Remediating Opera

Crossing and Encounters Between Film and Music Studies

edited by
Chiara Casarin and Laura Cesaro

e-ISSN 2785-0986 ISSN 2785-1613

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e-ISSN 2785-0986
ISSN 2785-1613
URL https://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/en/edizioni4/collane/the-future-contemporary-inquiries-into-the-visual-/

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Venezia
Edizioni Ca' Foscari - Venice University Press
2025

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Edizioni Ca' Foscari
Fondazione Università Ca' Foscari | Dorsoduro 3246 | 30123 Venezia
edizionicafoscari.unive.it | ecf@unive.it

1st edition October 2025
ISBN 978-88-6969-911-5 [ebook]

Cover design: Lorenzo Toso

Remediating Opera. Crossing and Encounters Between Film and Music Studies / edited by Chiara Casarin and Laura Cesaro — 1. ed. — Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2025. — viii + 149 p.; 25,5 cm. — (The Future Contemporary; 3).

URL http://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/it/edizioni/libri/978-88-6969-911-5/
DOI http://doi.org/10.30687/978-88-6969-911-5

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Abstract

This volume explores the intersection of moving images and music, analysing the fascinating remediation mechanisms between these two artistic languages. In particular, it embraces the approach to temporality featuring *The Future Contemporary* book series by offering a journey across different periods and artistic productions. The aim is to highlight the creative possibilities that emerge from the observation of recurring elements in cinema and music over time. Moving from cutting-edge archival research focused mainly on Italian cinema and opera, the essays gathered in this volume address various levels of remediation occurring across media, genres, and semantics. Together, they propose a novel perspective on the often-overlooked connections between these two fields of cultural and artistic production. Pairing texts from musicology and film studies, the rich reflection resulting from this book offers an innovative critical toolkit that looks back at historical opera and film productions to gain access to the roots of contemporary musical and cinematic representations.

Keywords Italian Cinema. Opera. Remediation. Intermediality. Cultural Heritage.

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Remediating Opera
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Introduction
Intermedia Opera: Lyric Traces in Italian Cinema

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A Remediation on Trial

In 1951, *Enrico Caruso, leggenda di una voce* was released in theatres, directed by Giacomo Gentilomo and starring Ermanno Randi for Asso Film. As the title suggests, the film is a celebratory biopic of the famous Italian tenor. On October 9, 1951, it received a censorship certificate with approval from the Commission, provided that "the close-up of the actress's leg in the dressing room is removed". The film was distributed in cinemas worldwide and immediately enjoyed great success with international audiences. However, Caruso's heirs reacted negatively, objecting to the portrayal as inaccurate and unauthorized.

The dispute between the family and the production company centered mainly on the depiction of the tenor's early environment, "the low social status and poverty of the environment in which Caruso grew up", his drunkenness at his debut in Trapani, a suicide attempt, and the narrative arc surrounding "Caruso's love for Stella, who later marries another man". According to Caruso's heirs, all these scenes amounted to "genuine offenses to the dignity and honor of the celebrated singer".

The film's production and distribution history reveal a structural tension between the demands of cultural legitimization and the logic of a spectacular remediation. Such legitimization appears as a consequence of the traumas following both the nation's formative years and the World War II. In the postwar period, cultural reconstruction was accompanied

The authors jointly discussed the contents of this introduction. However, the writing of the first paragraph is by Laura Cesaro, while the second is by Chiara Casarin.

Edizioni Ca'Foscari

The Future Contemporary 3
e-ISSN 2785-0986
ISBN [ebook] 978-88-6969-911-5

Check for updates

Open access
Submitted 2025-09-03 | Published 2025-10-22
© 2025 Casarin, Cesaro | 4.0
DOI 10.30687/978-88-6969-911-5/000

by a profound redefinition of collective identities, marked by the need to distance oneself from the ideological appropriation of art and media carried out by Fascism (Gundle 2013; Brunetta 1979). After years in which operatic spectacle and its performers had been instrumentalized as propaganda, there emerged an urgent need to assign new meanings to representation, questioning what it meant to depict reality and through which forms. This reflection particularly had a particular impact on cinema and literature, which became privileged arenas for experimenting with new expressive modes capable of restoring complexity, memory, and truth to a national identity that had been fragmented and wounded. It is within this broader horizon of cultural reconstruction and redefinition of collective identities that *Enrico Caruso, leggenda di una voce* must be situated. On the one hand, the film presents itself as a tribute to the Italian operatic tradition and to one of its most emblematic figures; on the other, it reinterprets that very tradition through the biopic format, resorting to a narrative and visual apparatus imbued with rhetoric.

