS PAPER ON TECHNO-INDUSTRIAL PROBLEMS IN THE 1970S ITALIAN CINEMA

Matteo Citrini

In 1963, Ettore Catalucci, dean pioneer of the film development and printing sector, voiced his concerns about the cinematographic industry's crisis and the excessive focus on technological innovation in an article in "Araldo dello spettacolo" significantly entitled *Appeal to wisdom*: "Enough of the madness, of the desperate search for the miraculous and monopolistic system. [...] How many serious or named societies have gone bust to follow this delusion of the technically majestic and exclusive product?".[1] In hindsight, Catalucci's voice appears to have been like that of Cassandra, a warning that went unheeded and foretold the inevitable decline of the prominent development and printing houses that had marked the Italian cinematographic industry nearly from its beginnings.[2]

The aim of this paper is to look into the most important techno-industrial operation implemented in the sector to break such vicious circle: the merger of the two large Roman companies Tecnostampa and Spes, which, along with the English Rank Film Laboratories, gave birth to Technospes in 1972. In examining Technospes' dramatic experience and the reasons for its failure, special emphasis will be placed on the technical and material features that distinguish it. Above all, the plant will serve as a litmus paper for reading, on the one hand, the specificities of the industrial reality of Italian cinema and, on the other, the great historical and cultural transformations that conditioned it.[3]

Italian development and printing societies in the Sixties

According to Paul McDonald, media industries are always a crossroads of the interests of numerous stakeholders who collaborate and compete with one another. For this reason, "They

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1 E. Catalucci, *Appello alla saggezza*, "Araldo dello Spettacolo", 19(88), 1963, p. 1 (here and after, personal translation from Italian quotes). On the life and work of Catalucci, see: Febian, *Quarant'anni di silenziosa operosità*, "Araldo dello spettacolo", 24(37), 1969, p. 2; V. Previtali, *L'anarchico in pellicola. Ettore Catalucci e la ricerca della perfetta luce*, Teseo Editore, Roma 2021.

2 For a definition of the development and printing sector in the cinematographic industry, see: M. Bernardo, *Sviluppo e stampa* (https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/sviluppo-e-stampa_(Enciclopedia-del-Cinema)/); D. Case, *Film Technology in Post-Production*, Focal Press, Oxford et al., 2001.

3 In reconstructing the history of Technospes and, more generally, of the Italian Technical Industries, we have relied on the collaboration of various sources and archives. Above all, the ANICA archive in Oppido Lucano (PZ), the societal dossiers at the Chamber of Commerce of Rome, and the oral testimony of some of the protagonists' heirs, in particular Finestauri and Calzini families.

represent an arena of cultural and economic power, enacted at micro- and macro-scales, in which participants contest the range of cultural expressions and meanings generated and how the commercial value of culture should be accumulated and invested".[4] The same truth applies to Italian cinematography following WWII, as evidenced by various recent studies. In this regard, Mariapia Comand and Simone Venturini have observed that: "The Italian industrial system has navigated the complexity of multiple dynamics in action, in the inter-twining of forces in the field often in antagonism with each other, reacting to tensions and internal and international contradictions […]".[5] In the resulting galaxy, technical industries have played a role that has frequently been viewed as auxiliary to production, when they have been able to carve out their own autonomous and reasonably defined sector. In fact, since 1953, the Unione Nazionale delle Industrie Tecniche Cinematografiche (UNITC) within the Associazione Nazionale delle Industrie Cinematografiche e Affini (ANICA) has formed four groups that will remain relatively stable for several decades and represents the different souls of the technical industry (Fig. 1): the Production Studios Group, the Development and Printing Factories Group, the Recording and Dubbing Factories Group, and the Auxiliary Industries Group.[6] UNITC discursive production is a valuable resource for understanding the power dynamics of each group, as well as the relationship between them and the other spheres of ANICA.

It is not surprising that the development and printing sector has operated in those years as the union's driving voice, with Alberto Genesi of Tecnostampa holding the presidency from 1953 to 1966.[7] We are, after all, in the midst of the transition to colour film, which stresses the Italian industry's capabilities in competing with foreign competitors (namely Technicolor).[8] The colour shift in Italy was led by two main companies: Tecnostampa, owned by the Genesi family, and Spes, controlled by Ettore Catalucci (Fig. 2). In just a few years, both of them were outfitted with specialized colour plants that served as benchmarks for national processing and were directed by two of the foremost experts of the field: the engineer Mario Calzini for Tecnostampa and the law-graduated Elio Finestauri for Spes.[9]

Alongside them, there were a number of other significant Roman plants in the sector (e.g., Staco, S.A.C.I., and Fototecnica). As Carla Mereu Keating points out, such abundancy

4 P. McDonald, *Media, Industries, Research. Problematizing the field*, in *The Routledge Companion to Media Industries* Id. (ed.), Routledge, London and New York 2022, p. 1.

5 M. Comand, S. Venturini, *MMC47'76. Modi, memorie e culture della produzione cinematografica: strumenti, metodi e primi esiti*, "L'Avventura. International Journal of Film and Media Landscapes", 7(special issue), 2021, p. 4. One the topic, see also: V. Buccheri, L. Malavasi, *La materia dei sogni. L'impresa cinematografica in Italia*, Carocci, Roma 2006; L. Barra, T. Bonini, S. Splendore (eds.), *Backstage. Studi sulla produzione dei media in Italia*, Unicopli, Milano 2016; M. Giordana, E. Ugenti, *Culture e pratiche della produzione. Il cinema italiano tra gli anni cinquanta e gli anni settanta*, Marsilio, Venezia 2024.

6 See: ANICA, *L'industria cinematografica italiana 1953*, S.A.E.T., Roma 1953, pp. 95-100.

7 When Luigi De Laurentiis succeeded him: "Il nuovo direttivo delle industrie tecniche", *Cinema d'oggi*, 5(45), 1971, p. 5.

8 On the topic, see: F. Pierotti, *Prima di Totò a colori. Il passaggio al colore nel cortometraggio italiano (1949-1952)*, *Cabiria*, ???, 2013, pp. 4-17; Id., *Un'archeologia del colore nel cinema italiano. Dal Technicolor ad Antonioni*, Edizioni ETS, Pisa 2016.

9 P.C., *Pionieri della produzione del film a colori in Italia*, *Un treno di ricordi. Bollettino AIC*, 1997, pp. 35-37.

was the result from the last wave of infrastructural expenditures planned by the fascist government in the 1940s to boost national film output.[10] Thanks to the data about movie credits kindly granted by ANICA, we were not only able to census them, but also to estimate the percentage of films covered by each of them from 1944 to 1975. Out of 1274 films, Spes worked the 32% and Tecnostampa the 21%, meaning that Genesi and Catalucci together accounted for more than half of the total development and printing production in those decades.

However, the importance assumed in the sector should not be misleading: the economic situation of the development and printing houses can never be said to be stable, not even during the golden years of Italian cinema. Always in the background important problems loomed: the high cost required for processing the film and for the continuous updating of the machinery, to which was added a condition of oversizing compared to the market demand. Furthermore, there was no lack of less legitimate forms of competition: small companies offering price below the list approved by ANICA, but also the Istituto Luce, which, operating in a grey area of the Andreotti law (no. 958, 1949) first and Corona law (no. 1213, 1965) after, offered its services for the development and printing of fictional feature films. The rapport between the private companies and Luce was tense, to say the least, for over twenty years, during which the problem was never solved.[11] Additionally, around 1958 a Technicolor factory opened in Rome, which, even if under strong limits, soon revealed itself to be a fierce competitor: the economic steadiness of the American company and the sure entry of work made Technicolor a sought-after destination for many of the employees of the other Roman companies.[12]

This is why Catalucci's appeal seems timely even though it addresses the so-called "Hollywood on the Tiber": behind the grandeurs of Italian cinema, fundamental fissures in the technical industries were rapidly growing, and when the financial shrinkage intercepted the efforts for an up-to-date technological offer in an inflated and hypercompetitive reality, the cracks became chasms. Tecnostampa and Spes were not spared, but rather were hit hard by this convergence of factors, and, faced with a scenario that appeared to be of great change and instability brought by the progressive passage to a post-Fordist economy, they felt forced to seek new solutions.[13]

10 C. Mereu Keating, *Il 'centro del cinema mondiale'. La* romanitas *del settore produttivo tra istanze di decentramento e internazionalizzazione*, "L'Avventura. International Journal of Film and Media Landscapes", 9(special issue), 2023, p. 55.

11 The feud between Luce and the private development and printing companies lasted many years, with the latter continually asking regulatory action to limit Luce's activities. For a first testimony on the topic, see: ANICA, *L'attività dell'A.N.I.C.A. 1951-52*, Rome: S.A.E.T., 1952, p. 99.

12 On the first impact of the Italian Technicolor factory in UNITC, see: ANICA, *L'industria cinematografica*, Rome: Stab. Tipografico Carlo Colombo, 1960, pp. 79-86.

13 On the challenges of film industries facing post-Fordism, see, among others: M. Lorenzen, *Internationalization vs. Globalization of the Film Industry*, "Industry and Innovation", 14(4), pp. 349-357.

The Tecnostampa company for "development and printing of cinematographic films"[14] opened its doors in 1925, in Via Albalonga 38, at the initiative of Vincenzo Genesi.[15] After him, his sons Alberto, Giulio, and Carlo succeeded at the lead of the plant in the 1940s. Around 1950, the Genesis met Mario Calzini through the mediation of the Orlandi family, the Italian distributor of Agfacolor film, and hired him as Technical Director of their colour processing plant.

Facing the stagnation in the second half of the 1960s, a very unclear framework regulation regarding technical industries, and the development of a new market marked by strong competition and internationalisation, the Genesi family became interested in forming alliances with foreign countries.[16] It so forged a collaboration with Rank Film Laboratories, an English counterpart, with the goal of establishing a hub capable of responding to the global sector crisis. In 1970, Tecnostampa became Technochrome.[17] According to his end-of-year report, Alberto Genesi expressed cautious optimism about the future of the society: "The foundations for a profitable management have been laid, among other things, by purchasing machinery and equipment and making appropriate contacts with customers".[18] It was at that point that their historical competitor, Spes, also became interested in the operation and began to reach an agreement with the Genesis for a merger.

Founded by Ettore Catalucci in 1924 and with headquarters first in Via Nomentana and, from 1932, in Viale Campo Boario 56, Spes (originally an acronym for Sviluppo Pellicole E Stampa) was the Italian sector's leader (Fig. 3).[19] They strengthened their primate after the colour turn, with the construction of what was described as "the largest colour factory in Europe" and directed by Elio Finestauri.[20] By the late 1960s, Spes had engaged in an effort to upgrade the technological department, spearheaded by the youthful and promising Ettore De' Cinque-Quintili Catalucci, called "Ruccio". As Mario Bernardo years later reports in his eulogy to Ettore Catalucci: "The small laboratory […] had become, thanks to him, a large plant in step with the times, with over 260 employees and which handled 12 million

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14 Tecnostampa, *Notification n. 29843*, 2 April 1926, document held by Chamber of Commerce, Rome.

15 For a brief history of the company, see: E. Jattarelli, *Quando la pellicola vive il suo momento 'magico'. La storia del Cinema italiano passa attraverso le case di stampa*, "*Cinema d'oggi*", 2(13), 1968, pp. 5-6.

16 On the topic, see at least: E. Sideri, *Coproducing Europe. An Ethnography of Film Markets, Creativity and Identity*, Berghahn, New York and Oxford 2023. Regarding Italian co-productions in the Sixties, see: F. Di Chiara, *Il fondo 'Co' dell'Archivio Centrale dello Stato. Alcune ipotesi per un'analisi del processo di implementazione della Legge Corona in materia di coproduzioni*, "L'Avventura. International Journal of Film and Media Landscapes", 7(special issue), 2021, pp. 35-50.

17 Technochrome, *Notice to the Tribunal of Rome*, 22 December 1970, document held by Chamber of Commerce, Rome.

18 Technospes, *Ordinary meeting minutes*, 24 February 1972, document held by Chamber of Commerce, Rome.

19 See: E. Jattarelli, "Quando la pellicola vive il suo momento 'magico'", cit., pp. 5-6.

20 "L'Italia avrà il più grande stabilimento d'Europa per i film a colori", *Araldo dello spettacolo*, 4(65), 1949, p. 4. On Finestauri's life and work, see: F. Pierotti, *Elio Finestauri*, "Quaderni del CSCI", 13, 2017, p. 243.

meters of film per year. [...]".[21] Then Bernardo provocatively closes his description of the plant in the golden years, suggesting that: "He could not fear anything from anyone".[22]

And yet, the situation at Spes in the 1960s was the same as at Tecnostampa: the "old guard" was looking for a replacement, and the crisis was bringing the company to its knees. It was therefore decided to create a newer and larger society, ideally capable of challenging the growing power of Technicolor and Luce. In the space of just one year, an agreement was reached, and, on October 2, 1972, Technospes was born.[23] The organisational chart included: Alberto Genesi as president, Catalucci as honorary president, Finestauri at the public relations, and "Ruccio" as the new technical director.

Infrastructure's raw nerves: maintenance, safety, pollution

Although the operation had been advertised with considerable enthusiasm (Fig. 4), the situation of Technospes quickly became severe, even in the eyes of the management: "Many structural and organisational problems arose from the aforementioned concentration".[24] The two circumstances that required immediate resolution were the unsustainable number of employees (more than 470 units) and the cohabitation of two plants of such magnitude. Again, the company minutes of Technospes make it clear that the administration's goal was to reduce the number of workers within a few months.[25] However, the cuts were vigorously opposed by the labours, who staged a series of major strikes, such as the protests for the new workers' contract of 1973, which not only significantly curtailed the projected cuts but also disrupted the scheduled activity.

The difficulties in cutting staff echoes those ones in reshaping the plants. Management intended to build a new, updated facility to replace the historic ones. It wasn't only about maintenance costs; two other important factors were now taken into account when calculating the essential issues of Via Albalonga and Viale Campo Boario: safety norms and environmental requirements. The first was a long-standing pain in the neck for development and printing societies: because of the film industry's bad reputation, as well as the levity with which numerous factories were extended in the postwar period, the relationship between the sector and the fire department was far from perfect. A precedent had been set by S.A.C.I., which in 1953 was denied authorisation to operate in its historic plant, putting it at risk of closure. Only a joint appeal by ANICA's forces, with the personal involvement of Eitel Monaco, was able to resolve the problem.[26] To avoid such scenarios, Technospes

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21 M. Bernardo, *Un vero pioniere del cinema italiano: Ettore Catalucci*, article found in the Finestauri family archive, p. 16.

22 *Ibidem*.

23 Technospes, *Extraordinary meeting minutes*, 2 October 1972 document held by Chamber of Commerce, Rome.

24 Technospes, *Ordinary meeting minutes*, 14 March 1974, document held by Chamber of Commerce, Rome.

25 Technospes, *Ordinary meeting minutes*, 31 July 1977, document held by Chamber of Commerce, Rome.

26 The little informations recovered on S.A.C.I.'s episode are kept in the "GSSS" folder, no. 1021 of the ANICA archive.

planned to construct a new centre that was in compliance with the law and located distant from high-density population districts. It was also for this reason that they chose a plot of land near Cinecittà: in addition to the obvious benefits of proximity to the studios, there was the possibility of carving out a new space for themselves in a more industrial location.

Environmental contamination was instead a comparatively new issue. It appears in a number of sources dating back to the early 1970s, when companies started to be concerned about the disposal of processed materials and produced toxins. In a 1974 article, in which UNITC President Alberto Sciarretta communicates the main problems of the category at the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, the matter of pollution comes as one of the major issues, "for which many companies in the sector are in serious difficulty, unable to obtain provisions or even information from the competent Authorities".[27]

For all these reasons, the project for the new plant was urgent and critical. And yet, the works only started in 1976 and six years later the sole office quarters were accessible. Thanks to a detailed article in "Note di Tecnica cinematografica", we know the project in detail: constructed next to the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, the new complex should have included five buildings (one for 35mm, one for 16mm and Super8, one for subtitling, one for the other services and the last one for offices and screening rooms) and be filled with state-of-the-art equipment (Fig. 5).[28]

Making matters worse, the unexpected death of Ruccio Catalucci effectively compromised his family's interest in the future of the company. Both Genesi and Catalucci did not find a generational change, and, in 1977, they passed the baton to Augusto Tifi, who had been part of the company since the beginning. The opening of the new plant arrived too late and five years later, on the pages of the Corsera we read: "Technospes [...] is closing its doors".[29] The collapse became irreversible and, in 1985, the new Sole Director Lorenzo D'Ormea certifies the obligation to file for bankruptcy.[30]

Conclusions

Looking at the swift end of Technospes and, therefore, of the two leading societies in the Italian film printing and development sector, is observing the crossroad of many historic dynamics that spread from the socio-cultural changes in habits and life-styles, to the techno-normative updating prompted by new media, as well as the financial-economic factors, both internal (a more ferocious competition) and external (international and intermedial competitors). Beneath these vast trajectories, the infrastructural dimension of a single society

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27 *Presa di posizione. Le industrie tecniche al Ministero dell'industria*, "Cinema d'oggi", 7(7), 1973, p. 2.

28 *Il nuovo stabilimento Technospes di via Tuscolana*, "Note di Tecnica cinematografica", 15(47), 1976, p. 15.

29 V. Ciuffa, *Technospes: 200 in cassa integrazione. Anche i gestori di sale in assemblea*, "Corriere della sera", 16 July 1982, p. 13.

30 Technospes, *Ordinary meeting minutes*, 30 October 1985, document held by Chamber of Commerce, Rome.

became a fertile soil in which to observe the specificity an operation (Technospes merger) and its resonance with its industrial transformations.

The proximity between media industry studies and infrastructuralism, as defined by John Durham Peters, has after all produced a growing number of contributes that tend to sensitise for a study of media that restores the ecological and connective elements of the medium reality.[31] From the more media archaeological work of Jussi Parikka to the network analyses of Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski,[32] the focus on less notable (even "boring") elements has pointed out the historical relevance of adequately considering the raw materiality of a single plant, tube or street; at the point that David Hesmondhalgh goes so far as to speak of an "infrastructural turn".[33] Moreover, reconnecting to Technospes' history, it is important to underline that all these techno-environmental factors cannot just be dismissed as collateral or easy to fix, since they have their historical depth. They are endemic and persistent cracks, slithering under the industry's skin during and even before the "glorious years" of Roman cinema, and, despite being called out in multiple occasion, they persisted until the 1970s crisis, when they emerged as momentous structural failures.

31 J. Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds. Towards a Philosophy of Elemental Media*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 2016, pp. 30-38.

32 J. Parikka, *A Geology of Media*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2015; L. Parks, N. Starosielski, *Signal Traffic. Critical Studies of Media Infrastructures*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana et al., 2015.

33 D. Hesmondhalgh, *The Infrastructural Turn in Media and Internet Research*, in "The Routledge Companion to Media Industries", cit., pp. 132–142.

