

LA SOPRAVVIVENZA DELLE IMMAGINI AL CINEMA. ARCHIVIO, MONTAGGIO, INTERMEDIALITÀ, FRANCESCO ZUCCONI (2013)

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Giotto, Pontormo, Velazquez, Eizenstejn, Hitchcock, Rossellini, Godard, Pasolini, Herzog, Moretti: this short list could continue almost to infinity, backwards and forwards. Although it may appear a vertiginous combination, could there be a principle to provide it with a coherent framework? According to Francesco Zucconi's *La sopravvivenza delle immagini al cinema*.

Archivio, montaggio, intermedialità such unity of meaning could be found in the concept of 'archive'. Structured in a prologue and three parts, Zucconi's book is an attempt to question the health of the present audio-visual landscape, from both the production and the reception side. By simultaneously considering a film as object and subject of theoretical reflection and practical knowledge, Zucconi encounters a long thread of thought which intersects the twentieth century at multiple points. The aim is to outline a theory that rigorously springs from textual analysis, and is also provided with a political value: 'the archive, the memory of the seen and undergone images presses, frames and displays the formation of the present time and defines the forms of belief in it' (20).¹

The importance of the notion of archive has crossed several domains since it was proposed by Foucault in the late 1960s; in his book *The Right To Look* (2011) Nicolas Mirzoeff affirmed: 'one of the major implications of W. J. T. Mitchell's famous claim, in 1994, that visual materials of all kinds are as complex and significant as print culture is that the visual image is an archive in its own right' (XV). Yet how could the archive be defined in an audio-visual domain, constantly re-mediating images of the past? To this end, Zucconi proposes a challenging starting ground:

Archive is not to be classically intended as a storage of historical materials. Rather, it is the *discursive measure*, it is the stratification of the *forms of understanding* of the real which have expressed themselves, and continue to do so, perpetually updating, within social representations.

(27)

As theoretical and critical objects, certain films seem thus to deliberately address these forms of comprehension of the real in the semiotic terms of a social and cultural construct. By doing this, they intend to propose a diagnosis of the conditions of use, alongside contemporary audio-visual representations, of some figures belonging to the whole archive of the cultural forms: 'It is possible to suppose that any work – and some more than others – establishes a field of projection and instructs a critical – or at least problematic – rereading of the cultural archive within which it lies' (32). After this prologue, three analytical parts follow. The first, 'The audio-visual as a space of thought', focuses on some key theoretical issues and their treatment by both scholars and directors. Archive and the 'time-image', window and the frame, detail and the fragment compose the structure within which the book moves, while a complex path is appointed to set the epistemological conditions for the whole research. *Russkiy koocheg/Russian Ark* (Sokurov, 2002), *Un'ora solo ti vorrei/For One More Hour With You* (Marazzi, 2002), *Histoire(s) du cinema/(Hi)story(s) of cinema* (Godard, 1988/1998) are three of the chosen places where such questions emerge, finally opening to the idea of a deep interrelation between the figural work of the images – given by both figurative strategies and editing processes – and the cognitive and emotional work of the beholder.

The next section, 'Reproduction and montage: The life of images', exploits Deleuze's difference and repetition dichotomy to enquire how cinema can reflect (on) the world as it (re)produces it. The first part thus takes into account Van Sant's remaking of *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960). In *Psycho* (Van Sant, 1998), Zucconi argues, the idea of repetition is so literal that the beholder is forced to make a strict philological comparison as an extreme stage of a 'cross-reading

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

practice between the source and the target of the intertextual operation' (134) fostered by modern cinema. The idea of a critical dimension inherent in any remake (or, more generally, intermedial work) leads in the subsequent pages to an investigation of the other side of the dichotomy, that is to say, difference, in the attempt to discover opposite strategies developing similar aims. Following the notion of the composition of point of view, Zucconi focuses on Nanni Moretti and Werner Herzog as instances of directors on the scene. As 'figures of framework', they orient itineraries of meaning in a perpetual confrontation with an iconic archive, either external (Moretti) or internal (Herzog) to their own work. However, for both of them, the main point is the same: to provide a 'testimonial discourse which tries to exploit the reflexive component of the artistic discourse' (180).

The third section, 'Survival of the images', bends this testimonial discourse towards an explicit critical enquiry of two of the main topics within contemporary audio-visual systems: the image of power and the representation of suffering. Entirely focused on Italian cinema, this final part recalls a specific theoretical thread which has analysed the connections between cinema and politics, nowadays merged into the broad domains of aesthetics and critical theory. The first line of development investigates the figural strategies of the deconstruction of political power by *Vincere/To Win* (Bellocchio, 2009) and *Il caimano/The Caiman* (Moretti, 2006). These films, Zucconi believes, redefine the task of political cinema by editing or re-mediating archive materials, highlighting their double tension, since 'the representation is an occasion of exercising power, as well as a meeting place, a place of *negotiation* and the formation of a horizon of shared meaning' (190, original emphasis).

Crucifixion as an iconographic motif is, on the other hand, the theme that allows a reflection on images of suffering in contemporary media. While some recent traumatic events (e.g. the 2009 earthquake in L'Aquila) have been framed through a wide recourse of Christian narrative configurations and passional formulas, some films, such as *La ricotta/Curd Cheese* (Pasolini, 1963), *Salomé/Salomé* (Bene, 1972) and *Totò che visse due volte/Toto Who Lived Twice* (Cipri and Maresco, 1998), have proposed an anachronistic staging of Crucifixion, which questions its persistent effectiveness. These profanations thus aim to unmask the rhetorical strategies which, in a preliminary manner, frame the world through the representation to finally disclose an ethical and political value: 'it is only through the consciousness of the relationship which links aesthetics and politics that the *spectator* may rediscover herself or himself as a *citizen*' (236, original emphasis).

The most relevant point of the book is probably its interdisciplinarity. Theoretical domains are merged together starting from a solid understanding of their depth and extension; similarly, images merge boundaries and concur to give life to a vast audio-visual archive, constantly expanding through new technologies and devices demanding new skills from their users. Cinema, as a young-old media, could show effective forms of visual manipulation, asking for cooperation: 'the capability to edit and manipulate archives – in the name of figural matrix shared by the different representations – delineates an active role for the beholder as a condition for a renewed belief in the images and their sharing within the community space' (240). Overstepping the cinema/reality dichotomy, Zucconi outlines the role of visibility in the present time, pointing out how images could construct a shared real: a ground where Ethics and aesthetics can find a meeting point.

REFERENCE

Mirzoeff, N. (2011), *The Right To Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality*, Durham: Duke University Press.