In the film, opera – originally a complex, performative, and spectacular language – is re-coded and re-signified as an emotional repertoire, instrumental in constructing a process of symbolic investment and mediation. It is precisely out of this tension that the aim of the present volume takes shape: to explore how cinema and opera intersect, cross-fertilize, and rewrite each other, generating hybrid forms that move between homage and appropriation. From this angle, *Enrico Caruso, leggenda di una voce* offers a privileged vantage point from which to reflect on the processes of remediation between the two media, serving as a paradigmatic example of how the operatic tradition is absorbed, reshaped, and rearticulated by the cinematic dispositif within new frameworks of consumption, spectacle, and cultural legitimation.

In this framework, the film's remediation unfolds across at least three analytical levels, which we have conceptualized in our work. The three levels to which we refer, and which constitute the framework of this volume, can be summarized as follows. The first level concerns remediation between semantics, understood as the way in which opera's signification structures enter, modify, and determine cinematic products as citational devices, dramaturgical references, and cultural tools capable of (more or less) broadly recontextualizing cinema. The second level involves remediation between genres, which examines how the relationship between cinematic (biopic, Italian comedy, drama film, musical) and operatic (opera seria, opera buffa, melodrama, opéra-comique) genres influenced the inception and development of cultural processes related to both media. The third and final level concerns remediation as a site of intersection between medial languages belonging to different periods, contexts, and purposes, and how such crossings generate new forms of reception and rewriting. Considering the three-level theoretical and methodological framework here proposed, we now turn to the film *Caruso*, which exemplifies these levels.

First, *Enrico Caruso, leggenda di una voce* stands as an epitome of remediation through appropriation, where cinema absorbs and reformulates the codes of opera within a new narrative and cultural framework. The choice of Caruso as subject is not accidental: he was already the first great transnational media star, whose image and voice had been incessantly reworked through records, radio, the press, and photography. The biopic thus builds upon a preexisting icon, further amplifying his charismatic aura.

From this perspective, Ermanno Randi – an actor with a vocal quality softer and more popular than the norms of Italian opera – becomes the cinematic vehicle of a new phase in Caruso's divinization, making him accessible and even more appealing to a broad and global audience, while embodying a figure that was already, in itself, the product of earlier processes of remediation. At the same time, the film does not merely relaunch Caruso's icon but also participates in the construction of new star trajectories: alongside Gina Lollobrigida, already on the verge of establishing herself as a leading figure of Italian cinema, Randi finds in this role the turning point that transforms him from an emerging face into a genuine star. The overlap with the Caruso myth – impersonating the first great global singer and, at the same time, lending him a body and a more accessible voice – confers upon the actor an aura extending well beyond the single film, marking his definitive legitimization within the cinematic landscape of the period.

This choice involves a profound semantic transformation: the operatic voice – symbolizing a strong and codified cultural identity – is 'domesticated' and presented as an immediate emotional effect rather than as a high, ritualized, and layered form of performative expression. The biographical homage is thus converted into a process of simplification and rewriting, in which not only the chronology of Caruso's life is altered for narrative purposes, but the complexity of his artistic figure is reduced to (not only) a cinematic cliché: the natural genius, the man of the people who conquers the elite, the tragic fate of talent. This is a hierarchizing medial operation in which cinema does not merely integrate opera, but subordinates it to its language, rewriting it according to its logic of consumption and spectacularization.

This process has significant cultural consequences: the legal action taken by Caruso's heirs highlights how this remediation was not perceived as a neutral or celebratory gesture, but rather as a transgression of the symbolic boundaries of national identity. In the Italian cultural imagination of the time, Caruso's body and voice were part of a heritage to be protected; their reworking according to the logic of global spectacle was therefore perceived as a symbolic dispossession carried out by the culture industry. The friction between this local perception and the global logic of cinema reveals the ambivalent nature of remediation as a cultural practice. On the one hand, it enables the survival and dissemination of the opera and/or its protagonists through new media and new audiences; on the other, it raises questions of cultural authority, fidelity, and narrative control.