Fig. 1 – "To consecrate the event of the constitution of the National Union of Technical Industries, Dr. Goffredo Lombardo (with the lawyer Monaco and the comm. Genesi at his side) offered a lunch to the representatives of the new organisation" ("Si è costituita l'Unione Nazionale Industrie Tecniche Cinematografiche", *Cinespettacolo*¸ 8(10-11), 1953, p. 18).
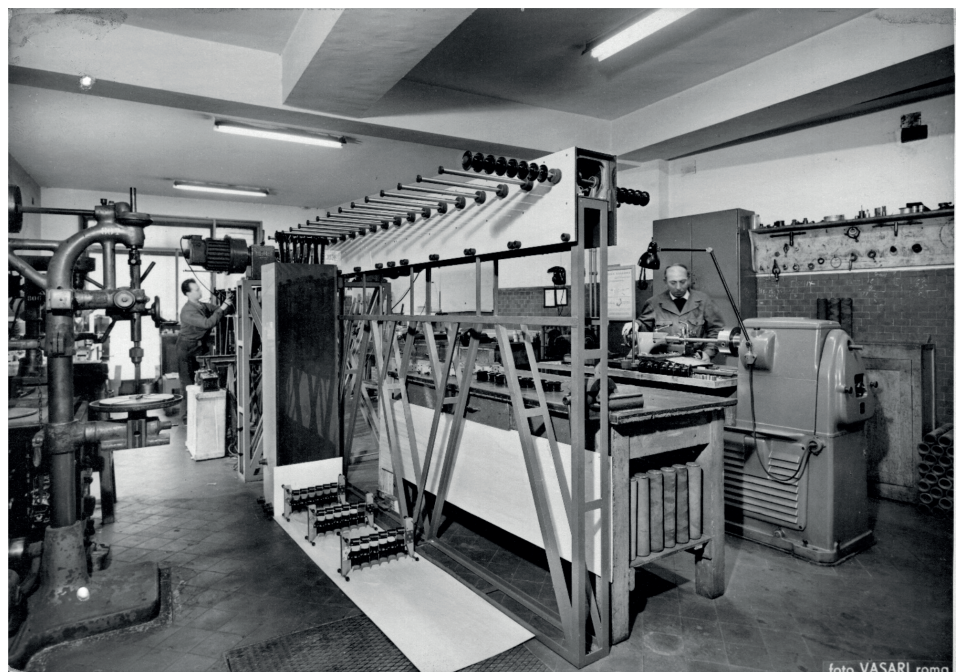
Fig. 2 – Inside Tecnostampa plant at Via Albalonga (courtesy of Calzini family).

Fig. 3 – Spes plant seen from Viale Campo Boario (courtesy of Finestauri family).

Fig. 4 – "Technospes is a window open to global cinema" (*Note di Tecnica cinematografica*, 14(44), 1975, p. 15).
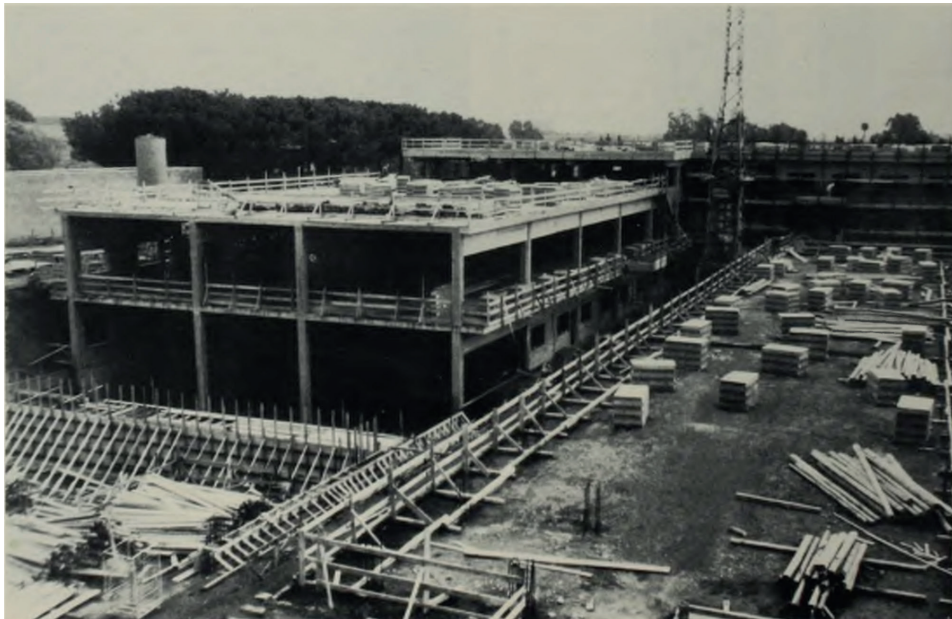
Fig. 5 – The work in progress for the new Technospes factory at Via Tuscolana ("Il nuovo stabilimento Technospes di via Tuscolana", *Note di Tecnica cinematografica*, 15(47), 1976, np).

OF SONG AND SPONSORSHIP: AMATEUR FILMMAKING EXPERIMENTS WITH 16MM COLOR FILM BASE ON THE FRONTLINES OF THE ITALIAN FASCIST PROJECT

Simona Schneider

In *Images in Spite of All*, Georges Didi-Huberman tells the story of "Four Pieces of Film Snatched from Hell." Of the paltry four frames, only three show the incriminating activity of disposing of freshly gassed bodies, with only one clearly in focus. Didi-Huberman writes of the images stolen from the *real*, the framing and blurriness that tell of the stealthy, anonymous *sonderkommando* photographer's hidden position, followed by sudden composure Huberman denotes as "business": "It is as though fear had disappeared for an instant in the face of necessity, the business of snatching an image."[1] It may seem strange to introduce Huberman's observation about a brave and risky photograph snatched at Auschwitz to discuss *Il Friuli* (Giuseppe Francescato, Orama Lestuzzi, Fausto Magnani, Maurizio Sanvilli, 1936–1942), a silent 20-minute color 16mm film consisting of a series of placid, postcard-like views of landscapes and architectural sites, montages of agricultural traditions and progress, and a performative ethnographic dance sequence in the Italian border region by the same name.[2] What allows it and what it allows, is the recognition of a shared condition of sponsorship in material and photographic documents pertaining to WWII. In the first case, the Polish Resistance supplied the camera that "probably contained only a small piece of blank film,[3] and in the second, the film producer Agfa (Aktien Gessellschaft für Anilinfabrikation) provided scarce but cutting-edge color film stock through the Fascist film institute Luce to amateurs in a contested border region.

This article proposes that the poetics of *Il Friuli* must be understood through its iconographic inheritances of a political Pictorialism from contemporary material and cinema culture from the region, as well as through a consideration of how the 16mm color film base overdetermined the reworking of this iconography. It seeks to comprehend how the film takes part in numerous frictions in the visual codification of the border region of Friuli—part of the Friuli-Venezia Giulia Region, autonomous since 1968—as Italian during the Fascist era (1922–1943). Reading the film through these lenses allows for a

1 G. Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, trans. Shane B. Lillis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 13.

2 The film was reconstituted and released on DVD in 2006 by the Cineteca del Friuli.

3 Ibid., 11.

reinsertion of the raw film material into the history of a period known for its ideology, especially its peddling of "Marxism stripped of materialism," with the aim, in the words of Jeffrey Schnapp referring to Susan Sontag, "to get inside fascism's power of fascination in order to break the spell."[4] It foregrounds how technical and aesthetic experimentation with Agfacolor 16mm film stock contributed to the modernization of the previous iconography. Though geographically and aesthetically removed from the Fascist-era avant-garde movement of futurism, *Il Friuli* provides indexical evidence of a technical experimentalism that was in dialogue and tension with Pictorialism and Fascist aesthetics. Tracing this background through the consumer magazine Note fotografiche, published by Agfa elucidates the business of making images in this contested border region and the amateur's role in it during a fraught historical period in which existential rights depended on a highly codified symbolic order.

The Business of Amateur Filmmaking on the Eastern Frontier

The equipment and supplies granted to four students operating under the auspices of the Cineguf of Udine, the local branch of the nationwide network of Fascist university film clubs, came from Mussolini's Fascist government by way of Instituto Nazionale Luce (L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa, or the Educational Cinematographic Union), the state propaganda film institute. The students had access to the newly released Agfacolor film stock through an exclusive educational film contract between Luce and the German raw stock producer Agfa, a member of the IG Farben Consortium and an official supporter of the National Socialists in Germany.[5] It constitutes the first known color film shot in the region and shooting began the same year that Agfacolor film stock became available.[6] Shaped equally by the possibilities of 16mm and one of the first color film stocks for that camera as by the still prevalent Pictorialism of the era, the initially bucolic-seeming film *Il Friuli* bears the marks of its competing means and influences.[7] Furthermore, a war looming just out of frame girds its gleeful technical experiments.

4 J. T. Schnapp, "Fascinating Fascism," *Journal of Contemporary History* 31, no. 2 (April 1996): 237. S. Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism," *The New York Review of Books*, February 6, 1975.

5 A. Mariani and S. Schneider, "16mm Standardization and Agfa's Strategic Policies in Fascist Italy" in 16 AT 100: THE REMAKING OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY CINEMA, Gregory A. Waller and Haidee Wasson, eds. (Oxford University Press, in production).

6 The second-place winner at the same national festival of small-format film where *Il Friuli* won first place was another color film, *In fondo al mare,* shot by the Gorizia branch of the Cineguf, see C. Gaberscek, *Il Paesaggio Friulano nel documentario cinematografico (1910-1969).* La Cineteca del Friuli, 2006.

7 On amateur experiments with color film in the 1930s in North America, and the tensions between "traditional aesthetic strategies and experimental – occasionally even modernist – ones," see C. Tepperman, "Color Unlimited: Amateur Color Cinema in the 1930's." In *Color and the Moving Image: History, Theory, Aesthetics, Archive*, edited by Simon Brown, Sarah Street, and Liz I. Watkins, 2013, 138–49. AFI Film Readers Series. New York: Routledge, p. 147.

Unlike other types of students, amateurs, or avant-gardists, Cineguf filmmakers were not entirely "removed from exchange relations."[8] Through Luce's agreement with Agfa, they were granted materials to shoot outside of the usual context for amateur film production—that is, of the privileged bourgeois or industrialist with time on his hands—in an effort to train future propagandists. In practice, however, the groups were managed locally, there was room for experimentation.[9] There is no record of exactly how the idea for *Il Friuli* came about or what, if any, strings were attached to the delivery of the precious and cutting-edge color technology; it is notable, however, that shooting went on for six years with four different filmmakers, as if the project had a life of its own. Upon the film's first projection at the first *Mostra nazionale del passo ridotto* held in Udine from December 10–13, 1942 (Fascist year XXI), where it won first place, a dance troupe performed and live music with singing in Friulan—the regional dialect—accompanied the film. A booklet, *Villotte e canzoni friulane antiche e moderne nel film 'Friuli'* provided the lyrics in Friulan and, for the out-of-town attendees, a facing page translation into standard Italian. This multi-media performance celebrating regional culture copied the release of the film *La sentinella della patria* (*Sentinel of the Homeland*, dir. Chino Ermacora, 1927), a 35mm propaganda film produced by Luce to simultaneously commemorate the losses of the region in WWI and promote the region as a tourism destination and for its strategic geographic location in the newly reconsolidated Italy. However, whereas Ermacora's film had codified the region as Italian and sought to incorporate the periphery into the center by debuting the film in Rome and circulating it as an educational 9.5mm Pathé print, *Il Friuli* and its premiere at the *Mostra nazionale* meant to bring the attention and resources of the nation to the border at a time of increasing political instability.

Pictorialism and Friulan Identity as National Identity

Women collect hay and carry it on their backs, farmers plow their fields, children walk mountain paths. The dance troupe "Danzerini di Aviano" twirls in medieval courtyards. Time stands still or seems to among immobile mountain peaks, at dusty architectural sites, castles and churches, bridges and aqueducts. Boats hang on cranes standing at attention in the shipyard in Aquileia or leisurely navigate the Grado lagoon. Inhabitants display their ingenuity and courage—weaving, felling trees, and carving picture frames tilling soil. The primarily rural, agrarian region of Friuli (of which Udine is the modern capital and Cividale di Friuli the historic one) serves as a setting for a seemingly anodyne lyricism based on the cyclicality of seasons and the romanticism of the pastoral.

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8 P. R. Zimmermann, "The Amateur, the Avant-Garde, and Ideologies of Art," *Journal of Film and Video* 38, no. 3/4 (Summer-Fall) (1986): 63–85, 63.

9 A. Mariani, *Gli anni del Cineguf. Il cinema sperimentale italiano dai cine-club al Neorealismo*, Mimesis, Udine-Milano 2017, pp. 149-155.

While many of the images in this shot list could come interchangeably from *Il Friuli* or *La sentinella della patria*, each shot is immediately identifiable.[10] Not only is the former in color, and the latter black and white or sometimes tinted, but the movement in the frame and the movement *of* the frame distinguish the fundamental stability of the images. Though *La sentinella della patria* was a reference, with its monumental camerawork by cinematographer Alfredo Lenci—known for *Messalina di Guazzoni* (1923) and *Ben Hur* (dir. Fred Niblo, 1925)—and dense poetic intertitles by Ermacora, the director, a poet and the chief editor of *La Panarie: Rivista Friulana d'arte e di coltura*, its primary visual modes of fixed shots, theatrical staging, and pastoral landscapes constitute a stark formal contrast with *Il Friuli*, which lacks intertitles and uses dynamic, heldheld shots, naturalistic performance, and primarily agricultural landscapes (fig. 1 and 2).[11]

Fig. 1 and 2. A still from the dance sequence in *La Sentinella della Patria* ([2021] 1927) (left) and a still from the dance sequence in *Il Friuli* (1936–1942) (right). All film stills courtesy of the Cineteca del Friuli.

In *La sentinella della patria* appear within an elaborate and imposing frame with classical columns and laurels as well as the words "Edizione Propaganda Italica" or upon a backdrop of the Fascist eagle with wings spread in the middle of a garland, clutching a bundle of sticks (a *fascio* from which the word fascism comes) and at the end of it, an axe. In the background, the acronym Luce makes the text hard to read. Ermacora, was one of the greatest proponents of the Friulan language, which today enjoys official status, though only one repeated word "Mandi! Mandi!" appears in the intertitles with the gloss: "…is the typical Friulan salute, derived from the Latin, 'mane diu.'" The intertitles indicate that the film was meant for non-Friulans, even as the images and accompanying brochure in Friulan were geared at preserving, or salvaging, already heavily codified traditions.

10 *La sentinella* was even edited and released under the title *Il Friuli* in 1941 in a 9.5mm Pathé Baby print for the educational market.

11 One of the students who filmed *Il Friuli*, Giuseppe Francescato, became a noted linguistic expert on the Friulan language. His interest in the visual and vernacular semiotics of the region made him the perfect collaborator as well as an actor committed to the regional culture, as Ermacora had been before him. Francescato was only 14 when filming began, so he may have joined the project later. It is to his son that we owe the conservation and donation of the film to the Cineteca del Friuli. "Dizionario biografico dei Friulani." Accessed October 13, 2024. https://www.dizionariobiograficodeifriulani.it/francescato-giuseppe/.

Visually, Pictorialism had been important to the Friuli region since the 19th century and continued to prevail as the primary aesthetic mode longer than in other places, partly because of its distance from larger urban and more quickly industrializing centers.[12] Paolo Villa writes of the landscape that it endowed diverse ethnolinguistic communities present in the region with a sense of belonging, and therefore received a "noteworthy symbolic investment."[13] In her field-shaping study of the overlaps and tensions of amateur film and the avant-garde tradition, Patricia Zimmermann underscores the ways in which the aesthetics of Pictorialism, Romanticism, and amateurism in photography, all associated with naturalism and authenticity, promoted focusing the camera on apolitical subjects "rather than towards an investigation of existing social relations, industry, factories, or more contemporary issues."[14] Most content was subjective, domestic, or neutral, and as amateurs were encouraged in consumer magazines to mimic Pictorialism, they often missed the opportunity to explore and experiment with the affordances of new lightweight and portable amateur technologies. By the mid-thirties, some of this had changed, and montage offered a way for amateurs to break the conventions of Pictorialism to achieve a more critical view of everyday life.[15]

Pictorial Dissimulation and the Aesthetics of Agfa's Note fotografiche

In addition to having *La Sentinella* and the iconography of *La Panarie* as precursors, other representational culture surrounding the Cineguf of Udine included the Pictorialism promoted in Agfa's consumer magazine *Note fotografiche*, one of the main forums for amateur and professional cinematographers, whose announcements often directly addressed Cineguf members. Many of the articles in *Note fotografiche* were translated from the German and came from central headquarters in Berlin, though local readers could send in their photographs for feedback from experts. This feedback loop established a hierarchical, authoritative model with the highest judges in Berlin, but Agfa also asked Italian photographers and critics to respond to these entries.[16] In content and matter, *Il Friuli* exemplifies several

12 On *La sentinella della patria*'s links with the photographic tradition of Pictorialism through the photographer Attilio Brisighelli, see P. Sacco, "La Sentinella Della Patria Tra Fotografia e Cinema." *La Panarie: Rivista Friulana d'Arte e di Coltura*, vol. 30, no. 117 (June), 1998, pp. 83–93.

13 P. Villa, "Per una 'documentazione poetica' del paesaggio. Tra pittorialismo e documentarismo nella fotografia friulana del dopoguerra," in *Paradigmi del fotografico*, ed. Claudio Marra and Daniel Borselli (Bologna: Pendragon, 2022), 321 (My translation).

14 P. R. Zimmermann, "The Amateur, the Avant-Garde, and Ideologies of Art," *Journal of Film and Video 38*, no. 3/4 (Summer-Fall) (1986): 72.

15 Zimmermann references an essay by Harry Alan Potamkin entitled, "The Montage Film," which first appeared in *Amateur Movie Makers* in 1930 (81).

16 For a history of the magazine and a timeline of its increasing Italianization, see E. Gipponi and C. Paollila, " 'Agfa Note fotografiche' tra periodical studies e format theory" in this issue. For an account of Ubaldo Magnaghi's experimentation with Agfa products and his collaboration with *Note fotografiche*, see De Rosa, Miriam; Mariani, Andrea: "Experimenting in circles: Agfa, amateur cinema, and the art of R&D," *NECSUS: European Journal of Media Studies*, Autumn 2023.

ways in which Agfa and the war effort shaped the pictorial landscape in the lead-up to and in the first years of the war without explicitly mentioning the war at all.

Aimed at capturing a bourgeoning consumer market, Agfa's marketing emitted a sense of prosperity to stoke consumer spending; Perhaps subconsciously, if you had a camera, you, too, would see what the *Note fotografiche* was showing you cameras see, including peaceful, pastoral landscapes, cute children, and lush shop windows. As one Agfa advertising motto put it, "Photography enhances to life" ("*La fotografia valorizza la vita*"). Italy officially joined World War II in 1940. In a 1941 call for participants in *Note fotografiche*, the Cineguf of Napoli announced the distribution of "material supplies along with advice and technical and artistic assistance" to all those interested in making Fascist *cinegiornali*, or newsreels. These consisted primarily of views of Fascist events (*manifestazioni*) such as the Littorali—exhibitions of sporting events (mini-Olympics), art exhibitions—as well as of "life, industry, and landscape."[17] Join the ideological effort and you will receive supplies, it promised.

During the war, *Note fotografiche*'s content displays a conspicuous lack of imagery explicitly referencing it. One must turn the pages of the magazine with a forensic eye to notice images of technological progress useful for the war machine, but nonetheless coded simply as scientific feats or that hint at submerged violence among serene landscapes under the newly nazi-red cover (previous issues had been entirely black and white). A cover image shows a projectile cutting through water and demonstrating the technical innovations of a high shutter speed able to shoot at 1/1,000,000 sec (fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Cover of *Note fotografiche*, November 1941.