Enrico Caruso, leggenda di una voce, serves as a paradigmatic example not only of how cinema has remediated opera, but also of how this process takes on the contours of a profoundly political cultural act, in which tensions between center and periphery come into play, in this case, between cultural hegemony and identity-based resistance.

Bearing in mind the three-level scheme we are proposing, we proceed to the second level of remediation that can be identified in the film. It uses opera as a memorial tool, transforming arias and operatic performances into moments of emotional recollection rather than performative acts tied to a specific dramaturgical context. There is no simple evocation of opera in this context, but its reconfiguration as a language of memory, as living matter through which the viewer can access the myth of Caruso. Well-known arias, removed from their original dramatic framework, are presented as sound fragments capable of activating collective memory, recognizable, familiar,

and charged with an emotional intensity that transcends time. In this light, the film constructs Caruso as a posthumous star figure, a "hero of song" who continues to live on through his melodies, which are transmitted via cinema and sound reproduction.

However, this monumentalization is not abstract: it is rooted within a narrative that strongly emphasizes the return to origins, highlighting the protagonist's humble Southern background. The film highlights Caruso's connection to his family, as well as his childhood experiences in Naples, which shaped his artistic path, imbuing it with a meaning of both personal and collective redemption.

Caruso's legacy is not only that of the great tenor who conquered the world stage, but also that of the son of the people, emotionally and symbolically linked to his roots. The decontextualized lyrical fragments reconfigured throughout the film as universal symbols of passion, genius, and sacrifice construct a mythicized idea of Italianness and project it, like a matrix, onto the tenor's biography. This process of displacement compromises the historical integrity of the narrative while redefining opera's role in cultural memory, transforming it from a situated performative practice into a quotable repertoire. Operatic moments shift from being ephemeral events to becoming spectacularized monuments. As a result, opera loses its performative and ritual dimension as a "school of emotions" and takes on the form of an accessible, immediate, consumable "emotional archive," based on memorable vocal moments rather than dramaturgical and textual complexity.[1]

In this interplay between celebration and humanization, between international icon and local roots, opera assumes a complex memorial function. It does not merely honor an artist; instead, it presents him as a familiar and emotionally accessible figure to the public.

Notably, the film's concluding episode, set in Trapani, features the performance of *Andrea Chénier* by Umberto Giordano – one of the most cherished operas in Caruso's repertoire. The staging, as reconstructed in the film, mirrors the opera's premiere at La Scala in Milan in 1896, as if to replicate – on a smaller scale but with no less solemnity – that founding moment of modern Italian operatic history. This choice is no coincidence: through this reenactment, the film symbolically inscribes Caruso within the national operatic canon, linking him not only to international success but also to the institutional heart of Italian opera culture.

Thus, cinema acts as a mediator of a simplified operatic memory, revisiting the past through the narrative and aesthetic lenses of the present. This confirms cinema's tendency, as a form of remediation, to rewrite the history of opera according to principles of visibility and recognizability. This process operates according to a dual logic: on the one hand, it contributes to the transgenerational transmission of opera, promoting its cultural survival; on the other, it leads to its decontextualization, fixing its meanings within a stereotyped and mythologized imaginary. It is within this tension between memory and reinvention, fidelity and anachronism, that opera's role as a cultural device across time unfolds: not as a fleeting, situated experience, but as a layered and remediated memory, subject to continual negotiation among various media, epochs, and representational codes.

1 On the concept of opera as a "school of feelings", cf. Bianconi 2003.

Third and final level. We can view *Enrico Caruso, leggenda di una voce*, as an early example of the intermedial persistence of opera, one of the many afterlives through which musical melodrama traverses epochs, languages, and devices, continually taking on new forms to endure over time. Indeed, the persistence of opera rests on a paradoxical dynamic: to survive, it is often compelled to transform, to translate itself – sometimes even to betray itself – in order to adapt to new audiences and new media.

This approach is accompanied by a highly evocative and celebratory iconographic construction, populated by idealized representations of the masters of Italian opera, even at the cost of historical inaccuracies. For instance, the film includes singing teachers and critics whom Caruso likely never met in the contexts portrayed, introduced not for biographical accuracy but to symbolically legitimize the protagonist's ascent into the national operatic *pantheon*. The presence of the Leoncavallo character, who in fact played an important role in the tenor's career, as well as the use of a large portrait of Verdi in one scene, creates a constellation of legendary figures that places Caruso within a mythical and institutional genealogy of Italian opera, rather than within a faithful chronicle of his life.