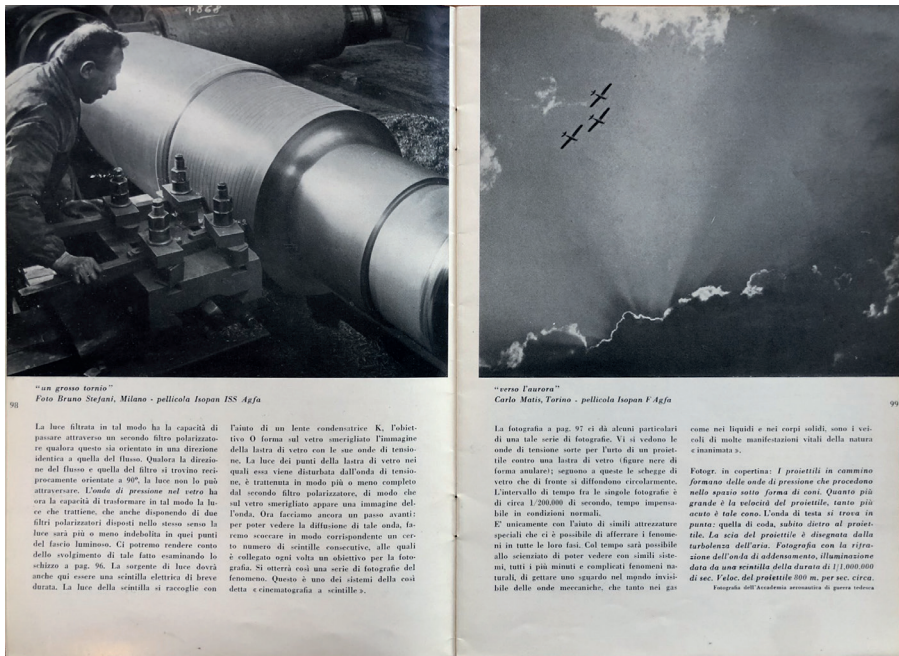17 *Note fotografiche*, N. 5, 1941, 114.

Fig. 4. The inside of *Note fotografiche*, November 1941, p. 98-99.

A spread of images shows those sent in by the magazine's readers. In Turin, a photograph capturing three fighter planes flying in formation towards rays emerging from behind black clouds is entitled *Verso l'aurora* ("Towards the Dawn"). The caption further showcases that the image was taken with Agfa's Isopan F, presumably to underscore the film's dynamic range. Though it is not surprising that Agfa would seek to present "apolitical," "timeless," or "lyrical" imagery in its pages, it is also important to see these images through the structuring absence of the war as a celebration of military technology and the bright future ahead for Germany and Italy, who had become allies the year before.

Experimenting with Agfacolor, Montage, and the Out-of-Frame

The images in *Il Friuli* modernize the pursuits of Pictorialism, however, they also lend these experiments to territorial claims and nationalist narratives. The surviving copy had to be assembled from surviving sequences, and was reconstructed according to the idea that it had originally adhered to a logic of regional geographic integrity, which followed a "concatenation in the representation of the environment 'from the Alps to the sea'" that the journalist and politician Pacifico Valussi had coined in 1865 to justify the necessity of Trieste's inclusion in the Kingdom of Italy (fig. 5)[18].

18 P. Valussi. *Dalla memoria d'un vecchio giornalista dell'epoca del Risorgimento italiano*. Udine: Pelligrini,
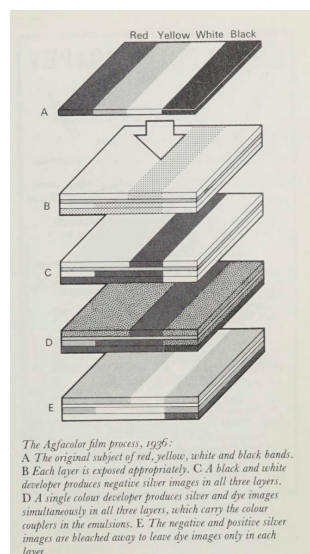
Fig 5 and 6. A shot of leisure activity at the end of the film follows the logic of Valussi's dictum "from the Alps to the sea" and aims to test the color capacities Agfacolor (left) and the Agfacolor film process in 1936. Coe, Brian. *Colour Photography : The First Hundred Years, 1840-1940*. London : Ash & Grant, 1978, p. 129 (right).

Color-forming developer reacted with couplers in each layer of substrate on the film base to form magenta (or its opposite, green), cyan, and yellow. The geographical climax of the film at the sea also marks the apotheosis of the color technology, with the warm colors present in dinghy's sails and the predominance of natural blues. Indeed, though the content and ethos of the images continued to pursue the Pictorialism of the region's symbolic investments with the added mission of exploring the affordances of the 16mm camera and Agfacolor film (fig. 6), these new attributes of the camera continued to be folded into a naturalist aesthetic through paratextual material. Framing *Il Friuli* within the rhetoric of a Vertovian "life caught unawares"[19] aesthetic approach for promotional purposes, the event listing in the Fascist organ *Il Popolo di Friuli* promised that the public would certainly show up in great numbers, not only for the above-mentioned reasons, but because "many will surprise themselves from the screen, caught furtively by an overly prying lens…though for once also an intelligent one."[20] This aspect is purely rhetorical, as even the group scenes are clearly staged and choreographed to be able to film close ups with particular musicians and dancers, who would have known they were being filmed.[21]

1967, p. 79, referenced in C. Gaberscek, *Il paesaggio friulano nel documentario cinematografico (1910-1969)* (La Cineteca del Friuli, 2006). Valussi writes of the necessity of a kind of maritime Switzerland in the sense of its necessary neutrality because of its strategic commercial position.

19 D. Vertov, *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*. Edited by Annette Michelson, Translated by Kevin O'Brien, University of California Press, 1984, 41.

20 "Friuli," *Il Popolo del Friuli*, Dec. 12, 1942.

21 As seen above in figure 1 and 2.

On the one hand, these handheld dynamic shots proving the stability of the color technology were coded as naturalistic, for instance when capturing dancers' movements or embodying a point-of-view shot admiring a mountain range or a church steeple. On the other hand, handheld pans over postcard-like landscapes challenge the sense of this iconography's stability, literally veering left midway through a horizontal pan or changing course to a vertical tilt to follow architectural features such as a tower. Though in some ways these movements seem to naturally follow the "sites", they also at times draw these bounded spaces as an image of what cannot be filmed. These movements treat imagery suited to the aesthetic tradition while simultaneously carving them away from traditional landscape representation. Close-ups showcasing the products of the land have a similar effect—as inserts, they fetishize food by isolating it and treating it as an object disconnected from its human use or meaning. These shots seem planned to test and celebrate the dynamic range of the color film stock as they capture clusters of red and white grapes in backlit and reflective lighting situations. Low angle shots of red wine against a white house and a man sharpening a steely blade against a blue sky abstract these subjects from the land and emphasize their color contrast or conformity while raising them to the status of icons (fig. 7, 8, 9 and 10). As with the single sharp photograph in the camp at Auschwitz, these explicitly composed shots evidence a concerted effort, the business of capturing the people and the land for the sponsoring entity.

The showcasing of color film as technological progress parallels the promotion of industrial, agricultural progress. A shot of yellow corn still in its green husk fades to naked ears of corn and finally to a loaf of polenta, which is in turn devoured by children in golden light (fig. 11 and 12). The effortless transformation of raw material to food creates a phantasmagorical commodity, conjured without hands or visible labor through color matches and associative montage.[22] The DVD, whose purpose is mainly to make the views in the film available, carries a relatively light, often unassuming soundtrack that helps to signal scene changes and hide cuts. A slow saxophone solo and soft brushes of the cymbal create a nostalgic atmosphere around the children eating the miraculously self-producing sustenance. However, in the tensions between the film's symbolic investments, its narrative of progress, and its experimentation with color, it is possible to read this sequence subversively. For instance, these few frames could also tell of how little film stock they had, or perhaps, how little corn. As filming for *Il Friuli* progressed, so did international shortages of both film and food. The majority of official resources during WWII went into documenting perceived glories and victories for newsreels or into amateur travel-films that were meant to contribute a perception of normalcy and ease.[23] The ambiguities and fragmentation of montage and its imperfect ellipses leave cracks through which to spot jealously guarded meanings.

22 This politically ambiguous "trick" is also one Dziga Vertov prized, such as in a sequence of pears packing themselves in *A Sixth Part of the World* (1926).

23 See F. Guerin, *Through Amateur Eyes: Film and Photography in Nazi Germany* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

Fig. 7, 8, 9 and 10. Stills from *Il Friuli*.

Fig. 11 and 12. Stills from *Il Friuli*.

The technical experiments prioritize an engagement with the magic of cinema through color film's affordances, at times to the detriment of linear narratives. *Il Friuli* as it was recently released has subtitles identifying locations and a few dates where they are known. One of the longest sequences of the film shows scenes with the subtitle, "Torviscosa in 1940 —

first plowing of the land reclaimed from the swamp" and ends with a man throwing up his hands in a "V" for victory. The original brochure accompanying the film included an introduction that attempts to overdetermine the film's purpose as propaganda for the war, paralleling the zeal of this sequence:

> In the welcome guests, who came to Udine from all over Italy for an art event that opens wider horizons to us and to the world, may the conviction be affirmed that this cinematic work, born in a wartime climate, is an act of the purest faith in Victory, which is being wrought as of now, in addition to on the battlefields, in the purifying workshops of the creative spirit.[24]

The sequence starts with handheld pans following the action of a modern plow and lingers on the thick materiality of the process. The camera pans left to right and tilts up to follow the mechanical tractors cleaving and tilling brown earth. The film then cuts in a montage to a pan over tall wheat in green fields (fig. 13, 14, 15 and 16). Another ellipsis reveals now golden fields and farmers reaping wheat with a horse-drawn vehicle and then to statuesque

Fig. 13, 14, 15 and 16. (clockwise from top left) A montage sequence from *Il Friuli*.

24 Gruppo dei fascisti universitari friulani, Udine, *Villotte e canzoni friulane antiche e moderne nel film "Friuli"*, 1° Mostra nazionale del passo ridotto, 10-13 dicembre 1942-XXI, Udine.

hand-bundled haystacks. The reversal of time's arrow in terms of farming methods while maintaining continuity of time, seasons, and the colors that accompany of them, troubles a clear narrative of progress. The color progression highlights the cycle of the seasons from winter to spring to late summer and ends on the white shirt of the farmer, short of showing winter. Though the last image proclaims victory, within a lyrical logic provoked by the materiality of the film and of the land, it also suggests the new especially hard winter to come, which military-industrial progress would exacerbate, and to which color would not be crucial. Just as winter remains out of frame, so, too, does a prisoner of war camp, Campo 107, housed simultaneously at Torviscosa.

Conclusion

Il Friuli must be seen as an attempt at an insistence on immanent abundance, bounty, and technical progress as epitomized by color film all thanks to a political and military alliance with Germany. This worldview would have been equally motivating to the German soldiers fighting to access precisely these abundant lands, which, during the war, were Germany's main supplier of wheat, rice, cheese, fruit and vegetables, as it was to Italian soldiers seeking to protect their land.[25] With the meager film stock available, all hands went towards amplifying a pastoral quiet harmoniously coupled with promises of technical and cinematic progress at precisely the moment when this basic premise could no longer hold. When Italy surrendered to the Allies almost ten months later, on September 8, 1943, Udine remained under German administration until April 1945, a fact that further shows the importance of this region to the German war effort. Luce and Agfa's sponsorship left its mark on the images, as Agfa's business became selling not only film but also a war. However, the subversive spirit of experimentation and the material agency of the film and the land exceed attempts at neat couplings of earth, culture, and ideology, just as they serve as evidence of the business of representation.

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25 L. Collingham, "Managing Scarcity: Food and World War II in the Mediterranean," *Watch Letter,* no. 36, CIHEAM: International Center for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies, 2016.

Bordwell

David Bordwell (1947-2024) è stato senza dubbio uno degli studiosi di Film & Media Studies più influenti degli ultimi trent'anni. I due volumi *Film Art: An Introduction* (1979) e *Film History: An Introduction* (1994), entrambi cofirmati da Bordwell insieme a Kristin Thompson, sono non solo un esempio alto di divulgazione scientifica, ma anche un caso abbastanza unico di successo planetario nella manualistica universitaria: tradotti in molte lingue, i due titoli campeggiano nei programmi dei corsi di cinema dei paesi più diversi. Tanto quei due testi rappresentano, ogni anno, il punto di ingresso nello studio delle nostre discipline per schiere di studenti, quanto alcuni dei contributi di Bordwell, sia solitari – pensiamo innanzi tutto a *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985) e *On the History of Film Style* (1997) – sia a più mani (*The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960*, 1985, scritto con Kristin Thompson e Janet Staiger), sono volumi imprescindibili per qualunque studioso di cinema.

Nel corso della sua carriera, David Bordwell ha lavorato soprattutto sul cinema americano classico e post-classico, insistendo sulla sostanziale continuità, in termini linguistici, tra la Hollywood della *golden age* e le sue incarnazioni successive. *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (2006) di fatto riparte dal penultimo capitolo di *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, intitolato appunto "Since 1960: the persistence of a mode of film practice", per dimostrare che, con le differenze del caso, l'idea di fondo di che cosa sia un racconto cinematografico, a Hollywood, oggi è più o meno la stessa dell'epoca dello *studio system*. E tra le ultime fatiche di Bordwell troviamo un'opera, *Reinventing Hollywood: How 1940s Filmmakers Changed Movie Storytelling* (2017), che ritorna sul cinema americano classico come grande oggetto d'amore, oltre che di studio.

Ma le ricerche di David Bordwell si sono spinte anche molto lontano dall'universo hollywoodiano. Bordwell è stato tra i primi studiosi occidentali a interessarsi in modo organico alla produzione di Hong Kong (*Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment*, 2000) e ha dedicato una monografia, *The Cinema of Eisenstein* (1993), a uno dei registi chiave del pantheon europeo. Così come *On the History of Film Style* e *Narration in the Fiction Film* lavorano su sequenze provenienti dall'intera storia del cinema, traendo esempi dal muto e dal sonoro, dal cinema d'autore e da quello mainstream, e appunto dalle cinematografie nazionali più diverse. E persino un libro incentrato esclusivamente sulla produzione americana, quale *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, è stato e continua a essere importante anche per chi studia i film di altri paesi, perché la nozione di modo di produzione si è rivelata assai fertile e potenzialmente esportabile in altre contesti.

Se David Bordwell ha svolto una lunga e fortunatissima attività di ricercatore, divulgatore e critico, attività condotta anche attraverso un blog molto letto, è perché, oltre che uno studioso, è stato un appassionato di cinema, un uomo che amava i film, che venivano prima di qualunque costruzione teorica si possa edificare su di essi. Non che rifiutasse la teoria, anzi. Basti dire che la nozione di modo di produzione, che – come appena ricordato – sta al centro di *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, è una categoria che discende dal pensiero di Karl Marx (a essere precisi, il concetto viene elaborato in un capitolo del libro firmato da Janet Staiger, ma è ovvio che i tre autori hanno condiviso in pieno il loro lavoro). Ciò che Bordwell rifiutava era l'uso dogmatico e feticistico della teoria.

Per onorare la memoria di questo grande studioso recentemente scomparso, "La Valle dell'Eden" ha voluto pubblicare un piccolo dossier, con tre saggi che affrontano, da prospettive tra loro molto diverse, il suo lavoro e la sua eredità. Due di questi saggi – il contributo di Adriano D'Aloia (Università di Bergamo) sul Bordwell teorico e quello di Dario Tomasi (Università di Torino) su Bordwell e il cinema di Hong Kong – riguardano in senso stretto la produzione bordwelliana. Il terzo saggio, invece, a opera di quattro dottorandi del curriculum in game design del dottorato in Patrimonio culturale e produzione storico-artistica, audiovisiva e multimediale dell'Università di Torino (Alessia Ianni-Palarchio, Fabrizio Matarese, Mauro Mola, Brando Ratti), prova ad applicare alcune categorie di *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* alla storia del videogioco. Applicare quegli strumenti concettuali a un ambito radicalmente altro ci è sembrato un bel modo di ricordare un uomo di così grande curiosità intellettuale.

Giaime Alonge e Riccardo Fassone

LO SPETTATORE PENSA, LO SPETTATORE FA. DAVID BORDWELL E LA COSTRUZIONE DEI FILM STUDIES CONTEMPORANEI

Adriano D'Aloia

Nell'apertura a un post pubblicato sul suo blog nell'ottobre del 2020, David Bordwell racconta che una delle cose più "carine" che qualcuno gli avesse mai detto fu una frase di Jacques Aumont, che andandolo a trovare a Madison nei primi anni Ottanta e avendo letto i primi capitoli di *Narration in the Fiction Film*, in quel momento in stampa, gli disse che il libro metteva in evidenza qualcosa di importante: lo spettatore pensa[1]. Fra i molti possibili punti di accesso e gli innumerevoli aspetti notevoli del contributo, probabilmente impareggiabile, di Bordwell ai film studies contemporanei vi è proprio il ruolo attivo attribuito allo spettatore e in particolare al suo lavoro mentale. Ciò che oggi ci sembra qualcosa di scontato, era negli anni Ottanta un'idea emergente tutt'altro che assodata. Bordwell aveva proposto di rimpiazzare – o quantomeno riequilibrare – la psicoanalisi, a quel tempo in voga, con le scienze cognitive: un approccio che presupponeva un metodo basato su procedimenti di indagine empirica sulle dinamiche della percezione, delle inferenze, delle credenze, delle intenzioni, dei progetti, dei desideri, delle abilità e dei sentimenti dello spettatore. E ciò a partire da ciò che è visibile (sullo schermo) e indagabile oggettivamente (nella mente), rinunciando alle imperscrutabili e indimostrabili interpretazioni lacaniane su ciò che invece era latente in un soggetto sostanzialmente passivo di fronte allo schermo. Nel libro citato Bordwell poneva le basi per un vasto progetto di ricerca che avrebbe sostituito la psicologia cognitiva alla semiologia, allo strutturalismo, alla psicoanalisi e al culturalismo studiando la narrazione cinematografica sulla base degli schemi mentali a cui lo spettatore ricorre per comprendere gli eventi del racconto e le intenzioni dei personaggi[2]. L'analisi deve pervenire alla *spiegazione* dei fenomeni, non a una loro *interpretazione*. Lo spettatore formula ipotesi, compie inferenze, verifica e rivede costantemente i risultati sino a giungere a una lettura che non è una semplice ricostruzione, ma una vera e propria *costruzione* del film e dei suoi aspetti complessi, ma ora non più impenetrabili.

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1 D. Bordwell, *Vancouver envoi: What happens in movies happens between your ears*, in "Observation on film art", https://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2020/10/10/vancouver-envoi-what-happens-in-movies-happens-between-your-ears/, 20 ottobre 2020. *Narration in the Fiction Film* fu pubblicato presso la University of Wisconsin Press, Madison nel 1985.

2 Francesco Casetti ne offre una puntuale sintesi nel suo *Teorie del cinema* 1945-1990, Bompiani, Milano 1993, pp. 274-278.

Cognitivisti si nasce o si diventa?

Bordwell ha adottato il metodo costruttivista in tutte le sue opere teoriche, ed è sintomatico che il suo ultimo libro sia dedicato proprio al *complex storytelling* nel poliziesco e nel thriller, a chiudere il cerchio rispetto all'interesse per la narrazione filmica popolare come luogo di decifrazione della complessità e generazione del senso a partire dalla connaturata tendenza dello spettatore a pensare[3]. Il testo non è qualcosa di predeterminato che non lascia a chi lo fruisce alcun margine di intervento e si occupa tutt'al più di *posizionarlo*, ma il campo di realizzazione di un'attività razionale che si compie tramite un procedimento analitico. Come accennerò più avanti, proprio all'adozione di una prospettiva filosofica rigidamente analitica è dovuta la scarsa fortuna dell'impostazione bordwelliana al di fuori del contesto anglosassone.