This process involves both simplification and reactivation: on the one hand, opera is stripped of its complex structure and theatrical context; on the other hand, it survives and is renewed through the language of cinema, making it accessible to a broader and culturally heterogeneous audience. The film does not merely represent opera: it reinvents it as a narrative and affective device (level 1), endowing it with a new audiovisual "truth" (level 2), and placing it within a media ecosystem in which it can continue to exert its evocative power (level 3). In this regard, the film's remediation should be understood not merely as an adaptation, but as a cultural act of considerable significance, one that opens up new avenues for interpretation and reception. The three interpretative levels identified serve as a compass for navigating this complex social and cultural phenomenon.

Remediation as a 'Critical Machine'

The idea of remediation as an intermedial practice unifies the three key points illustrated by the case of *Enrico Caruso, leggenda di una voce*. Remediation involves more than simply transferring content from one medium to another; it fundamentally renegotiates aesthetic forms, conditions of reception, and the form of meaning construction. The theory proposed by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999), in defining remediation as "the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media," underscores the dialectical nature of every process of transcoding examined here. On the one hand, there is a notable drive toward immediacy, which aims to erase traces of previous mediation; on the other hand, there is a push toward hypermediacy, which emphasizes the apparatus and multiplies layers of representation. When examining the relationship between cinema and opera, the double logic of remediation – as defined by the two authors – becomes even more complex, as it concerns two highly stratified performative systems that are historicized and possess their own grammar, temporality, and audience relationships.

In the case of opera, the transition to cinema does not merely represent a transposition; rather, it entails a reconfiguration and re-signification of its essential components: the voice, the body, the (visual) space and time of

performance, the ritual and collective dimension, and the musical and aural element in all their complexity. This reconfiguration, based on mechanisms of montage, condensation, and selective exposure, unfolds on multiple levels. On the one hand, remediation affects the visual dimension by enhancing the visibility of the performance, emphasizing facial expressions (and expressiveness), the intimacy of gesture, and the emotional modulation of the voice through the proximity of the shot, thereby transforming stage spatiality into diegesis. On the other hand, remediation extends beyond the visual dimension, involving both the sonic level – when opera becomes an integral part of the soundtrack – and the dramaturgical one, influencing the articulation of narrative through reference to opera as archetype. In this way, within this complex intertwining of vision and sound, diegesis and drama, remediation generates new meanings by quoting, reflecting, and reinventing opera, yet always according to a logic of medial rearticulation that redefines its function and reorients its affective, symbolic, and political potential.

To grasp this dynamic, we can also consider the concepts of cultural memory (Assmann 2011) and intermedial afterlife (Erll 2011) alongside that of remediation, as they illuminate how cinema does not merely represent opera but reactivates it, each cinematic appearance enacting a new form of survival. Every remediation of opera can be viewed as a memorial act, in which the past is summoned into the present through selection, deformation, and relocation. Cinema not only stages opera but also actively shapes its intermedial survival, hybridizing memory, body, voice, and space to create new meanings. However, this survival never occurs neutrally: aesthetic, productive, and ideological forces always influence it. Intermedial translation never proceeds innocently; it involves omitting, cutting, selecting, and thus exercising power.

From this perspective, remediation can be understood as a "critical machine" that uncovers the hidden tensions between media and makes visible their historical interrelations. Italian cinema, in particular, has engaged with opera since its inception in ways that reflect the country's cultural transformations: from constructing national identity to contesting established canons, to experimenting with digital adaptations in response to recent crises, such as the pandemic. Throughout these moments, the remediation of opera has served as a strategy to interrogate tradition: to 'use' it, to pay homage to it, to betray it, to rewrite it. In this sense, cinema emerges not just as a hosting medium but also as a site of cultural negotiation, where opera is manipulated – at times deconstructed and then reassembled – becoming, at various times, a nostalgic object, a malleable material, or a field of reinvention.

It is this hybrid, unstable, and productive nature of remediation that the volume seeks to emphasize: not merely as an object of formal analysis, but as a critical category for understanding the complex relationships between media, tradition, and cultural transformation. The collected essays demonstrate that remediation is not just a technical device; rather, it embodies a spectrum of aesthetic, historical, and ideological forces, where the potential for non-linear, open, and differential cultural transmission is at stake. Moreover, the essays collected in this volume demonstrate how Bolter and Grusin's broadly defined concept can generate a kaleidoscopic variety of meanings. Opera does not survive unchanged in its transition to cinema: it survives by transforming. Through this metamorphosis, opera reveals its cultural resilience, its ability to question the present and continue to present itself as a living form, a receptive body, and a gesture to be reinvented.

The structure of this volume itself recalls, by analogy, that of the operatic form, unfolding across three "thematic acts", each dedicated to a fundamental conceptual axis: homage and appropriation, displaced cultural memory, and the transformative survival of opera. These acts are punctuated by dialogic intervals that mark the rhythm of reading and vary its tone. Each section features a dialogue among critical voices from different but complementary disciplinary fields. On the one hand, film studies focus on the materiality of the image, the devices used, and the forms of audiovisual narration; on the other hand, musicology reflects on history and the reception of opera. This dialogue – at times harmonious, at others dissonant – has been deliberately sought out to highlight the frictions and resonances that emerge from the relationship between cinema and opera.

The transitions between sections are framed by interviews that function as interludes, scene changes, or orchestral refrains. These are moments of suspension and reflection, in which the voices of scholars and professionals – Roberto Chiesi, Michal Grover-Friedlander, and Vincenzo Borghetti – guide the reader beyond the linearity of 'traditional' essays into a more dynamic experience, shaped by intuition and openness. A brief musicological contribution by Roberto Calabretto, along with a conclusion by Miriam De Rosa and Vincenzina Caterina Ottomano, completes the narrative arc of the volume, revisiting, transforming, and projecting forward the main themes.

In this deliberately asymmetrical and layered polyphonic structure, the volume not only provides an analytical exploration of remediation but also puts its principles into practice, becoming a hybrid device, a space of contamination and listening. Like an opera, the variety of registers – narrative, theoretical, dialogical – does not aim for uniformity, but rather for a productive tension between different languages. Remediation is not just the subject of study here: it is the internal logic that informs the volume's structure and invites the reader to follow its course.

The volume organizes its contributions around the themes of homage and appropriation, the temporal displacement of operatic memory, and the transformative survival of opera in new media environments. The collected essays aim to provide a plural and interdisciplinary reflection on how Italian cinema – through various forms, languages, and devices – has remediated opera, not merely as a repertoire to be cited or reinterpreted, but as a performative and symbolic space to be redefined.

Building on this conceptual structure, the first part of the volume explores the relationship between cinema and opera, focusing on the productive tension between fidelity and rewriting. It examines how cinema appropriates the operatic repertoire to construct new narratives and create distinctive images. Elena Mosconi's analysis of Italian biopics from the 1940s and 1950s reveals how the cinematic portrayal of opera singers contributes to the canonization of an idealized image of the performer through visual and narrative strategies that merge melodrama with national celebration. Chiara Casarin, in her study of the theater scene in *Il Marchese del Grillo*, explores the boundaries of remediation, questioning the implications of using an opera composed *ad hoc* in Monicelli's film to mimic a specific musical genre and thus reactivate its cultural connotations. In both cases, opera is not merely evoked or represented, but it is actively refunctionalized, illuminating the cultural and political logics that shape its remediation.

The second part of the volume shifts the focus to memory and cultural displacement, exploring the remediation of opera as a practice of rewriting the past. Giorgio Biancorosso analyses the recreation of operatic performances – understood as moments of reflection on cinema's performative potential – in selected films by Luchino Visconti and Bernardo Bertolucci. He examines the dialectic between representation and ritual, redefining the concept of 'performance'. Laura Cesaro reflects on the coexistence of operatic traces and representations of labor in Italian industrial cinema, demonstrating how opera can provide a sonic and symbolic counterpoint to collective experience, reconfiguring the factory space as an alternative site of memory.

The third part of the volume addresses the survival and metamorphosis of opera in the contemporary context, specifically focusing on instances where remediation manifests as a creative translation. Matteo Giuggioli uses Bertolucci's *Strategia del ragno* as a case study to analyze operatic remediation from a cinematic perspective. He observes how cinema evokes and incorporates opera, making it an integral part of its own narrative. Lorenzo Rossi examines Mario Martone's theater-film trilogy, produced during the height of the pandemic. He reflects on how opera, which was forced to close and rethink its practices, finds a new medium in cinema to redefine its forms, spatiality, and ways of being received. The media transformations brought about by the health crisis present an opportunity for opera to develop new strategies for survival, which include filmed theater, virtual stages, and innovative scenographic approaches. Since cinema has remediated opera by appropriating and transforming it, we can now conceive opera as an active subject in new intermedial practices. This shift allows opera not only to survive but also to create new audiovisual, performative, and theoretical forms independently.