Anticipo che il problema risiede nella scelta di un atteggiamento metodologico idiosincratico e insofferente rispetto ai paradigmi che il cognitivismo si era incaricato di innovare. Il dibattito è stato acceso fin dall'inizio. Penso al "botta e risposta" tra Bordwell e Dudley Andrew sulla rivista *Iris*, su cui nel numero 9 del 1989, dedicato a "Cinema and Cognitive Psychology", apparve il seminale e programmatico articolo "A Case for Cognitivism"[4]. Il saggio era preceduto da un editoriale in cui Andrew da un lato sottolineava i potenziali guadagni del paradigma cognitivista emergente, ma dall'altro si premurava di prenderne le distanze, almeno a titolo personale e almeno su alcuni aspetti problematici[5]. L'adozione del linguaggio e dei metodi della computer science, della neurobiologia, della psicologia e della psicolinguistica e la loro sostituzione a quelli della semiotica, della psicoanalisi, del marxismo – riferimenti obbligati fino a pochi anni prima –, poteva certamente portare, secondo Andrew, a «un cambiamento di tono nel pensiero e nella scrittura sul cinema» e avviare un dibattito sul «valore di un ethos "scientifico"»[6] in questo ambito. La questione era "procedurale": per quanto i cognitivisti non ripudiassero la filosofia (attingendo comunque a Sartre, Bergson e Kant), essi «potrebbero non aver bisogno di confrontarsi con [gli] enigmi filosofici se riuscissero a dimostrare sperimentalmente che qualcosa come gli schemi funzionano, e funzionano universalmente»[7]. Andrew non nascondeva la sua preoccupazione: «Una volta che il cinema diviene puramente un luogo o un mezzo di investigazione di leggi psicologiche e sociologiche, siamo in pericolo di imbavagliare la sua voce e il suo valore»[8].

È il caso precisare che Andrew aveva tutti i titoli per avanzare le sue perplessità. Negli anni Settanta aveva pubblicato libri importanti[9] e di *Iris* era uno dei tre condirettori ame-

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3 D. Bordwell, *Perplexing Plots: Popular Storytelling and the Poetics of Murder*, Columbia University Press, New York 2023.

4 D. Bordwell, *A Case for Cognitivism*, in "Iris", n. 9, Spring 1989, pp. 11-40.

5 D. Andrew, *Cognitivism: Quests and Questioning*, in "Iris", n. 9, Spring 1989, pp. 1-10.

6 *Ivi*, p. 1, trad. mia.

7 *Ivi*, p. 8, trad. mia.

8 *Ibidem*, trad. mia.

9 D. Andrew, *The Major Film Theories*, Oxford University Press, New York 1976 e *Concepts in Film Theory*, Oxford University Press, New York 1984.

ricani. Va notato anche che, significativamente, il fascicolo di *Iris* in questione fu il primo pubblicato negli Stati Uniti, dopo l'avvio nel 1982 in Francia (non a caso il sottotitolo della rivista era bilingue: *Revue de théorie de l'image et du son / A Journal of Theory on Image and Sound*). Per "filosofia" Andrew intendeva genericamente l'atteggiamento additato dai cognitivisti come non rispettoso di standard scientifici adeguati, e dunque sostanzialmente gli approcci "continentali", a cui si opponeva invece la filosofia analitica, ben più rigorosa, adottata dai cognitivisti. Andrew avvertiva il lettore che la proposta di Bordwell era piuttosto dura rispetto al concetto di interpretazione; che rimpiazzava l'assunzione teorica con l'empiricamente verificabile; che non salvava nulla della psicoanalisi; che non considerava le dinamiche affettive; che si applicava solo alle narrazioni canoniche; che era piuttosto aggressiva (anche verbalmente) rispetto a prospettive del passato o diverse. Da parte sua Bordwell rispose in seguito sulla stessa rivista[10] che Andrew aveva male interpretato il suo saggio: che non c'era alcuna insofferenza per la teoria continentale (anzi si rifaceva anche a Barthes, Genette e ai sovietici); che casi come il libro *The Philosophy of Horror* del filosofo e suo sodale alla University of Wisconsin Noël Carroll, nel frattempo pubblicato[11], offrivano una valida alternativa allo studio delle emozioni rispetto alla lettura psicoanalitica; che il cognitivismo si applicava anche al cinema non standard; che esisteva un naturalismo filosofico; che non si voleva innescare alcuna diatriba. È vero che Bordwell sembrò porsi piuttosto sulla difensiva, ma non ci si stupisca: il metodo della *response* fa parte della pratica editoriale delle riviste anglosassoni e soprattutto è parte stessa della dialettica analitica, dove i toni usati sono sempre molto franchi e talvolta molto poco diplomatici.

Un dibattito simile fu intrattenuto tra Carroll e Warren Buckland stavolta a partire da una dura recensione del libro – programmatico fin dal titolo – *Mystifying Movies: Fads & Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory*[12]. Nella sua critica, intitolata sarcasticamente "Critique of Poor Reason"[13], Buckland fu molto esplicito nel contestare alla filosofia analitica, alla base del paradigma cognitivista, un modo di procedere che pretendeva di arrivare empiricamente e "imperialisticamente" a una verità infallibile. Contro l'accusa di assolutismo, Carroll replicò in modo tanto puntiglioso quanto furioso, accusando Buckland di determinismo sociale e relativismo concettuale. A fomentare ulteriormente la disputa il fatto che mentre la critica di Buckland era apparsa sulla rivista *Screen*, ovvero l'organo principale della teoria filmica psicoanalitica-marxista-semiotica vituperata dai cognitivisti, la risposta di Carroll dovette essere pubblicata sul *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*[14]

10 D. Bordwell, *A Case for Cognitivism: Further Reflections*, in "Iris", n. 11, Summer 1990, pp. 107-112.

11 N. Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart*, Routledge, London and New York 1990.

12 N. Carroll, *Mystifying Movies: Fads and Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory*, Columbia University Press, New York 1988.

13 W. Buckland, *Critique of Poor Reason*, in "Screen", vol. 30, n. 4, Autumn 1989, pp. 80-103. Oltre a giocare con la "pure reason" kantiana, Buckland appunta a Carroll l'eccessiva enfasi nel polemizzare contro il "poor reasoning" da quest'ultimo attribuito al libro Stephen Heath *Questions of cinema* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1981) in una lunghissima recensione pubblicata anni prima su *October* (n. 23, Winter 1982, pp. 89-163), intitolata "Address to the Heathen", con una storpiatura del cognome dell'autore altrettanto sarcastica ("heathen" significa "pagano").

14 N. Carroll, *Cognitivism, Contemporary Film Theory and Method: A Response to Warren Buckland*, in

perché *Screen* l'aveva rigettata. L'autore se ne lamentò con tono decisamente velenoso nel preambolo: «Che *Screen* l'abbia respinta in quanto risultato di un giudizio che non soddisfa sufficientemente le questioni metodologiche o come tentativo di reprimere voci alternative nel dibattito nel modo prevedibilmente stalinista di Lysenko è una questione che è dato al lettore risolvere…»[15].

La teoria è morta, lunga vita alla teoria

Bordwell e Carroll non demorsero e negli anni successivi si impegnarono nella curatela di un volume che passerà alla storia della teoria del cinema: *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*[16]. La Teoria del cinema è in declino, anzi siamo già oltre e non esiste neppure più; serve ricostruirla su premesse diverse da quelle su cui si era retta nel ventennio procedente. Ovvero, la teoria del posizionamento del soggetto e il culturalismo, promosse dalla cosiddetta SLAB theory – Saussurre-Lacan-Althusser-Barthes (a cui possono tranquillamente essere aggiunti i francofortesi, Lévy-Strauss, Metz, Baudry, Foucault, la Femminist Film Theory e così via) – ed etichettate da Bordwell come "Grand Theories" per la loro tendenza inscrivere lo studio del cinema in schemi di ragionamento omnicomprensivi, vaghi, incompleti, astratti, metaforici. Nel saggio d'apertura Bordwell si produceva in una dettagliata disamina degli aspetti di debolezza delle Grand Theories. In primo luogo sul piano dottrinale: la costruzione sociale delle pratiche e delle istituzioni umane; la necessità di una teoria della soggettività per comprendere come gli spettatori interagiscono con i film; la dipendenza della risposta dello spettatore dall'identificazione; l'analogia tra linguaggio verbale e linguaggio filmico. In secondo luogo sul piano procedurale: il credito esclusivo al modello *top-down*; l'argomentazione come bricolage; il ragionamento per associazioni; l'impulso ermeneutico. Nella *pars construens* Bordwell avanzava la sua controproposta: una teoria di "medio livello", più modesta, che affrontasse questioni localizzate e problemi specifici senza assumere impegni teorici generali. Per esempio: lo studio dei registi, dello stile, delle cinematografie nazionali (anche non occidentali), la storiografia, la storia economica e industriale, la narrazione, la censura, la tecnica. Ciò valeva anche sul fronte più specificamente psicologico caro a Bordwell, concretizzando gli auspici di "A Case for Cognitivism": «la teoria cognitiva vuole comprendere le attività mentali umane come il riconoscimento, la comprensione, la deduzione, l'interpretazione, il giudizio, la memoria e l'immaginazione. I ricercatori che adottano questo approccio propongono teorie su come funzionano tali processi e analizzano e testano le teorie secondo i canoni dell'indagine scientifica e filosofi-

"Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism", vol. 6, n. 2, Spring 1992, pp. 199-220.

15 *Ivi*, p. 199, trad. mia.

16 D. Bordwell, N. Carroll (eds.), *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 1996. Cfr. anche R. Allen, M. Smith (eds.), *Film Theory and Philosophy*, Oxford University Press-Clarendon Press, Oxford-New York 1997.

ca. Più specificamente, l'approccio cognitivo presuppone il livello di attività mentale come irriducibile nello spiegare l'azione sociale umana»[17].

Secondo Bordwell l'approccio *middle-level* «pone domande che hanno valore sia empirico sia teorico»[18], senza che il primo sia a detrimento del secondo. Dunque l'analisi di fenomeni particolari attraverso un modo di procedere che, nel secondo saggio programmatico di *Post-Theory*, collocato subito dopo quello di Bordwell, Carroll chiamava *piecemeal theorizing*, una teorizzazione "frammentaria" che non invocasse teorie soggettivistiche, ideologiche, eccessivamente ambiziose e deterministicamente confermative delle premesse. Per Bordwell «i programmi di ricerca di medio livello hanno dimostrato che un argomento può essere allo stesso tempo concettualmente potente e basato sull'evidenza senza ricorrere al bricolage teorico o all'associazione di idee»: «non occorre una Grande Teoria del Tutto per svolgere un lavoro illuminante in un campo di studio»[19]. Il cognitivismo, insomma, non vuole e non deve essere una Grand Theory.

Neuropsicosi

Sono passati trentacinque anni da "A Case for Cognitivism" e quasi trenta da *Post-Theory* e forse è tempo di tracciare un bilancio, per quanto sintetico e provvisorio[20]. È innegabile che la proposta di Bordwell abbia fatto da apripista a generazioni di studiosi che hanno aderito al programma e (de)costruito una teoria del cinema assai ricca nella sua *frammentarietà*. I suoi allievi o seguaci hanno colonizzato i film studies anglosassoni con lavori che hanno dato concretezza al fondamentale assunto che *lo spettatore pensa*. Dapprima soffermandosi sulla narrazione, per espandersi poi sul terreno delle emozioni, rispondendo di fatto all'appunto di Andrew sulla recalcitranza del cognitivismo per l'analisi della dimensione affettiva. Penso alle opere di Edward Branigan, Torben Grodal, Carl Plantinga, Ed Tan, Murray Smith, Greg M. Smith, fra gli altri[21]. L'ampiezza e la varietà del corpus di questi contributi, che rispec-

17 D. Bordwell, *Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory*, in Bordwell, Carroll (eds.), *Post-Theory*, cit., p. 13, trad. mia.

18 N. Carroll, P*rospects for Film Theory: A Personal Assessment*, in Bordwell, Carroll (eds.), *Post-Theory*, cit., pp. 37-68, il quale ovviamente si apre con un paragrafo introduttivo intitolato "La teoria è morta, lunga vita alla teoria".

19 D. Bordwell, *Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory*, cit., p. 29, trad. mia.

20 Per le disamine proposte dai continuatori del cognitivismo si vedano almeno R. Allen, *Cognitive film theory*, in R. Allen, M. Turvey (eds.), *Wittgenstein, Theory And the Arts*, Routledge, London 2001, pp. 174-210; C. Plantinga, *Cognitive Film Theory: An Insider's Appraisal*, "Cinémas: Journal of Film Studies", vol. 12, n. 2, 2002, pp. 15-37; T. Nannicelli, P. Taberham, *Introduction: Contemporary Cognitive Media Theory*, in Idd. (eds.), *Cognitive Media Theory*, Routledge, New York-London 2014, pp. 1-23.

21 Ecco una bibliografia parziale, almeno dei testi principali, in aggiunta a quelli già citati: E. Branigan, *Narrative Comprehension and Film*, Sightlines, Routledge, London 1992; M. Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1995; G. Currie, *Image and Mind: Film, Philosophy, and Cognitive Science*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1995; E. Tan, *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film: Film as Emotion Machine* Lawrence Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ 1996; R. Allen, M. Smith (eds.), *Film Theory and Philosophy*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1997; T. Grodal, *Moving Pictures: A New Theory of Film Genres,*

chia le diverse sensibilità degli autori (filosofica, psicologica, estetologica, evoluzionistica ecc.), conferma la validità e la produttività del pionieristico manifesto di Bordwell e della sua prospettiva "psicocinematica", come ribattezzata una decina d'anni fa da un'antologia di contributi intitolata appunto *Psychocinematics: Exploring Cognition at the Movies*[22].

Il saggio d'apertura di quest'ultimo volume ovviamente è di Bordwell; ed ecco la prima frase: «Guardiamo i film con gli occhi e le orecchie, ma viviamo i film con la mente e il *corpo*»[23] (enfatizzo e metto da parte per un momento quest'ultima parola, che riprenderò fra poco). L'operazione segna il rilancio dell'interesse del cognitivismo per le neuroscienze, in particolare alla luce dell'avvento delle nuove tecniche di *brain imaging* che consentono di correlare stati mentali e processi celebrali. «La psicocinematica – sottolinea il curatore del volume, Arthur Shimamura – è fondata sull'analisi scientifica della nostra risposta estetica ai film»[24] rivalutando le basi psicologiche e biologiche dell'esperienza filmica. Si tratta in realtà di una reazione al successo di un articolo ospitato nel 2008 da *Projections*, la rivista della Society for Cognitive Studies of the Moving Image, intitolato *Neurocinematics*[25], a cui il titolo del volume in questione fa un po' il verso e si pone in diretta polemica. Nell'articolo il neuroscienziato Uri Hasson e il suo gruppo di lavoro presentavano i risultati di alcuni esperimenti che prevedevano la registrazione tramite risonanza magnetica funzionale dell'attività neurale di un gruppo di spettatori. I risultati dell'esperimento mettevano in risalto soprattutto l'efficacia del montaggio sul comportamento celebrale, che risultava trasversalmente omogeneo nei casi in cui – come nei primi minuti de *Il buono, il butto, il cattivo* di Sergio Leone – la successione delle inquadrature è progettata in modo accurato. «Tuttavia – nota Shimamura – limitarsi a registrare l'attività cerebrale mentre si guardano i film non è sufficiente, poiché è importante considerare i processi psicologici definiti da tale attività neurale. Non possiamo cioè cadere in una versione moderna della frenologia in cui le protuberanze della testa vengono sostituite da punti illuminati nel cervello. Dobbiamo andare oltre e sviluppare teorie neuropsicologiche che descrivano le dinamiche funzionali dell'attività cerebrale e il modo in cui esse operano al servizio della cognizione»[26].

Posizioni più aperte e dialettiche su questo fronte sono state adottate in tempi recenti da Torben Grodal (*Embodied Visions*), sostenitore di una prospettiva caratterizzata evo-

Feelings, and Cognition, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1997; C. Plantinga, *Rhetoric and Representation in Nonfiction Film*, Cambridge Studies in Film, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997; C. Plantinga, G. M. Smith (eds.), *Passionate Views. Film, Cognition, and Emotion*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1999; G.M. Smith, *Film Structure and the Emotion System*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003; T. Grodal, *Embodied Visions: Evolution, Emotion, Culture, and Film*, Oxford University Press, New York 2009; C. Plantinga, *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2009; M. Smith, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture: A Naturalized Aesthetics of Film*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2017; C. Plantinga, *Screen Stories: Emotion and the Ethics of Engagement*, Oxford University Press, New York 2018.

22 A. P. Shimamura (ed.), *Psychocinematics: Exploring Cognition at the Movies*, Oxford University Press, New York 2013.

23 D. Bordwell, "The Viewer's Share: Models of Mind in Explaining Film", *Ivi*, p. 19, trad. ed enfasi mie.

24 A. P. Shimamura, "Psychocinematics: Issues and Directions", *Ivi*, cit., p. 2, trad. mia

25 U. Hasson, O. Landesman, B. Knappmeyer, I. Vallines, N. Rubin, D. J. Heeger, *Neurocinematics: The Neuroscience of Film*, "Projections: The Journal for Movies and Mind", vol. 2, n. 1, 2008, pp. 1-26.

26 A. P. Shimamura, "Psychocinematics", cit., p. 15, trad. mia.

luzionisticamente e fondata sul flusso percezione-emozione-cognizione-attività motoria, e da Murray Smith (*Film, Art, and the Third Culture*), promotore di una nuova "estetica naturalizzata" in cui le neuroscienze entrano a pieno titolo in una triangolazione con la psicologia e la fenomenologia. Peraltro si tratta delle due sole opere cognitiviste tradotte in italiano[27], a riprova del tentativo operato in particolare dal nostro Paese di ricalibrare il possibile apporto delle neuroscienze all'approccio cognitivista sulla base di una concezione incarnata dell'esperienza filmica, fondata cioè – e vengo qui a quell'ultima parola della frase di Bordwell riportata più sopra – sulla centralità del corpo. Corpo e corporeità intesi nella prospettiva anti-dualistica del nesso corpo-mente promossa in particolare dalla fenomenologia esistenzialista (in particolare quella merleaupontyana, e dunque a monte rigettata dal cognitivismo "canonico": lo spettatore pensa, ma non *sente*...) e posta a fondamento filosofico delle ricerche neuroscientifiche scaturite dalla scoperta dei cosiddetti "neuroni specchio". Nell'ultimo decennio quest'ultime hanno trovato applicazione anche nell'ambito degli studi sull'esperienza delle immagini in movimento[28] e stanno dimostrando come sia possibile costruire una "Neurofilmolgia" che, realizzando esperimenti psicologici e neurologici per l'analisi di aspetti specifici dell'esperienza filmica e/o discutendo gli esiti di esperimenti neuroscientifici realizzati in altri ambiti o da altri ricercatori, si impegna a supportare una nuova ermeneutica dell'esperienza estetica[29]. Si tratta di fatto di un "cognitivismo fenomenologico" che promuove il superamento di una filmologia, quale è quella bordwelliana, insindacabilmente sospettosa degli approcci "continentali" e che mira a ripristinare l'analisi anche dei mezzi formali del cinema (come i movimenti di macchina, il montaggio ecc.) come forme incarnate del vissuto dello spettatore, a integrazione e correzione dell'originaria (e un po' avventata) proposta della Neurocinematica.