This volume emerges from the study of documents in the *Fondo Censura cinematografica*, undertaken within the framework of the PNRR CHANGES project (*Cultural Heritage Active Innovation for Next-Gen Sustainable Society*). We gratefully acknowledge all the contributing authors, whose research offers valuable insights and substantially enriches the field. We also thank the editorial team at Edizioni Ca' Foscari and our supervisors, Miriam De Rosa and Vincenzina Caterina Ottomano, for their support throughout the development of this work.

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Cinema vs Opera:
Between Homage and Appropriation

Remediating Opera
Crossing and Encounters Between Film and Music Studies
edited by Chiara Casarin and Laura Cesaro

Vissi d'arte. Opera Singers in Italian Biopics of the 1940s and 1950s

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Abstract This essay gives an overview of the Italian opera singer's biography in its earliest formulation, starting with the advent of sound, and continuing, uninterrupted, until the 1950s. The author recognises a crucial moment in these years. She analyses it through three films dedicated to opera singers made in Italy in the 1940s and 1950s: *Maria Malibran* (Guido Brignone, 1943), *Enrico Caruso leggenda di una voce* (Giacomo Gentilomo, 1951) and *La donna più bella del mondo* (Robert Z. Leonard, 1955).

Keywords Biopic. Singer. Stardom. Metagenre. Maria Malibran.

Summary 1 Not Just Opera Films. – 2 The Biographical Impulse. – 3 A Flash, a Dream, a Game.

1 Not Just Opera Films

The volume of studies that, particularly in recent years, have addressed the relationship between cinema and opera has significantly enriched the interdisciplinary debate between musicologists and film scholars through a plurality of approaches from which "no one model has emerged, largely because of the variety of the filmic styles and the operas chosen for cinematic treatment" (Citron 2014, 46).[1]

Less attention has been paid to the singers, who are tasked with materially presenting the representation of the opera (or excerpts from it) on screen, and not just in the soundtrack or as an indirect reference, mediated by recorded voice, as it is the case in reproductions of operatic records.

Certainly, the first issue posed by the opera singer is that of cinematic technology, which, unlike theatre, undermines the unity of their presence

The translation of the essay was edited by Miriam De Rosa (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia).

1 Citron's essay also draws from a rich literature devoted to this topic.

Edizioni Ca'Foscari
The Future Contemporary 3
e-ISSN 2785-0986
ISBN [ebook] 978-88-6969-911-5
Peer review | Open access
Submitted 2025-01-08 | Accepted 2025-01-21 | Published 2025-10-22
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DOI 10.30687/978-88-6969-911-5/001

on screen, encompassing both the physical dimension and vocal emission, due to the split between the visual and acoustic components that mechanical recording imposes on the performer. This is an unavoidable aspect, linked to the nature of the medium which, as Rick Altman observed, after the introduction of sound, makes the actor's vocal emission similar to that of a ventriloquist, since the sound does not coincide with their lips but comes from another source, namely the speakers (Altman 1980, 67-79).[2] On the other hand, filming an opera singer undoubtedly poses concrete problems.

> close-up pictures of an opera singer hitting a note at a high volume often are unattractive. The face shows the actual strain in sending a note to the second balcony; the mouth is twisted out of shape to accommodate the vowel being produced. If the singer 'mouths' to a playback of a recording made before filming to avoid the strain and facial distortion, movie audiences may be able to detect that he is not really singing. (Parker 1980, 372-3)

There are also more contingent reasons, related to the cultural status of opera in specific cultures and historical periods: from its origins, cinema has drawn on opera as an elevated cultural horizon from which to derive benefits such as greater respectability or, alternatively, a repertoire of dramaturgical and emotional structures to draw inspiration from, making the works' titles more relevant than their performers.