In un intervento su questo specifico argomento a partire dalla pubblicazione della traduzione inglese del volume di Gallese e Guerra *Lo schermo empatico*, Bordwell riconosceva la rilevanza della cognizione incarnata supportata dal rispecchiamento neuronale per l'analisi dei processi visivi automatici e *low-level* nella risposta degli spettatori al film e in particolare l'attivazione di una forma empatica di comprensione dell'azione, delle intenzioni e delle emozioni dei personaggi[30]. Egli tuttavia esprimeva alcune riserve, specialmente sui termini utilizzati per caratterizzare la specifica forma di comprensione promossa dall'*embodied cognition*: coinvolgimento, identificazione, immersione. Insomma parole che nella testa di Bordwell fecero riaffacciare lo spauracchio della Grand Theory... Si capisce che l'ipotesi che la comprensione del film possa assumere forme immediate – e cioè *pre-cognitive* – abbia

27 T. Grodal, *Immagini-corpo. Cinema, natura, emozioni*, Diabasis, Parma 2014; M. Smith, *Cinema, evoluzione, neuroscienze. Un'estetica naturalizzata del film*, Dino Audino, Roma 2022.

28 V. Gallese, M. Guerra, *Lo schermo empatico. Cinema e neuroscienze*, Raffaello Cortina 2015.

29 A. D'Aloia, R. Eugeni (eds.), *Neurofilmology. Audiovisual Studies and the Challenge of Neuroscience*, special issue di "Cinéma&Cie", n. 22-23, 2014; A. D'Aloia, *Neurofilmology of the Moving-Image. Gravity and Vertigo in Contemporary Cinema*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2021.

30 D. Bordwell, *Brains, bodies, and movies: Ways of thinking about the psychology of cinema*, in "Observation on film art", 29 aprile 2020, https://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2020/04/29/brains-bodies-and-movies-ways-of-thinking-about-the-psychology-of-cinema/.

suscitato in Bordwell ben più che una riserva, dato che per lui e per il cognitivismo (come per Gombrich, Gregory e i suoi riferimenti nella psicologia della visione) esiste solo «un percipiente attivo che prende stimoli frammentari come indizi per la costruzione di una conclusione percettiva, attraverso un processo di verifica delle ipotesi»[31] e di problem-solving. L'argomento di Bordwell insisteva infatti sulle generalizzazioni che Gallese e Guerra sembrano addurre rispetto alla modalità incorporata di esperienza dei movimenti di macchina e del montaggio, ritenute valide invece solo per alcuni momenti del film. Eccolo allora schierarsi dalla parte del "marcato scetticismo" di Malcolm Turvey nei confronti dei neuroni specchio, in un dibattito veicolato dapprima sul blog di Bordwell e poi migrato su *Projections*[32]. Tra gli eccessi della neurofilia e della neurofobia, meglio adottare un atteggiamento cauto e continuare a difendere le *humanities* (a cui i film studies devono appartenere) dal pericolo scientista delle neuroscienze.

Ho ricostruito e discusso quest'ennesimo acceso dibattito nella prefazione alla traduzione italiana del libro di Murray Smith *Film, Art, and the Third Culture*, a cui rimando per dimostrare quanto l'atteggiamento dei cognitivisti sia più che comprensibile, se l'apertura al pre-cognitivo rischia di mettere a repentaglio la purezza di trent'anni di ricerca[33]. Bordwell però non si è mai nascosto dietro al dito: l'ampiezza e la profondità della sua conoscenza delle teorie (anche quelle "avverse") lo hanno reso un modello di invidiabile ostinatezza. Lo dimostra il suo ulteriore commento a chiusura della "disputa" sui neuroni specchio e la cognizione incarnata, un po' cocciuto nell'incentrare la propria perplessità su una questione di vocabolario[34].

Dopo la post-teoria

I teorici, per retroazione, finiscono per essere un po' vittime delle loro stesse teorie, che a loro volta sono anche uno specchio dei tempi e dei luoghi in cui attecchiscono, oltre che condizionate dalle genealogie concettuali da cui gemmano. Per Francesco Casetti, se le Grand Theories erano il risultato di una certa paranoia nell'affrontare la pervasività delle immagini e del cinema e la propensione a disvelarne gli effetti ideologici attraverso una loro decostruzione, nel suo progetto di ridimensionamento delle pretese e di restringimento del perimetro di intervento la Post-Theory ha rinunciato a costruire un quadro di riferimento

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31 Ibidem, trad. mia.

32 V. Gallese, M. Guerra, *The Neuroscience of Film*, in "Projections", vol. 16, n. 1, 2022, pp. 1-2; M. Turvey, *Can the science of mirror neurons explain the power of camera movement? A guest post by Malcolm Turvey*, in "Observations of film art", May 3, 2020, http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2020/05/03/can-the-science-of-mirror-neurons-explain-the-power-of-camera-movement-a-guest-post-by-malcolm-turvey, rielaborato in M. Turvey, *Mirror Neurons and Film Studies. A Cautionary Tale from a Serious Pessimist*, in "Projections", vol. 14, n. 3, 2020, pp. 21-46.

33 A. D'Aloia, *La teoria del cinema allo specchio*, in M. Smith, *Cinema, evoluzione, neuroscienze*, cit., pp. 7-19. Cfr. anche M. Smith, *Triangulation Revisited*, in "Projections", vol. 16, n. 1, 2022, pp. 11-24.

34 D. Bordwell, *Mirror neurons and cinema: Further discussion*, in "Observations on film art", 16 agosto 2024, https://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2020/08/16/mirror-neurons-and-cinema-further-discussion/.

funzionale, sposando lo spirito neoliberale e trasformando un po' anche i film studies in un «supermarket teorico dove ciascuno può trovare la merce che preferisce»[35]. Sono sicuro che Bordwell avrebbe reagito anche a questo giudizio con una puntuale (e un po' pedante) *response* sul suo blog, e avrebbe respinto le accuse al mittente criticandolo di promuovere un reazionario neosemioticismo. Avrebbe mai accettato il superamento del cognitivismo così come la semiotica e la psicanalisi avrebbero dovuto accettare il proprio o pensava che la sua creatura teorico-metodologica fosse destinata a regnare per sempre? Il panorama contemporaneo, sempre più articolato, complesso e *frammentato* degli studi sul cinema riflette plasticamente i mutamenti del suo oggetto di ricerca e le pulsioni del suo tempo, portandosi dietro le stratificazioni della sua evoluzione, con le relative tensioni, lacune, ansie. Voltandosi indietro e osservando bene, non è poi così azzardato pensare che anche il cognitivismo, in fondo, sia (stato) una Grand Theory… Ma come si evince da questa piccola archeologia meta-teorica che dagli anni Ottanta ci ha riportato ai giorni nostri, David Bordwell è stato in grado di rimanere sempre nel cuore del dibattito sulle innovazioni teoriche a cui egli stesso ha dato origine e impulso, dimostrando una caparbietà (e una testardaggine) esemplari. Come ho provato a dimostrare ricostruendo i termini di alcune interessanti "dispute", Bordwell è stato e continuerà a essere un problema inaggirabile per i film studies. Al di là delle implicazioni e degli esiti della sua proposta, la sua scomparsa rende il suo contributo agli studi contemporanei sul cinema definitivamente imprescindibile.

Dario Tomasi

Nell'ultimo libro di David Bordwell, *Perplexing Plots*[1], campeggia in copertina un'immagine di *Laura* (*Vertigine*, O. Preminger, 1944) che riproduce Gene Tierney con un fucile in mano[2]. Si tratta, a suo modo, di un'immagine emblematica di tutto il lavoro di Bordwell, non solo del suo amore per il cinema americano ma, soprattutto, per ciò che ci riguarda, di quello per il cinema popolare e di genere (anche se nel caso si tratta, senza esitazione alcuna, di un film sì di genere, ma indubbiamente "alto").

Quella di una donna che imbraccia un'arma, pronta a passare all'azione, è un'immagine che potrebbe benissimo trovarsi sulla copertina di un qualsiasi libro dedicato al cinema di Hong Kong (un esempio possibile fra i tanti, tantissimi: Brigitte Lin, col suo trench, la parrucca bionda e gli occhiali scuri cerchiati di rosso che in *Chungking Express*, *Hong Kong Express*, Wong Kar-wai, 1994, punta la sua pistola contro un criminale, in un abbastanza evidente rimando alla Gena Rowlands di *Una notte d'estate – Gloria* (*Gloria*, J. Cassavetes, 1980).

Se si ripercorre il vasto insieme delle opere scritte da Bordwell, l'approdo al cinema di Hong Kong è forse un po' meno sorprendente di quel che a prima vista potrebbe apparire. Da una parte, come appena indicato, c'è l'attenzione al cinema popolare e di genere, che emerge con evidenza nei diversi testi che lo studioso ha dedicato al cinema americano, dall'altra c'è quella manifestata verso il cinema dell'estremo oriente (anche se quello "alto") che, oltre ai diversi saggi pubblicati su riviste e volumi collettanei, passa, soprattutto, attraverso il libro dedicato a Ozu Yasujirō, *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema*[3], e all'ampio spazio attribuito a Mizoguchi Kenji, più di cinquanta pagine, in *Figures Traced in Light*[4].

Planet Hong Kong. Popular cinema and the Art of Entertainment[5] ripercorre la storia del cinema dell'ex colonia britannica, a partire degli anni Settanta, quelli che videro l'affermazione planetaria di quell'icona del cinema globale che fu, ed è, Bruce Lee. A questa prima edizione, se ne è poi aggiunta, nel 2011, una seconda[6], che, oltre ad alcune correzioni relative alla parte già edita e la riproduzione questa volta a colori dei fotogrammi, aggiorna il lavoro,

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1 D. Bordwell, *Perplexing Plots. Popular Storytelling and the Poetics of Murder*, Columbia University Press, New York 2023.

2 Si tratta di una foto di scena. Nel film la protagonista Laura (Gene Tierney) non imbraccia mai un'arma.

3 D. Bordwell, *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1988.

4 Id., *Figures Traced in Light*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2005.

5 Id., *Planet Hong Kong. Popular cinema and the Art of Entertainment*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Massachusetts) 2000.

6 Id., *Planet Hong Kong. Popular cinema and the Art of Entertainment*, Second Edition, Irvington Way Institute Press, Madison (Wisconsin) 2011.

con due nuovi capitoli, alla fine del primo decennio del nuovo millennio, e di conseguenza agli sviluppi del destino del cinema di Hong Kong dopo l'*handover* del 1° luglio 1997 e il ritorno della ormai ex colonia inglese alla Repubblica Popolare Cinese.

Il titolo del primo capitolo del libro è già di per sé indicativo di ciò che del cinema di Hong Kong interessa a Bordwell: «Troppo stravagante, troppo gratuitamente selvaggio» («All Too Extravagant, Too Gratuitously Wild»), ovvero il suo carattere estremo, che si traduce in una pratica stilistica, su cui si avrà modo di tornare, in cui si fondono il gusto dell'intrattenimento (anche con soluzioni eticamente più che discutibili) e quello della sperimentazione discorsiva. Suddiviso in nove capitoli (undici nella seconda edizione), che prendono in esame i diversi aspetti del cinema di Hong Kong (dal contesto storico/produttivo/distributivo ai diversi generi, dalle dinamiche narrative agli aspetti stilistici), il libro testimonia alcune delle caratteristiche proprie alla scrittura bordwelliana: l'attenzione all'analisi del film (con la puntigliosa dissezione di molte scene e sequenze, nonché di singole inquadrature, sorrette dalla riproduzione di innumerevoli fotogrammi); l'insistenza su dati oggettivi che, in una quasi matematica del cinema, notano, ad esempio, come in *Infernal Affairs* (Andrew Lau, Alan Mak, 2002), a testimonianza del carattere più drammatico che d'azione del film, il primo colpo di pistola si senta dopo trenta minuti, la prima vera e propria scena violenta avvenga dopo un'ora, e come nel loro insieme le sequenze di sparatoria occupino non più di quattro minuti dell'intera durata del film[7]; il tono non accademico che, senza mai venir meno al rigore e alla scientificità degli assunti, si lascia andare, ad esempio, a suggestive descrizioni di ambiente[8]. A questi diversi aspetti, si può anche aggiungere una certa attenzione, in sintonia con *la politique des auteurs*, alla poetica e alla stilistica di alcuni dei più importanti filmmaker hongkongesi, come testimonia il fatto che quasi ogni capitolo comprende una seconda parte dedicata ad uno o a più di uno di essi (da Bruce Lee a Jackie Chan, da John Woo a Tsui Hark, da Wong Jing a Chang Cheh, da Lau Kar-leung a King Hu, da Wong Kar-wai a Johnnie To), quelli che meglio rappresentano l'ambito, il genere o la tendenza presa in esame.

Soprattutto ad emergere è l'amore di Bordwell per il cinema o, meglio, per quello che si potrebbe chiamare il CINEMA-CINEMA. Senza farsi prendere la mano da quelle tendenze accademiche di moda, seguite da molti suoi colleghi, che subordinano il discorso sul cinema ad altre prospettive, correndo a volte il rischio di "parlare soprattutto d'altro" (cosa in sé più che legittima ma, per così dire, meno attenta al cinema in sé e per sé), Bordwell tiene strettamente ancorato il suo discorso a una prospettiva squisitamente cinematografica, il cui baricentro è costituito dall'oggetto film in quanto costrutto audiovisivo, forma significante e, aggiungerei, espressiva, che si fonda sulla poetica e la stilistica, l'analisi del testo e la teoria del cinema. Come scrive Gary Bettinson: «La poetica di Bordwell opera

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7 Cfr. ivi, p. 204.

8 Si veda ad esempio la descrizione degli uffici della Film Workshop di Tsui Hark che hanno sede «in un complesso di cemento che odora di frittura e fumo di sigaretta» («In a cement-block complex smelling of deepfrying and cigarette smoke»). D. Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong. Popular cinema and the Art of Entertainment,* cit. p. 135.

induttivamente dal basso verso l'alto […]. Non parte da una teoria generale della cultura, ma dalle particolarità del film»[9].

Si è già accennato al fatto che l'interesse di Bordwell per il cinema di Hong Kong sia dovuto al modo in cui esso coniuga intrattenimento e sperimentazione, che è, anche se solo in parte, qualcosa di simile a ciò che determinava l'amore dello stesso Bordwell per il cinema giapponese. Un cinema di cui, a proposito degli anni Trenta, scriveva che «non è una pratica significante radicale, né un diretto prodotto delle tradizioni locali. È un cinema classico, sebbene forse del più variegato, vivido e vivace classicismo che noi abbiamo mai conosciuto»[10]. E sono proprio simili variegature, vividezze e vivacità, all'interno di un contesto che egli ritiene strutturato su modelli classici, ad attrarre Bordwell verso il cinema di Hong Kong, spingendolo a volte anche a farsi prendere le mani dall'entusiasmo – cosa che succede quando è la passione a guidarci – come nel passaggio in cui analizza meticolosamente una sequenza di *A Chinese Ghost Story* (Ching Siu-tung, 1987) arrivando a concludere che

> Non credo che nessun regista hollywoodiano, né nel 1987 né oggi, sia in grado di montare il movimento con questo grado di esattezza ritmica. I registi americani non hanno mai imparato il tipo di disciplina imposta dai film di arti marziali di Hong Kong, che ha trasformato il modo in cui i registi locali concepiscono l'azione cinematografica[11].

Più avanti, con altrettanta precisione, è la volta di una sequenza d'azione di *Righting Wrongs* (Corey Yuen, 1986), la cui analisi testimonia, secondo Bordwell, che

> Concepire l'idea – una donna che sottomette quattro uomini con un solo paio di manette – e poi lavorarla con incisivi dettagli, richiede immaginazione, un modesto senso dell'assurdo e la consapevolezza dei meccanismi di una regia forte e leggibile indicati da Kuleshov, Pudovkin ed Eisenstein negli anni Venti[12].

Tali considerazioni che esaltano le modalità di rappresentazione del cinema di Hong Kong, il carattere variegato, vivido e vivace del suo classicismo, la tendenza alla sperimentazione, la ricerca di nuove e originali soluzioni espressive, sono ulteriormente evidenziate dallo stesso studioso nel noto blog da lui curato insieme alla compagna Kristin Thompson:

> Da alcuni anni sostengo che il cinema di arti marziali dell'Asia orientale costituisce un contributo distintivo all'arte cinematografica al pari di "scuole e movimenti" più noti del cinema europeo, come il montaggio sovietico e il neorealismo italiano. I film d'azione di Giappone,

9 G. Bettinson, *The Sensuous Cinema of Wong Kar-wai. Film Poetics and the Aesthetic of Disturbance*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong 2015, p. 19.

10 D. Bordwell, *A Cinema of Flourishes. Japanese Decorative Classicism of the Prewar Era*, in A. Noletti, D. Desser (a cura di), *Reframing Japanese Cinema. Authorship, Genre, History*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1992, p. 345.

11 Id., *Planet Hong Kong*, cit., p. 166.

12 Ivi, p. 243.

Hong Kong e Taiwan hanno rivelato nuove risorse di tecnica cinematografica e i registi hanno influenzato altre cinematografie nazionali. La forza di questa tradizione è particolarmente evidente nei film *wuxia* (film di cavalleria marziale), nei film di kung-fu e nei thriller d'azione urbana del cinema di Hong Kong, dagli anni '60 agli anni 2000[13].

Una volta indicate alcune coordinate generali del libro di Bordwell, ci si può chiedere che posto esso occupi nell'insieme degli studi occidentali sul cinema di Hong Kong, sia prima che dopo la sua uscita in libreria. Nella bibliografia della prima edizione di *Planet Hong Kong*, il corpus più rilevante dei testi indicati è costituito dai diversi saggi editi in inglese dalle principali istituzioni cinematografiche dell'ex colonia britannica, come l'Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF) e l'Hong Kong Film Archive (HKFA). Per ciò che riguarda la bibliografia occidentale, Bordwell cita diversi testi che definisce «guide per fan» e che considera ricchi di informazioni (avvertendo però il lettore a verificare la correttezza di date, titoli e nomi). Di là da questo insieme, perlopiù privo di una vera e propria autorevolezza scientifica, il volume di riferimento più autorevole è, fuor di ogni dubbio, quello di Stephen Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema. The Extra Dimensions*[14], un libro che disegna una storia complessiva del cinema di Hong Kong e che Bordwell non esita a qualificare come «magistrale»[15].

Fra il 1997, l'anno dell'uscita del libro di Teo, e il 2000, quando è pubblicato quello di Bordwell, si può notare, rispetto agli anni precedenti, una certa crescita d'interesse editoriale verso il cinema dell'ex colonia da parte di accademici e autorevoli critici, come confermano i libri di Bérénice Reynaud, *Nouvelles Chines, nouveaux cinemas*[16], che dedica al cinema di Hong Kong 120 pagine, di Alberto Pezzotta, *Tutto il cinema di Hong Kong. Stili, caratteri, autori*[17], e quello curato da Po-shek Fu e David Desser, *The Cinema of Hong Kong. History, Arts, Identity*[18], il primo, insieme a quello di Bordwell, edito da una University Press. Si tratta di una crescita d'attenzione, di cui il libro dello studioso statunitense è parte, dovuta, soprattutto, al fatto che l'*handover* di Hong Kong (1° luglio 1997), cioè il passaggio della colonia britannica alla Repubblica Popolare Cinese, oltre a essere politicamente all'ordine del giorno e a suscitare un'attenzione internazionale, avrebbe probabilmente messo fine a quello che era stato il cinema di Hong Kong, almeno nei suoi caratteri precipui, che poteva così considerarsi presumibilmente come un'esperienza compiuta, e quindi osservabile nella sua interezza.