A further factor is the difficulty of analysing the opera singer's performance on screen: in addition to the issues related to cinematic acting, frequently highlighted by several research,[3] there are those related to the analysis of vocal aspects, which have only recently begun to receive attention (O'Rawe 2017, 157-72). In this regard, the use of various dubbing and synchronisation practices certainly makes it very complex to identify convincing approaches. To open this field of study, it appears necessary to start by focusing on the consistency of a phenomenon that remains elusive, even from a historical-critical point of view. Whilst David L. Parker provides an overview of the ways opera singers have been employed in musical cinema with an international perspective (Parker 1980, 370-86), in Italy, valuable sources include the cataloguing and classification work carried out by Gianfranco Casadio (1995), as well as a number of monographic studies on individual singers. Together, they identify a phenomenon particularly apparent in the 1930s-1950s, thanks to singers such as Gino Bechi, Maria Caniglia, Beniamino Gigli, Tito Gobbi, Tito Schipa, and Ferruccio Tagliavini. Much work remains however to be done.

Exploring how singers are employed in films with an operatic setting – and not just in opera films –[4] as singer-actors, as voices, or, more rarely, as

2 In a wider theoretical field, ventriloquism has been addressed by Steven Connor who investigates all forms of ventriloquism – from the ancient oracles to the present day – as forms of illusion and magic related to voices without a source, or to dissociated or displaced voices (see Connor 2000). Today's uses of digital technology have greatly emphasized this tendency, leading to a 'technovocalic body' as the result of the most varied intersections and combinations between a (supposed) body and a voice that is 'adapted' to it (see Baron, Fleeger, Wong Lerner 2021).

3 A summary of this is available in Robertson Wojcik 2004,1-13.

4 I am adopting the definition 'film with an operatic setting' because I suggest that broadening the perspective in comparison to the sole 'opera film' in the frame of a more accurate study of the phenomenon. On this please refer to Mosconi 2018, 787-93.

actor-singers (Noto 2015),[5] allows us to focus on linguistic and symbolic issues. On a formal level, through the roles assigned to singers, it is possible to grasp the processes of formation and articulation of cinematic genres between the fascist period and the post-war era, between continuity and transformation, but also, in the dramaturgical construction of musical sequences, it is possible to retrieve the ways in which opera and its culture are remediated for broad audiences.[6] On a sociocultural level, it is possible to delve into both the star status of singers in cinema (and in the cultural industry as a whole),[7] and the values associated with their image.[8]

In the following pages, attention will be focused on the biopic in highbrow music, before examining the biographical films on Italian opera singers made in the 1940s and 1950s, in an attempt to demonstrate – albeit briefly – the importance of their study.

2 The Biographical Impulse

From the early years, one of the most cultivated areas of cinema with an operatic setting has been the biographical film dedicated to figures of composers and, more rarely, singers. This is a trend that fits within a broader interest in the lives of illustrious individuals, universally known and consecrated to fame due to exceptional characteristics, which has fuelled a significant portion of cinematic production across all times and cultures.

From this perspective, cinema contributes to the process of 'biographisation,' enacted by the arts and humanities in modern society (Moulin 2016, 2), that is, to promoting "this personalised mode of history-telling" that "connects cinema to nineteenth-century models, relying on linearity and an accumulation of facts to provide a strong logical thread and sense of progress" (Vidal 2014, 5).

Given the variety of articulations of the biopic, it is more appropriate to speak of a 'metagenre' (15)[9] as a narrative device that, in staging a significant figure from the past, interrogates the ways in which this same figure can be told, as well as their presence in the public discourse of the period in which the film is made, and the need to revive their collective memory.

The biopic's attitude towards the lives of those who are elevated to protagonists is, with some exceptions typical of contemporaneity, celebratory: precisely because they are the centre of the representation, any character is already 'absolved' before entering the scene, and even the worst actions, failure, misunderstanding, and possible decline are always presented in terms of a challenge, a struggle to overcome their inner contradictions and weaknesses.

5 Among the actors performing as singers is also Gina Lollobrigida, as I will discuss in § 3.

6 Whilst it is not specifically applicable to the Italian context, William Everett's analysis is particularly interesting (2019, 271-96).

7 Besides the study by Paolo Noto (2015), please refer to Di Chiara, Noto 2020, 15-37; 2019, 525-36.

8 An example is provided in Mosconi 2012, 197-212; see also Fleeger 2017, 31-46.

9 Vidal works especially on contemporary biopic, but I suggest that her claim may be applicable to the film I discuss in this text.