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13 Id., *Lau Kar-leung: The Dragon Still Dances*, https://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/category/directors-king-hu/, ultima visita 17 settembre 2023).

14 S. Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema. The Extra Dimensions*, British Film Institute, London 1997.

15 D. Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, cit., p. 292. Nella seconda edizione di *Planet Hong Kong*, il nome di Teo è citato da Bordwell in 35 casi, 9 nel testo e 26 nelle note.

16 B. Reynaud, *Nouvelles Chines, nouveaux cinemas*, Cahiers du cinéma, Paris 1999.

17 A. Pezzotta, *Tutto il cinema di Hong Kong. Stili, caratteri, autori*, Baldini&Castoldi, Milano 1999. Il libro di Pezzotta non è citato nella prima edizione del volume di Bordwell, "lacuna" però colmata nella seconda.

18 P.S. Fu, D, Desser (a cura di), *The Cinema of Hong Kong History. Arts, Identity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000. Fra gli autori dei saggi contenuti nel libro, c'è anche lo stesso Bordwell, col suo: *Richness through Imperfection: King Hu and the Glimpse*.

Questa crescita di interesse accademico nei confronti del cinema di Hong Kong è confermata, anche in conseguenza della legittimazione di Bordwell, nei primi due decenni del XXI secolo, quando i libri dedicati al cinema di Hong Kong, prima e dopo l'*handover*, da parte della University Press o di editori di indubbio peso, sono notevolmente aumentati, come testimoniano la ventina e più di volumi pubblicati dalle edizioni universitarie di Cambridge, di Oxford, del Minnesota, di Duke, di Edinburgh, dell'Illinois, del Southern Illinois, di Hong Kong, e di istituzioni o editori di prestigio come il British Film Institute, Routledge e Palgrave Macmillan[19]. Cui è doveroso aggiungere i volumi di tre accademici italiani come Silvio Alovisio, su Wong Kar-wai, Marco Dalla Gassa, sul cinema dell'estremo oriente con un'ampia sezione dedicata a Hong Kong, e Stefano Locati (in collaborazione con Emanuele Sacchi) sul cinema dell'ex colonia britannica dopo l'*handover*[20].

La gran parte di questi studi non si esime dal riferirsi al lavoro di Bordwell, ai suoi diversi saggi e, soprattutto, a *Planet Hong Kong*, facendo così di quest'ultimo un testo di riferimento obbligato, sia quando, nella maggior parte dei casi, lo si cita in positivo, sia quando se ne muovono delle riserve. Tra le questioni poste dallo studioso americano che più ritornano nella bibliografia in lingua occidentale sul cinema di Hong Kong c'è quella inerente il rapporto che passa fra la produzione dell'ex-colonia britannica e quella hollywoodiana, in una logica comparatista, transculturale e che concerne le relazioni tra il locale e il globale.

Kin-Yan Szeto, ad esempio, osserva come Bordwell «confronti e contrapponga il cinema di Hong Kong a quello di Hollywood a riguardo dello stile cinematografico e noti le differenze tecniche e narrative tra la drammaturgia più serrata di Hollywood e le strutture

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19 E.C.M. Yau (a cura di), *At Full Speed. Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2001; E.M.K. Cheung, Y.W. Chu (a cura di), *Between Home and World. A Reader in Hong Kong Cinema*, Oxford University Press, Oxford-Hong Kong 2004; K.C. Lo, *Chinese Face/Off. The Transnational Popular Culture of Hong Kong*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana 2005; M. Meaghan, L.L. Siu, C.K.S. Chan (a cura di), *Hong Kong Connections. Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema*, Duke University Press-Hong Kong University Press, Durham-London-Hong Kong 2005; S. Teo, *Wong Kar-wai*, British Film Institute, London 2005; G. Marchetti, T.S. Kam (a cura di), *Hong Kong Film Hollywood and New Global Cinema*, Routledge, London 2007; G. Marchetti, *Andrew Lau and Alan Mak's* Infernal Affairs, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong 2007; S. Teo, *Director in Action: Johnnie To and the Hong Kong Action Film*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong 2007; Y.J. Zhang, X. Zhiwei, *Encyclopedia of Chinese Film*, Routledge, London 2002; J.H. Choi, M. Wada Marciano (a cura di), *Horror to the Extreme. Changing Boundaries in Asia Cinema*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong 2009; V.P.Y. Lee, *Hong Kong Cinema Since 1997. The Post-Nostalgic Imagination*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2009; S. Teo, *Chinese Martial Arts Cinema. The Wuxia Tradition*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2009; L. Kam (a cura di), *Hong Kong Culture. Word and Image*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong 2010; E.M.K. Cheung, G. Marchetti, T.S. Kam (a cura di), *Honk Kong Screenscapes. From the New Wave to the Digital Frontier*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong 2011; K.Y. Szeto, *The Martial Arts Cinema of the Chinese Diaspora. Ang Lee, John Woo, and Jackie Chan in Hollywood*, Southern Illinois Univ Press, Carbondale (Illinois) 2011; E.C.M. Yau, T.,Williams (a cura di), *Hong Kong Neo-Noir*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2017; K. Fang, *Arresting Cinema: Surveillance in Hong Kong Film*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2017; K.M.E. Chan, *Hong Kong Dark Cinema*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2019; B. Hu, *Worldly Desire. Cosmopolitanism and Cinema in Hong Kong e Taiwan*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2020, L. White, *Legacies of the Drunken Master*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu 2020.

20 Cfr. Silvio Alovisio, *Wong Kar-wai*, Il Castoro cinema, Milano 2010; Marco Dalla Gassa, Dario Tomasi, *Il cinema dell'Estremo Oriente. Cina, Corea del Sud, Giappone, Hong Kong, Taiwan dagli anni Ottanta a oggi*, UTET UNIVERSITÀ, Torino 2010; Stefano Locati, Emanuele Sacchi, *Il nuovo cinema di Hong Kong. Voci e sguardi oltre l'handover*, Bietti Heterotopia, Milano 2014.

della trama più episodiche del cinema di Hong Kong»[21]. Analoghe osservazioni muove Gary Bettinson quando si sofferma sull'approccio transculturale di Bordwell, sulla natura comparativa del suo lavoro che «indaga tradizioni e pratiche cinematografiche pertinenti, alla ricerca di divergenze e convergenze, in una prospettiva transculturale che illumina norme di composizione e comprensione operanti attraverso le culture […]. "I film cinesi, per dirla senza mezzi termini, sono cinesi, ma sono anche film..."»[22]. Esprimendo qualche riserva e giocando maggiormente su ciò che Bordwell vede di diverso fra le due cinematografie, Elaine Chan scrive come questi «descriva le particolari qualità del cinema locale [di Hong Kong] in opposizione a quelle del cinema globale di Hollywood» aggiungendo poi di non condividere una tale «binaria opposizione tra il globale e il locale, o tra il nazionale e il locale»[23].

Alla questione della globalità fa riferimento anche Meaghan Morris che cita Bordwell quando questi sostiene che il cinema davvero globale è quello che occupa gli schermi dei paesi sviluppati o in via di sviluppo, e, stando così le cose, l'unico cinema davvero globale è indiscutibilmente quello americano: «"la Hollywood dell'Oriente è Hollywood" e il cinema di Hong Kong è, al confronto, una "industria artigianale"»[24]. Artigianale sì, ma in grado di acquisire una dimensione internazionale, anche se nelle forme di una subcultura, grazie alla diffusione del cinema attraverso canali diversi da quelli delle sale cinematografiche (dall'*home video* agli *streaming*)[25].

Più critico sul modo in cui Bordwell disegna il rapporto fra le due cinematografie è Tam-see Kam, che cita lo studioso americano quando questi afferma che «sin dall'inizio il cinema di Hong Kong è debitore di quello americano... Oggi Hollywood rimane il punto di riferimento [per il cinema di Hong Kong]». Un'affermazione che non tiene conto, sempre secondo Kam, di come lo stesso «cinema americano sia stato prodotto […] dall'interazione di forze interne e esterne, filmiche, culturali, o di altro tipo». Di fatto, il cinema di Hong Kong e di Hollywood «convergono e divergono […] sono allo stesso tempo simili e diversi, manifestando idiosincrasie e sovrapposizioni linguistiche». In conclusione, Kam sostiene che Bordwell ha finito col «subordinare il cinema di Hong Kong a un'ideologia universalista […] aggirando le questioni relative alle differenze storiche e culturali della produzione e del consumo di film, così come i contesti coinvolti»[26].

Un altro aspetto di *Planet Hong Kong* che ha suscitato molta attenzione è quello menzionato per primo da Kwai-cheung Lo, che afferma come Bordwell, in maniera «convincente», sostenga che la concretezza e la potenza delle sequenze d'azione dei film di kung-fu «è per

21 K.Y. Szeto, *The Martial Arts Cinema of the Chinese Diaspora. Ang Lee, John Woo, and Jackie Chan in Hollywood*, cit., p. 17.

22 G. Bettinson, *The Sensuous Cinema of Wong Kar-wai. Film Poetics and the Aesthetic of Disturbance*, cit., p. 19.

23 E. Chan, *Hong Kong Dark Cinema*, cit., pp. 175, 177.

24 M. Meaghan, *Introduction*, in M. Meaghan, L.L. Siu, Ching-kyu S. Chan (a cura di), *Hong Kong Connections. Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema*, cit. p. 11.

25 Cfr. D. Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, Second Edition, cit., p. 59. Qui Bordwell mette in relazione la dimensione subculturale dei film d'arti marziali, di kung-fu e d'azione di Hong Kong con le anime giapponesi, i melodrammi indiani, l'horror italiano, i film di wrestler messicani e il fantastico indonesiano.

26 T.S. Kam, *From* South Pacific *to* Shanghai Blues. *No Film Is an Island*, in G. Marchetti, T. S. Kam (a cura di), *Hong Kong Film Hollywood and New Global Cinema*, cit., pp. 15-17.

lo più manifestata con uno schema di pausa-scoppio pausa (pause-burst-pause) in cui i movimenti continui degli attori sono separati da pause intelligibili di stasi»[27]. Il modello proposto da Bordwell è ripreso, sul piano dei rapporti tra film e spettatore da Karen Fang quando scrive come «lo staccato cinematografico, il ritmo pausa-scoppio-pausa, "ci blocchi" nella sua esagerata stilizzazione»[28]. Ki Wong, dal canto suo, riprende il modello bordwelliano, che considera una delle caratteristiche «salienti» di *Planet Hong Kong*, approfondendolo e vedendone i legami con l'Opera di Pechino e la filosofia taoista, e, in particolare, col concepire da parte di questa «l'immobilità come la sorgente ultima di tutte le energie»[29]. Sulle valenze culturali del modello bordwelliano, si sofferma anche Elaine Chan che, dopo aver notato come questo sia stato «ben recepito dall'accademia» e costituisca una forma propria della «cinematica cinese», fa proprie le parole dello stesso studioso americano, vedendo in tale paradigma l'esempio di «"come il cinema trasformi materiali che circolano nella cultura in significative esperienze per gli spettatori"»[30]. Infine Kin-yan Szeto, citando anch'egli Bordwell, correla alla nozione di "corpo" le considerazioni sullo schema pausa-scoppio-pausa, cogliendo al suo interno l'importanza che possono assumervi le fantasie relative agli «sforzi del corpo umano di rompere i suoi legami terreni»[31].

Quello dell'importanza del corpo nei film d'azione di Hong Kong è un altro aspetto del discorso di Bordwell a cui molti studiosi hanno fatto riferimento nei loro lavori. Ancora Szeto, nota l'importanza attribuita da *Planet Hong Kong* alla fascinazione che, attraverso le sue spettacolari coreografie, il cinema di kung-fu manifesta nei confronti del corpo e delle sue situazioni estreme. E, dando una connotazione di classe al suo discorso, arriva ad affermare che questa «messa in primo piano del corpo dell'eroe/eroina» manifesta di frequente la volontà di «liberarsi e superare l'oppressione sociale e politica»[32]. L'importanza delle osservazioni dello studioso americano sulla centralità del corpo è commentata anche da Sai-shing Yung, che fa riferimento alle affermazioni dello stesso Bordwell secondo cui il cinema di arti marziali, prima, e quello poliziesco, poi, hanno posto al centro della loro messa in scena il «corpo aggraziato» dell'attore, secondo una prassi che costituisce «una continuazione e un'estensione dell'estetica teatrale cinese […]. Ciò che Bordwell descrive come l'estetica del cinema d'azione di Hong Kong è applicabile anche all'arte operistica cinese, se non addirittura derivata e radicata in essa»[33]. Infine, all'importanza del corpo nel cinema popolare e alle considerazioni di Bordwell, si rifà anche Luke White quando scrive:

27 K.C. Lo, *Transnationalization of the Local,* in E. Yau (a cura di), *At Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World,* cit., p. 264.

28 K. Fang, *Arresting Cinema. Surveillance in Hong Kong Film*, p. 157.

29 K. Wong, *Technoscience culture, embodiment and Wuda pian*, in M. Mehagan, L. L. Siu, S. Chan (a cura di), *Hong Kong Connection: Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema*, cit., pp. 278-279.

30 E. Chan, *Hong Kong Dark Cinema*, cit., pp. 175, 177.

31 K.Y. Szeto, *The Martial Arts Cinema of the Chinese Diaspora*, cit., p. 7.

32 Ivi, p. 17,

33 S.S. Yung, *Moving Body. The Interactions Between Chinese Opera and Action Cinema*, in M. Meaghan, L.L. Siu, C.K.S. Chan (a cura di), *Hong Kong Connections. Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema*, cit., p. 29).

Bordwell nota la generale tendenza del cinema e della letteratura popolare ad allontanarsi dalle forme (borghesi) di unità narrativa e di sviluppo del personaggio […]. Il cinema popolare tende, invece, a una costruzione episodica fatta di scene d'impatto, in cui l'immediatezza sensoriale, la *performance* e la pura spettacolarità sono in primo piano. Spesso mira a stimolare il maggior numero possibile di emozioni. È spesso "volgare", preferisce gli effetti forti alla sottigliezza e mette in primo piano il corpo, soprattutto le funzioni inferiori e quelle che Bordwell definisce le "costanti di base della vita umana"[34].

L'uso del corpo nel cinema di Hong Kong diventa, secondo lo studioso americano, uno degli aspetti fondamentali per trasmettere allo spettatore una particolare ed energica reazione, attraverso quel «sentire il colpo (feel the blow)», auspicato dal citato Yuen Woo-ping[35], e che fa sì, sempre secondo un Bordwell qui decisamente poco accademico, che:

Quando si esce dai migliori film d'azione di Hong Kong si è carichi, si ha la sensazione di poter fare qualsiasi cosa [… Questi film] contagiano anche i professori di cinema, appesantiti dalla mezza età e dalle controversie [accademiche]... con l'illusione di poter volteggiare, gravi e imperturbabili, sopra le auto parcheggiate fuori dal cinema[36].

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34 L. White, *Legacies of the Drunken Master*, cit., p. 9.

35 Cfr. D. Bordwell, *Aesthetics in Action*, in E. Yau (a cura di), *At Full Spee. Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World*, cit., p. 90. Yuen Woo-ping è uno dei maggiori cineasti di arti marziali di Hong Kong. In Occidente è noto per le sue collaborazioni in veste di coreografo delle scene di arti marziali per *Matrix* (*The Matrix*, A. e L. Wachowski, 1999) e *Kill Bill* (Q. Tarantino, 2003).

36 Ivi, pp. 73, 93.

CLASSICAL STYLES: A COMPARISON OF CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD CINEMA AND MODERN AAA VIDEO GAMES

Alessia Ianni-Palarchio, Fabrizio Matarese, Mauro Mola, Brando Ratti

1. Introduction

The classical style of Hollywood films as discussed by Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* situates Hollywood cinema as a distinct phenomenon, with consistency across its style that emerged alongside the mode of production (xvi – xviii). This concept of the *classical,* referring at times to an "ideal form of expression" (Bazin 29), is not reserved for the medium of film: it has been applied to dance, such as classical ballet, to music, in the way of classical music, and continues to be applied to various artforms. This raised the question: is there a classical style of video game? If so, what would this classical style look like, and how would its mode of production have influenced the paradigm?

In the pursuit of investigating these questions to attempt to define a classical style of video game, we compare the classical style of Hollywood cinema as discussed by Bordwell, Steiger, and Thompson, to video games. Although Bordwell argues that the classical Hollywood cinema style is not connected to a fixed historical period (Bordwell et al. 2), his analysis focuses on cinematic production between the 1920s and the 1960s, making it impossible to establish a chronological parallel with the younger medium of video games. In deciding which video games to instead apply Bordwell's methodology to, we considered that in previous scholarly works the word classic had previously been discussed by Eddy in *Classic Video Games: The Golden Age* to examine the period between the 1970s and 1980s. Another consideration was that the first historical period for video games with a potential for comparisons to " Classical Hollywood Style " could be the "Golden Age of Video Games," which, according to journalist Steven L. Kent, spans from 1978 to 1983 (Kent 148) and includes titles such as *Battlezone, Space Invaders, Pac-Man,* and others (143). However, applying Bordwell's methodology to video games produced during this period would have been overly forced, as many elements defining the "Classical Hollywood" style are absent from these games; for example, the emphasis on the presentation and psychological aspects of characters (Bordwell 12), is a narrative element that can be found in a video game like *L.A. Noire* (Carbone), but is absent from *Space Invaders,* which has a more limited narrative scope.

According to Italian writer Italo Calvino, "classics" exert a particular influence both when they establish themselves as unforgettable works and when they become part of collective memory, regardless of the era in which they were created (Calvino 30). This idea

of a quality of being "timeless" influenced our focus to shift from a purely chronological framework to a more qualitative one. Thus, in contrast to Eddy's and Kent's writings, we instead decided to investigate the production methods of the company Rockstar Games, and their body of work, as an exemplar of games to explore an alternative view of the concept of a classical video game. More specifically, the majority of our analysis is on a corpus of video games produced by Rockstar Games from 2000 to 2013. Titles such as the *Grand Theft Auto* series managed to dominate the global market and collective imagination (Wright), breaking the molds of past productions in terms of narrative, textual, and production frameworks. This choice also aligns with a well-defined period in video game history: the sixth and the seventh generation of consoles. Spanning from 1998 to 2013, this era marked a watershed between old and new generations of video games (Wardyga 243). It signaled the decline of SEGA-branded consoles, the introduction of new systems such as Microsoft's Xbox, the adoption of DVDs as a new storage medium, improved graphical fidelity, and greater accessibility of video games, which during this phase became more economically attainable (Wardyga 248).

We discuss how the term classical can be applied to high-budget, triple-A video game productions that redefined the norms of action-adventure games. We also consider how the production methods used by studios compare when analyzing both the development of video games in a large, triple-A game studio alongside Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson's discussion of classical Hollywood cinema studios. Lastly, we discuss how certain stylistic conventions that emerge from the mode of production in triple-A video game studios converge with the norms of classical Hollywood cinema. Our analysis focuses on the areas of storytelling, music and audio, and advertising, and demonstrates how the framework established by Bordwell for the study of classic Hollywood cinema provides an additional perspective, and is a useful tool through which we can study other forms of media and popular culture, such as video games.

2. Studio Characteristics between Classical Hollywood Cinema and AAA Video Games

Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson's theory discusses how entwined the style of Hollywood cinema is with its mode of production, which they describe as being "reciprocal and mutually influencing" (xvii). They make the distinction that 'mode' and 'industry' are not synonymous terms. Staiger states that 'mode' is referring to production practice, while 'industry' is referring to "the economic structure and conduct of the particular companies that produced, distributed, and exhibited the films" (91). This comparative analysis will utilize these definitions of 'mode' and 'industry' in the analysis of the video game development. We argue that the reciprocity and influence of style and production on one another (Bordwell et al. xvii) is also applicable to games. While we specifically investigate the correlation between triple-A game production and Hollywood cinema, to understand the limited scope of this research,

it is necessary to understand the delineations between the scales of game production and why the triple-A studio is most comparable with the classical Hollywood cinema studio.

2.1. A Correlation in Scale of Production

The field of video game development is composed of varying modes of production at different scales. For this particular analysis, the major focus is the structure of the triple-A, often written as AAA, game studio. Before discussing how AAA video game production parallels the mode of production in Hollywood cinema and why it is the focus of our research it is important to unpack how game studio terminology, like AAA, fits into the broader discussion of categorizations of video games and the developers who make them. The term 'triple-A' exists within a broader category of classifications to indicate the types of games a studio produces. Some of these classifications include indie, triple-I, double-A, triple-A, and quadruple-A: these may be written as indie, III, AA, AAA, and AAAA respectively (Alva). Alva writes that "[f]actors like budgets, the size of the team, and the willingness to take risks have a lot to do with how a game feels, plays, and looks. Games are often classified into categories like indie and AAA as shorthand in response to some of these factors" in discussing what differentiates each classification. Independently produced indie games are considered to have had lower financial and human resources behind them, while the highest budget, highest human-resources developments are considered AAAA games (Livingston). The line between games that fit these shorthands and the studios can often be a point of muddled contention (Lipkin 9), especially when discussing indie games (Livingston).

Ruffino points out that indie games lack a solid agreed upon definition (107), while Lipkin states that "[i]n some ways, defining 'AAA' or 'mainstream' depends on the contrast between whatever it is and whatever 'indie' is" (9). One recent such game that exemplifies the dilemma of using these categorizations in perceived independent aesthetic versus the production of the game can be seen in the video game *DAVE THE DIVER*. While the director of the game has stated that he personally would not call *DAVE THE DIVER* an indie video game, there have been arguments that the game has 'indie vibes' (Livingston), and it was even included in The Game Awards event under the independent category of games (Pureza). There is a sort of collective consciousness about how AAA games are in an aesthetic manner. A similar misconception about classical Hollywood cinema closely parallels this: Bordwell states that "in spite of the many claims that Hollywood has an aesthetic of realism, filmmakers would always sacrifice realism if this was necessary for a clearer understanding of the story" (324), and this holds true of AAA games. D'Amato exemplifies this in pointing out that despite *DAVE THE DIVER's* departure from what has become an expected AAA aesthetic, MINTROCKET is still owned by the much larger powerhouse company Nexon (Obedkov; D'Amato). It is not aesthetics that form the sole basis of determining what studios fit the AAA form, nor can aesthetics alone be the determining factor to analyze AAA.

Ruffino suggests that "we could welcome them as different approaches to the production and distribution of a video game" (119) in reference to the production of independent

games (119). We have decided to base our understanding of AAA on production scale while discussing the influence of modes of production. With this sentiment on alternative, non-mainstream production modes present in the conversation of indie games (Lipkin 11) for a multiplicity of motivations (Lipkin 12), there was less common ground with the paradigm of Hollywood cinema for analysis, as indie games are more comparable to indie film production (Lipkin 11, 12, 21). With this precedent for film and games comparison historically set under an alternative lens, and keeping in mind this conflict between aesthetics and scale, we can look to studios that are widely regarded as AAA studios, as well the broad portfolio of the games they produce. This includes subsidiaries of Rockstar Games, like Rockstar North (Mason), and studios that are able to support the cost of making video games at a AAA scale, such as Activision Blizzard, Ubisoft, Square Enix, and Warner Bros. Games, which have the funding and size to be classified as AAA (Alva). The similarity between Hollywood film and AAA games in having these larger production scales in people power and economic power made AAA the best candidate for examining a potential classical style of video games.

2.2. Organization in Specialization

AAA video game development companies do not contain homogenous skill sets between individuals. From a company's hiring information we can begin to extrapolate the internal structure of their studios based on the current hiring categories listed as an extension of the teams and roles which make up the studios internally. In video game development, it is not uncommon for companies to be divided internally into subsidiary studios that often deal with different projects: the publisher Rockstar Games is both a development and distribution house with studios such as Rockstar Dundee, Rockstar Toronto, and Rockstar North, among others (Mason): these studios all develop under the Rockstar Games umbrella, and we can infer that the resources discussed below are spread across all of their subsidiaries. When viewing Rockstar Games' current career listing page on their website they list their currently available job roles by department, which include various job categories; these include categories like animation, art, audio, code, game design and scripting, IT, marketing, research, and writing (Rockstar Games). This split of responsibilities and job descriptions is not unique to Rockstar Games and its subsidiaries.

Comparatively, the developer and publisher Ubisoft has structured their job listings similarly. While the exact wording varies between both companies' job listings, the categories are structured similarly between Rockstar Games and Ubisoft: both have departments for game design, IT, and audio among other comparable categories ("Design & Creative Direction."; Rockstar Games). This division of labor can also be seen in the credits of video games, just as in film credits, though game credits are not always reliable references, as not all individuals who work on a game may be credited by name (Yarwood; Valentine).

Each of these companies shares overlap in groupings of specialists in different areas of production. While cinema utilized specialists in the manner of "scene design, photography, lighting, and location" (Bordwell et al. 212) among others, the necessity for specialists is

shared between Hollywood cinema and AAA game production disciplines. This requirement for individuals to specialize is a result of the scale of the production; just as no one individual could know and do every task required on a film set (Bordwell et al. 212), the same can be applied to the large scale productions of AAA studios.

Studios that develop independent games are less rigid in their structure. With smaller team sizes, this level of specialization is less prominent. Unlike the structural similarities AAA studios have with the production specialization seen in Hollywood cinema, indie games do not have the same number of human resources to require, or even allow for, this level of specialization. Team sizes can be as small as in the single and double digits (Ruffino 107). The independent designer is less of a specialist, and may instead be viewed as a "lonely genius" (Ruffino 118), especially in regard to solo developers. The scale of production is drastically smaller and holds less in common with classical Hollywood film studios: this in turn influences the games produced differently than the work accomplished through large scale collaboration. This has no implicit bearing on the quality of work produced purely based on scale and specialization, but the mode of production is dissimilar enough between indie games and Hollywood cinema up to the 1960s that we focused only on further analysis of AAA games for the bearing of the classic title.

Keeping both human and financial resources in mind, as well as the scale and scope of work produced, Rockstar Games and its subsidiaries are structured in a way that allows for more direct comparisons to be drawn between their portfolio of games work and cinema. Beyond sharing specialization as a common feature of production, some areas of production overlap between the two mediums in structure and function. To determine their proximity, we narrowed down the specialties and function to compare aesthetic and production mode together, and discuss narrative, audio, and advertisements in subsequent sections.

3. GTA V's *Narrative Through the Lens of Classic Hollywood Cinema*

The progressive convergence of films and video games at a formal and production level has led to a growing need for interdisciplinary research capable of connecting the two fields. While the video game medium is multifaceted, video games have increasingly incorporated formal devices developed by cinema; at the same time, many films of the last decades produce aesthetic effects comparable to those of AAA video games, both which are influenced by technological advancements (Fassone). *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* provides a valuable framework for understanding the narration and modes of production of classical cinema, which can be applied to other narrative forms, including video games.

Starting from the fundamental elements that constitute the narrative modes of classical Hollywood cinema, we used them to investigate how the video game industry has incorporated these elements in AAA video games using *Grand Theft Auto V*, referred to as *GTA V*, as our case study.

The choice of this game derives from a few main motivations: first, it was developed by Rockstar North which, as mentioned prior, is a studio with comparable economic and human resources to the Hollywood cinema studios Bordwell et al. discuss: more than a thousand people participated in the development of the title ("Inside Rockstar North – Part 2: The Studio") and estimates of the overall cost of the title (considering development and marketing) are around 265 million dollars (Villapaz). The economic-production component of the title is comparable to that of a blockbuster movie.

Regarding its gameplay, *GTA V* fits into, and enriches, an established formula of open-world, criminal-themed action-adventure games that the *Grand Theft Auto* saga largely contributed to creating.

3.1. The Narrative Device of Classical Cinema in a Blockbuster Video Game

In this section, we analyze Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson's discussion of the classical Hollywood narrative style while applying it to the video game *GTA V*.

Cinema and video games share similarities both at the linguistic-formal level, and at the economic-productive level: Bordwell et al's reflections provide a framework to analyze the nature of the relationship between these two fields.

Beginning with an investigation of the narrative style of *GTA V,* we started from the fundamental elements of classical Hollywood narrative codified by Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson: compositionally motivated narrative, linear causality model with multiple intertwined lines of action, clear representation of information, centrality of the psychological character, a goal-oriented protagonist, and the presence of the obstacle as a driving force for the development of the plot (Bordwell et al. 265-275). In the continuation of the text we will focus on an analysis of the narrator.

3.2. The Narrator

Bordwell et al. cite *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction* (Sternberg)*,* to understand classical Hollywood narrative through the analysis of the following three axes: *self-consciousness*, *knowledgeable* and *communicative* (Bordwell et al. 24*)*. The first axis indicates how much the narrator is conscious of presenting information to an audience, the second how much information is knowable by the narrator, and the third how much the narrator is willing to share their knowledge.

Hollywood narration is potentially omniscient, but manages this abundance of information more or less generously depending on the sequences of the film. The narrative style of *GTA V* takes up, and implements, some of the stylistic characteristics of classical cinema narrative modes. We explore some characteristics of the implicit narrator of *GTA V:* we refer to these characteristics as the 'pseudo-omniscient narrator'.

3.2.1. The Pseudo Omniscient Narrator
In *GTA V* the narrator manifests their omniscience in a measured way, as the narrator is subject to the action of the player. *GTA V* is the first game in the *Grand Theft Auto* saga

to have three playable characters integrated as a basic gameplay feature. All three of these characters have a complex psychology, different temperaments and desires, and come from specific and distinct social backgrounds: all characteristics in line with the model of the psychological character that emerged in conjunction with classical Hollywood narrative (Bordwell et al. 269).

After progressing through the initial stages of the game and unlocking at least two of the three playable characters, the player can press a button to switch characters at almost any time during the game. When this happens, there is a montage break and the camera view switches from the third-person view behind the character to a bird's-eye view similar to that produced by satellites. This bird's eye view is centered vertically on the head of the controlled character. Subsequently, there are three zoom shots back to widen the field of view, and then it switches to the newly selected character's position with the same sequence of shots from above, only this time moving towards the character instead of away. This gameplay feature indicates a level of omniscient storytelling governed by:

1) the formal limitations imposed by the developers – one cannot take control of a bird for example and fly freely through the streets of Los Santos, the fantastical re-creation of the city of Los Angeles in California, and;
2) by the choice of the player who, within the formal limitations imposed by the developers, can make a certain selection to vary and expand the narrative focus.

This game mechanic generates possibilities for multiple narrative configurations, and gives the player the ability to make editing choices within the game's sequences by changing the player's point of view and framing on the fly.

In *GTA V* the point of view can change dynamically by focusing on one of the three main characters, this possibility is not common in games that we have identified as belonging to the classic period of video games. However, it represents a natural development of the characteristics found in the narrative of classic Hollywood cinema that the video game industry has reformulated through the ludic media. Narration with multiple lines of action, clear representation of key information, the psychological character as the focus of narrative: all of these narrative characteristics identified by Bordwell et al. in Hollywood cinema remain preponderant in *GTA V* and we can also find them in many video games of the 2000s that we can consider classics.

4. The Role of Music as a Source of Identification: From Classical Hollywood Cinema to the AAA Video Game

For the film historian, the non-diegetic music used in the classical film style is the central element through which different scenes are connected together, or emotional moments of the film and characteristic aspects of characters are highlighted (Bordwell et al. 32). Bordwell also states the musical element must lead the audience into the narration (32). This decision enabled the non-diegetic music to become a significant element of the narrative,

without overwhelming the filmic text. One of the elements identified as significant within classical Hollywood cinema is the use of the leitmotif (Bordwell et al. 33).

Early Hollywood film production took Richard Wagner as a general model for the creation of the various film soundtracks, and Bordwell offers the following explanation for this decision: Wagner was a perfect model, since he exploited the narrational possibilities of music (33). Harmony, rhythm, and a continuous melody could correspond to the play's dramatic action, and leitmotifs could convey a character's thoughts, draw parallels between situations, even anticipate action, or create irony (Bordwell et al. 33), and was particularly well-suited for representing characters, locations, moments, or psychological states. The use of the leitmotif enabled the association of a specific melody with a character or a precise moment in the narrative, facilitating the spectator's identification with the depicted story. This is one of the points of contact between the classic Hollywood film production and the production of AAA video games of the early 2000s.

The juxtaposition between Rockstar Games and the classical Hollywood film industry can be seen in comparing the use and production of leitmotifs in films with the use of music in the Grand Theft Auto video game series, focusing on the game's radio stations through which the player can select the songs they prefer.

Music was a founding element of Rockstar Games even before the birth of the company itself (Peel), and retains a key role in the brand identity of Rockstar Game's productions. One of the brand's principal strengths has consistently been its aspiration to encapsulate the multifaceted nature of American society and history, encompassing its inherent contradictions and stereotypes (Wright 15). In order to facilitate such a narrative, in a manner analogous to classical Hollywood cinema, the musical element assumes great significance.

It is evident that, even within the context of video games, the musical element cannot be regarded as purely decorative. Instead, it must be considered as an integral component of the narrative and world of the video game itself. A study conducted in 2010 by Tan, Baxa, and Spackman demonstrated that music and game sounds, when incorporated into gameplay, enhance a player's performance during the gaming session, as opposed to a gaming experience without such auditory elements. A review of this study reveals that non-diegetic music and sounds are deeply intertwined with and beneficial to the audience, even in the context of video games (Tan et al.). Performativity is not the sole objective of the soundtrack in video games, and as previously stated, the music should assist the players in identifying with the narrative, emphasizing its pivotal elements or accentuating the characteristics of characters and cultural contexts. Furthermore, if a brand wishes to maintain its reputation as a 'bad boy of the game industry' (Zakariasson and Dymek 56), the choice of soundtrack will also be of significant importance.

This is particularly true when the narrative of most of the titles produced deals with themes such as crime, lawlessness, and social violence (Osborne). In contrast to the Hollywood leitmotif, however, the music present since *GTA III* is not a non-diegetic medium used. By adhering to the active narrative of the video game text, the music becomes an active diegetic element through which the individual player can manifest their own emotional state, or

their character's. The player is able to choose songs featured on radio stations according to their mood or individual approach to the game narrative at a specific moment in time: this creates an additional layer of complexity through which the player can identify more with the imagery proposed by the game and customize their avatar (Miller).

The inaugural utilization of tracks from external artists occurred with the advent of *GTA III*, wherein tracks created expressly for the game by select music producers were accompanied by pre-existing tracks from artists with varying degrees of recognition. In addition to supporting the narrative of the game, Rockstar Games is able to establish a portion of its marketing campaign based on the music itself (Wright). This decision proved to be an appropriate one from the outset, as evidenced by the fact that, upon the release of *GTA: Vice City*, there were over 100 licensed songs in the game, including from artists such as Ozzy Osbourne, Iron Maiden, Blondie and Run-D.M.C ("Vice City Tourist Guide" 18-21). Similarly to the musical production of the classic Hollywood film, in which the various musicians reproduced, reinterpreted or composed from scratch the various leit-motifs, within a few years, Rockstar began to commission the supervision of the various radio channels to prominent figures from all the music scenes deemed 'underground' and suitable for the narrative.

An example could include the supervision, and hosting, of the *Liberty City Hardcore* radio station in *GTA IV*, by Jimmy Gestapo, the frontman of the historic New York Hardcore band Murphy's Law (Fischer et al.). The curatorial involvement of musicians, or influential figures within a specific musical scene, contributes to making the product feel more authentic, and more aligned with the narrative: in the production of classic video games, it is now possible to ask Iggy Pop to curate the selection of tracks that will be broadcast on *Liberty Rock Radio* (Liebe).

The utilization of music in the *GTA* series is analogous to that employed in Hollywood cinema, and these similarities extend beyond the narrative aspect to encompass production, and historical aspects as well. With a few exceptions, the focus of various classical Hollywood film soundtracks was on pieces that were inspired by and reproduced the sound of mid-19th century romantic music (Bordwell et al. 33). The advent of 'New Hollywood', or 'post-classical' cinema, marked a change in the composition of soundtracks, which began to feature contemporary pieces, often already known to the general public (Bordwell et al. 608-09). An example of this is *Easy Rider*, the precursor film of this new cinematic style. Although the first three volumes of *GTA* mainly include unreleased songs, created expressly for the game and arranged by Craig Conner, who was Rockstar North's musical director from 1995 to 2014 (Miller), the approach to music taken from the modern AAA video game seems to be different from that of classical Hollywood cinema, and therefore more similar to that of New Hollywood.

The style of the songs in *GTA* rearranges and adapts music and melodies from the past to the present, similar to classical Hollywood cinema. An exemplar of this phenomenon is the utilization of select compositions from the *Scarface* soundtrack on the 'Flashback 95.6' radio station that evocatively conjure the underworld imagery of the 1980s (Miller). It is

only with the advent of *GTA: Vice City*, following a music-driven marketing campaign, that the *GTA* radio stations began to feature a far greater number of widely known tracks, rather than those created specifically for the video game.

Despite the numerous differences, primarily stemming from the substantial heterogeneity between film and video games, the use of music throughout various periods of Hollywood cinema Bordwell describes appears to share certain affinities with that of AAA video games. Initially conceived as a simple, yet powerful, narrative aid, the musical element evolves over time, becoming a fundamental and almost autonomous feature of the production itself.

5. Standardization and Differentiation: Analysis and Comparison Between Bordwell's Theory on Advertising Practices in Classical Hollywood Cinema and Rockstar Game's Productions

To expand the discussion to the advertising methods and how Rockstar Games acts in the post-production phase of their work, we reference chapter nine of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* as the definitions of standardization and differentiation play a key role both regarding the production processes and the advertising methods of a product.

Standardization refers to the set of "repetition of characteristics considered desirable in the film" (Bordwell et al. 96). It also includes the structure of Hollywood productions: "ranging from stylistics practices (...) to technology (...) to business, production, and exhibition practices" (97). It is then possible to focus on the characteristics that make a product recognizable and appreciable, like all those rules and "norms" that the audience knows to expect in a product of a specific company.

On the other hand, differentiation bases its advertising on something that makes a specific movie different and unique. Taking into analysis four examples of classical Hollywood film advertisements that are cited by Bordwell, there are four types of specific cases: from the feelings related to the audience experience to the technical innovations about fading (98); from comparison in absolute terms like considering *The Great Train Robbery* "the superior of any moving picture film ever made" (98), to the search for realism through new technologies as the Edison's Projectoscope (100).

Since the days of the first generations of consoles, with the birth of the genres and their specific characteristics (Cook), players and critics have argued on the dualism between what is standardized and what is new (Arsenault) in terms of gameplay, design, and experience. Regarding software and specifically the video games sector under consideration, every specific video game has technical and visual norms from which it is difficult to move away (like the interface in a first person shooter or the skill tree in an RPG); but at the same time, the player is always looking for technical or technological novelties that can support a new and engaging experience. Focusing on the worlds created by Rockstar Games, this case study will analyze how the advertising behind three specific products worked in the years: the *Red Dead* (Rockstar Games) series, and the *Grand Theft Auto* series. Every Rockstar Games

production has a strong connection with cinema in terms of both its inspiration and references. The relationship with cinema, as previously discussed, touches on several points of connection: from genre clichés, settings, visual and narrative tributes to Hollywood cinema, the way cutscenes are enjoyed, and the possibility to drive a car with different cameras and fast cutting during gameplay that "mimics a film car chase" (Chesher).

This section will analyze the terms and ways in which the *Red Dead* series, and the *Grand Theft Auto* series have been presented to the public; with what criteria of standardization and differentiation they have been described and how they are related to the four types of reviews identified in Bordwell's work. Rockstar Games has created over the years games that have a lot of things in common: genre, style, mechanics, typology of missions, and the open world structure. The *Grand Theft Auto* saga, especially from the third chapter onwards, has become the yardstick for any other third person adventure video game in the manner of gameplay. Typically rockstar games have a strong connection to the North American area and to a specific historical period: according to Wright, Rockstar Games wants to tell players "all over the world what an authentic, Rockstar-authored history of America looks like" (30): starting chronologically from the far-west imagery, to post-World War II, to contemporary society. As Wright continues "their games are self-consciously historiographical. Branded as 'satire' or 'cultural history', they reflect wider historical knowledge and sell it back to a globalized audience. Moreover, their promotional discourses are equally as deliberately historiographical" (217).

The standardization of the technical aspect of the game and the way the player interacts with the digital world is well present in the productions of the U.S. studio. For example , the structure of both the *GTA* and *Red Dead* sagas is almost identical: third-person action-adventures set in open world maps with similarly structured main and optional missions and a default user interface and controls with the same features. Although many media outlets at the release of the first episode tried to intertwine the two games, Cantamessa – writer of Red Dead Redemption –stated that the games' intentions, though visually comparable, were totally different: *"Our ambition certainly wasn't to make GTA with horses (...) Our target was to contribute something to the canon, without being a movie and without being a book"* (Sirio).

The way Rockstar Games talks about its products is specific to each game it produces: different advertisements have been used, and are still being used, for specific games, focusing on unique features of the game.

In the area of advertisement, one can attempt to apply the same Bordwellian pattern analyzed earlier to some of the statements made at video game releases. The following are some quotes regarding specific Rockstar Games' productions that may fall under the four cases highlighted above about: user experience, technical innovations, comparison in absolute terms and searching for realism.

5.1.1 Case Studies

Rockstar Games co-founder Dan Houser presented Red Dead Redemption as "not just a kind of classic cowboy experience, but it's a classic cowboy experience as that classic cowboy era is dying out" in an interview about the user experience (Onyett). This type of communication is intended to give an accurate, and faithful description of a specific slice of life. In *Life of an American Fireman* the viewers create a relationship with the characters and to follow their evolution, in this case the player plays the role of a specific character and conducts him toward his personal story in the game world: the old west. Thanks to the avowed film references that have made the narrative, world building, design and characterization of the characters unique, the player knows they will have a complete western experience

In this second case, the main focus is adding a new mechanic into an established series. There is a statement from Rockstar North's art director Aaron Garbut in which he says that "[having] multiple characters was a leap of faith. It was an interesting idea, and it felt like we could do interesting things with it, but it also felt like a change to the core of the game that might backfire" (O'Brien).

While Bordwell discusses how advertising communicates with the viewer about technical innovation such as new film transitions, in Rockstar's interview the main focus is on the mechanics: can a new mechanic be considered as an innovation in the same manner? As new film transitions would impact the experience of the viewer in classic cinema, the player is now set to play the game in a new way when given a new mechanic. In this example, that mechanic is using different characters inside the same universe for the first time in the series. The new mechanic brings to the player a novel experience which is more closely related to cinema as referenced in *3.2.1. The Pseudo omniscient narrator.*

The third case is important because the statement comes from 2001, during the PlayStation 2 era: this was one of the most important consoles ever in terms of innovation (Zawislak). Leslie Benzies during an interview reflected on the importance of *GTA III* to the genre it created: "Grand Theft Auto 3 is going to be more influential than ever, but above all it's going to be fun. (IGN Staff)

Unlike as discussed by Bordwell et al. we are not living in an era in which movie studios could venture to announce that a particular film would be the best ever (98). In the video game world, and also for film, doing this today is very rare.

GTA III was one game which made an important step forward from the previous installations in the series in gameplay, realism, experience and in-game options. And despite the fact that it was not described as the best game ever, in absolute terms it can be confirmed that *GTA III* was "more influential than ever" for the evolution of third person action games as they are known today.

The last case is focused on realism. Regarding new technologies used for *Red Dead Redemption 2*, John Bass declared that their biggest goal was "making the player forget they are playing a game, and instead leaving them with a memory of a place" (Shanley). Edison's projectoscope was able to give life to pictures, and make them look as if they were real. In another way, Rockstar's games allow players to play and navigate in a game world

increasingly similar to the real world. This is thanks to the innovative latest generation of hardware and technologies. In this case the environment – like pictures at the end of the nineteenth century, has been made real.

Although the examples examined are a small number, it is interesting to note that there is a similarity in the two media. Society's usage and methods of advertising have changed over the decades, a deeper study of this area can make the connection between film and video game production even stronger.

5.2. Comparable Advertising

Most of the norms that Bordwell et al. analyzed are entirely analogous with the advertising procedure that large companies, such as Rockstar Games, use in recent years. However, it is necessary to say that this refers to specific cases, regarding a small percentage of advertising methods: advertising works differently today, with avenues including social networks, guerrilla marketing, and video specials.

Times change, and today it is hard to find a game that is advertised as the best ever; at the same time it is easy to find a communication focused on something new thanks to technological progress or innovative game play and game-experience or eventually something somehow new referring to games that winks to other games from the same genre or from the same saga.

6. *Conclusion*

In this article we related stylistic features of AAA games, as well as production methods employed, focused mainly on a subset of games produced by subsidiaries of the publisher and developer Rockstar Games, to elements of classic Hollywood cinema. This comparative analysis has revealed significant and comparable aesthetic and production elements between these two media. Despite the differences in historical, economic, and cultural context between these two phenomena, we found numerous points of contact that suggest a continuity of certain production practices and stylistic elements between classic cinema and AAA video games.

To start with the similarities, both classic cinema and AAA video games require a high production budget, and a sizable workforce. Furthermore, the human capital must be highly specialized in one of the roles that make up the production process to accommodate for the large base of knowledge spread across the individuals working on these respective projects. At the narrative level, elements inherited from classic cinema, such as the pseudo-omniscient narrator, are also found, reworked, in AAA video games, incorporating elements specific to the medium that add further complexity to the narrative form. In music production, it is used in classic cinema as an expressive element, capable of communicating on an emotional level the dramatic progression of a scene, the personality of a character, or the approach of a significant event. In AAA video games, this use is maintained but some linguistic in-

novations have been introduced through the double possibility of using extradiegetic and diegetic music, as we see through the radio highlighted in the *Grand Theft Auto* series. Finally, at the level of advertising for these mediums, we have highlighted four case examples in which the same persuasive levers have been used in the presentation of classic cinema and AAA video games: user experience, technological innovations, comparison in absolute terms, and the search for realism.

None of these are an exact match – due to technological differences, the affordances of each medium, and the changing historical and media contexts – but we can draw parallels between these two forms of media in both production and how that emerges into many of their aesthetic choices. While the comparisons in this study are relevant in the narrow field of AAA video games, in particular in the productions of Rockstar Games and subsidiaries, the question remains if Rockstar Games and its subsidiaries are representative of the whole of AAA gaming, and if these parallels are sufficient enough in applying the classic label to modern gaming. There are a few gaps in this particular research.

One large consideration unexplored in this paper is the idea that the classic video game may be a style and mode of game not yet entirely established in the present day. Cinema is an older, more established medium than video games by decades ("*Video Game History*."; "A Very Short History of Cinema."), while video games are both newer ("*Video Game History*.") and have been subject to rapid change alongside the technology used both in making, disseminating, and playing it. Given another decade, or longer, what we currently consider to be modern AAA may still be considered historically classical, but just as easily may be an outlier as norms change: this is especially significant while we are only just seeing the emergence of AAAA games being developed (Alva). Another gap is considering that this is a vertical slice of research, which provides a deep but narrow insight into a series of studios that all work in similar genres under the same publishing umbrella. This research would benefit in the future from an in-depth analysis of additional studios' production-aesthetic connections which are not subsidiaries of Rockstar Games, and are additionally not published by Rockstar Games: as the publisher may potentially impose its own aesthetic norms due to their publishing requirement, this may introduce bias if all games are from the same publisher across a horizontal section of AAA games.

This study demonstrates that Bordwell's analytical frameworks offer a valuable toolset for understanding creative industries, especially those that create artifacts of popular culture, beyond the industry behind cinema. AAA Video games, such as the action-adventure games produced by Rockstar Games and its subsidiaries, appear to have a strong pervading set of both aesthetic and production norms that show consistency across the body of work. We have demonstrated on this subset of games some of the ways in which the modes of production are enmeshed with the principles of narrative structure; as well, the use of certain genre conventions, and stylistic devices are transferable across multiple forms of media. The findings of this study contribute to our understanding of the video game industry as a distinct yet interconnected part of the popular culture landscape. This can be extrapolated

to other AAA studios in the future to further examine how this mode of production has influenced the games they produce.

This research underscores the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in analyzing popular culture, where media studies can inform and enrich our understanding of film, television, literature, and other creative industries. We wanted to highlight the need for scholars to explore the intersections and overlaps between seemingly disparate fields of study.

Ultimately, the most significant contribution of this study lies not in its empirical findings, but rather in its theoretical implications. By successfully applying Bordwell's analytical frameworks to a medium as distinct from cinema as video games, we demonstrate that these categories are not bound by their initial conception. Rather, they are transferable in a way that allows them to be adapted to other forms of popular culture; the value of this research lies in its potential to expand the scope of Bordwell's work, providing a framework for scholars across disciplines to analyze and interpret diverse forms of media and how similar modes of production in scope and scale influence the works.

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ABSTRACTS

RESEARCHING IN CIRCLES: MATERIAL CULTURE, HISTORY AND METHODOLOGY
Leonie Hannan

This essay examines the value of 'critical intimacy', return and repetition as perspectives and practices applied in historical research. In particular, it addresses history-writing that uses material culture as primary evidence, or which considers questions of materiality. The discussion begins with examples of eighteenth-century knowledge-making by non-elite individuals and emphasises the early modern home as site of intellectual and creative work. This research was informed by a previous, collaborative project which questioned traditional historical methods. Ultimately, the essay argues that the study of material culture offers historians (and others) an important analytical perspective, one that disrupts linear narratives in favour of generative circles of enquiry.

'MUSIC EMBODIED IN LIFE': ROCK MUSIC, MATERIALITY AND 'LIFE-CREATION' IN 1970S LENINGRAD
Polly McMichael

The community that formed around rock music in late 1960s and 1970s Leningrad was conscious of existing in conditions of material scarcity and being cut off from the flow of rock music from its dominant centres. Locally, music-making focused on live concerts known as 'sessions', ephemeral and rarely captured in recordings. Simultaneously, the rock community was animated by an innovative interest in the material. Musicians, collectors, artists and organisers made huge efforts to acquire objects associated with the music, prizing highly those, like vinyl LPs, that had physically travelled from the West, but also creating their own stuff using the material resources of their environment. Sounds were thus transformed into tangible and durable forms. Drawing on contemporary accounts and memoirs, this article how rock music was imagined materially when listening to shortwave radio, collecting, creating displays at home, and putting the body on show. It argues that via these behaviours life itself became an object of artistic creation, and that *doing rock* in this way was an important and overlooked part of Leningrad's rock music culture during this era.

PORNOGRAPHY, THE EVERYDAY AND MATERIAL CULTURE
Feona Attwood

This article challenges dominant portrayals of pornography as a harmful, abstract force disconnected from everyday life. Instead, it explores pornography as a diverse and material

cultural practice embedded in people's personal histories and daily experiences. Drawing from a large-scale qualitative study involving over 5,000 participants, it highlights the wide range of media considered pornographic and the varying ways people encounter, use, and relate to pornography over time. The concept of a "porn career" is introduced to trace changes in individual engagement, revealing complex relationships shaped by context, emotion, and desire. Emphasizing the significance of space, place, and access, the article calls for a grounded, nuanced understanding of pornography that accounts for its ordinary, affective, and socially embedded dimensions.

"IT WAS SOMETHING TO BE DONE IN SECRET": REFLECTING ON THE MATERIALITY OF POR-
NOGRAPHY IN THE FAMILY HOME
Clarissa Smith

This article explores the presence and significance of pornography within the domestic sphere, drawing on personal narratives that recount early encounters with pornographic materials in the family home. Rather than framing these moments as harmful "exposure", the study examines how pornography operates as a hidden yet powerful medium of sexual discovery, identity formation, and emotional negotiation. Engaging with themes of secrecy, familial intimacy, and the material culture of the home, the article challenges conventional depictions of pornography as an intrusive or pathological presence. Instead, it positions porn as a form of intimate media embedded in the social and emotional fabric of everyday life. Through accounts that span curiosity, pleasure, shame, and trauma, the article highlights how pornography's concealment and discovery reflect broader societal norms about sexuality, authority, and intergenerational silence, ultimately revealing its complex role in the shaping of personal and familial relationships.

ANALOG BOARD GAMES AS CITIZEN JOURNALISM
Brian Train

This word "newsgame" is a recent term in the academic field of game studies that refers to videogames or computer games on current events and issues. This is a new word and mode for a very old practice. There is a long tradition of analog games performing the same function that not only predates personal computers and the Internet, it continues today – advised and assisted by these media.

"AGFA NOTE FOTOGRAFICHE" BETWEEN *PERIODICAL STUDIES* AND *FORMAT THEORY*]
Elena Gipponi e Costanza Paolillo

This article offers one of the earliest scholarly analyses of "Agfa Note fotografiche", the Italian house organ of the German film manufacturer AGFA, situating it within the transformation of European media culture during the interwar period. Published during AGFA's expansion into Italy in the 1920s, the magazine not only promoted technical education and visual literacy in amateur photography and cinematography but also showcased AGFA's technological innovations to the new market.

Using the frameworks of periodical studies and format theory, this research examines the interplay between the magazine's material production and its role within the broader media ecosystem. It shows how "Agfa Note fotografiche" evolved from a direct replication of its German counterpart, "Agfa Photoblätter", to a culturally localized product, adapting its communication strategies to better engage with Italian amateur photographers and filmmakers. By integrating technological discourse with modern visual culture, "Agfa Note fotografiche" positioned itself as both a commercial tool and a platform for cultural mediation. Bridging industrial innovation with the aspirations of an expanding consumer base, the magazine became a significant player in the evolving media landscape of the early 20th-century Italy, fostering a dialogue between technology, aesthetics, and the demands of modern visual culture.

THE UNBEARABLE COST OF DEVELOPMENT AND PRINTING PLANTS. TECHNOSPES, LITMUS PAPER ON TECHNO-INDUSTRIAL PROBLEMS IN 1970S ITALIAN CINEMA
Matteo Citrini

Result of the merger in 1973 between Spes and Tecnostampa, the two most important Italian film development and printing societies, Technospes constitutes a complex case study to re-investigate the deep crisis that subverted the cinematographic industry since the 1960s, shifting the focus from socio-cultural to techno-industrial dynamics.

In the rapid decline of Technospes during the 1970s, one can read not only the epilogue of two great protagonists of the technical history of Italian cinema, but the emergence of new material and technical needs and patterns that marked the audiovisual industry of the late 20th century. The factory—to be understood as a site of aggregation as wells as an urban building, an infrastructure, and a set of costs—is the place in which resonates the most the collapse of the old system and the emerging of new industrial criticalities (safety rules, maintenance costs, technological updates, production flexibility).

OF SONG AND SPONSORSHIP: AMATEUR FILMMAKING EXPERIMENTS WITH 16MM COLOR
FILM BASE ON THE FRONTLINES OF THE ITALIAN FASCIST PROJECT IN *IL FRIULI* (1963-1942)
Simona Schneider

This article unearths the material, experimental, and aesthetic factors that shaped the
anodyne-seeming amateur film Il Friuli, made in the eponymous eastern border region of
Italy over six crucial years leading up to WWII. It argues that the film bears traces of two
competing necessities, that of the film stock's provenance and that of its materiality. On
the one hand, the film reveals the "business" of taking an amateur image under centralized
political and corporate sponsorship by the Italian Fascist government with equipment from
the Nazi-sympathetic film stock company Agfa. On the other, it bears the marks of the local
and material stakes that shaped it—the aesthetic codification of landscape and folk, and
the experimentation of the new 16mm Agfacolor film stock. Drawing upon paratextual
propaganda materials including newspapers, and consumer and industry magazines, it ar-
gues that, while the film ostensibly celebrates a twinned victory of cinematic and industrial
progress in the service of nationalism and war, moments of material experimentation and
encounters with lyrical logics reveal the contradictions at the heart of the fascist narrative.

SPECTATOR THINK, SPECTATOR DO: DAVID BORDWELL AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF CONTEM-
PORARY FILM STUDIES
Adriano D'Aloia

The article analyzes David Bordwell's contribution to contemporary film studies, emphasizing
the importance of the viewer's active role in the perception and interpretation process of film.
Starting in the 1980s, Bordwell shifted the focus from psychoanalysis to cognitive sciences,
proposing an empirical analysis of cinematic narration that considers the mental dynamics
of viewers. To this end, he highlighted how the viewer is not merely a passive receiver, but
an active formulator of hypotheses and inferences. The discussion also includes critiques
and debates that occurred between Bordwell and other scholars, such as Dudley Andrew
and Warren Buckland, underscoring the tensions between analytical approaches and more
traditional theories. Additionally, it touches on the evolution of embodied cognition and
the link between neuroscience and cinematic experience, suggesting a continuous relevance
of Bordwell's thinking in the current context of film studies.

THE HOVERING PROFESSOR
Dario Tomasi

The article tries to define the role played by *Planet Hong Kong. Popular Cinema and the
Art of Entertainmen*t in David Bordwell's extensive bibliography, starting with the atten-

tion he always paid to popular cinema, on the one hand, and Far Eastern cinema, on the other. After defining the essential characteristics of the book (the focus on film analysis, the insistence on objective data, the non-academic tones, a certain closeness to the *politique des auteurs*, the placing of cinema as cinema at the center of all discourse), the article dwells on how *Planet Hong Kong* undoubtedly fostered a growth of academic interest in the cinema of the former British colony, posing a number of questions that will later be taken up and developed by others: the relationship between local and global, the connection between Hong Kong cinema and Hollywood production, the importance of the 'pause-burst-pause' model that structures the action sequences, becoming almost a paradigm of 'Chinese kinematics', the centrality that the actor's body assumes in it, and how all this is transformed into a sensorial experience with very particular characteristics.

CLASSICAL STYLES: A COMPARISON OF CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD CINEMA AND MODERN AAA VIDEO GAMES
Alessia Ianni-Palarchio, Fabrizio Matarese, Mauro Mola, Brando Ratti

The aim of this article is to conceptualize the term "Classic Video Game" by employing the methodology used by David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson to delineate the "Classical Hollywood Style." To conduct the research, several video games produced by Rockstar Games between 2000 and 2013 were analyzed using the categories outlined by Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson in the first part of *Classical Hollywood Cinema*: production, narrative, soundtrack, and advertising practices. The application of this method revealed numerous shared elements between classic Hollywood productions and certain AAA video games, allowing the category of "classic" to be applied not only in a temporal sense but also in a stylistic one. Furthermore, the research confirms that Bordwell's robust analytical framework can also be effectively applied to other forms of popular culture, even across different time periods.