In other words, no life recounted – except for some villainous characters, and surely not for artists – leaves the audience distrustful or indifferent; on the contrary, the narrative is constructed to allow the audience to feel a certain degree of empathy with the protagonists. Moreover, in the case of films about musicians and singers, despite the great variety of ways in which the subjects are portrayed, a characteristic they share is that the biopic never questions the status and value of the character it refers to. The canonisation of the artist (and their works) is preconceived and incontrovertible fact: the very fact that the film is produced – that is, that it has found funding for its realisation – only attests to the collective interest in the represented character and, at the same time, further consecrates them, imposing them on the attention of the widest possible audience, also through international agreements aimed at exporting the film.

Moreover, in the case of artists, cultural memory is exercised, alongside their figures, on the works they have left behind, creating a triangulation between authors, works of art, as well as historical and contemporary reception contexts. This is a sort of intersection between biopic and *heritage movie*, another formula widely present in the debate of the last twenty years to indicate films that engage with a cultural heritage capable of negotiating forms of socially shared cultural identity.[10] In the case of composers, the cultural heritage consists of the body of music they have created: the biopic cannot but openly recall them, even if in a synthetic form and, with regard to those generally best known, sometimes accompanied by reading cues (for example, the title of the score or the indication of the opera's poster) for the less cultured audiences. As John Tibbett observes, these are films that "appropriate the classical canon of 'great lives' and 'great works'; strip away some of its elitist posturings, and commodify and market it to a mass audience" (2005, 12). The lives and images of composers are

> modified and reconfigured into recognisable and accessible individuals who redirected and consolidated the antinomies of their genius – possessed and possessor – into the service of the social welfare and cultural aspirations of the community at large. (12)[11]

Musical biopic and *heritage movie* share a tension towards the *middlebrow* (Faulkner 2016), that is, a range of films suitable for a middlebrow audience, who want to be gratified rather than provoked or instructed, and who approach classical music and opera through the 'classical greatest hits.' These are always present in the more classical musical biopic, which can be traced back to the 1930s-1960s. From a narrative perspective, the genre is predominantly focused – as Guglielmo Pescatore recalls – on a contrast "between the social and artistic sphere – the spectacle – and the individual sphere – feelings. The genius must necessarily pay a high price for their art" (Pescatore 2001, 21.[12]

10 On heritage movie in its original formulation and further variations (i.e. post-heritage, alternative heritage, film patrimonial), please see at least Higson 2003; Beylot, Moine 2009; Monk 2011.

11 The traits featuring biopics dealing with classical composers are presented in Tibbett 2015, 20-1.

12 Unless otherwise stated, all translation are by Miriam De Rosa.

However, while the film about composers highlights the creative moment in which the artist's genius manifests itself – a genius destined to be inevitably crowned by the public – the one about singers focuses on the performative aspects. In this case, the heritage that is negotiated and reinforced relies on the voice, on memorable performances that have imprinted themselves on the collective imagination thanks to the role of the media as mediators of memories (recordings, radio recordings, films) (Garde-Hansen 2011), too. Moreover, in the singer's biopic, one of the elements of greatest interest lies in the interpreter's ability to convincingly embody a star, both through acting and – in a smaller number of cases where the interpreter ventures to sing – through vocal performance (Powrie 2025, 235-41; Fife Donaldson 2014, 103-17). As we shall see, the historical distance between the figure of the singer and their cinematic 'canonisation' facilitates the task of their representation on screen: if the interpreter's figure is little known to the audience's memory, the task for the interpreters is simpler; conversely, in the recent proliferation of biopics about contemporary music scene singers, the resemblance between the actor and the singer is a fundamental condition to activate the audience's belief. In effect, one of the aspects most appreciated by the audience lies in the star's ability to bring another star (who preceded them) (Kennedy-Karpat 2019, 395-414) back to life. This explains the increasing number of contemporary biopics about singers who replace the classical music composers of the previous period, especially if we also consider that many of them combine the dual characteristic of singer and author.

In this sense, the singer's biopic always tells the process of star construction, too, from the first performances to fame, paying attention to their value and the elements that determine it. As Marcia Landy observes,

> the narratives of stardom embed a number of elements that comprise the star as a powerful cultural commodity. The material and historical conditions of their production are inherent to star narratives, both biographical and cinematic, textual and extra-textual. The economy of stardom is never completely effaced. In its operations, it exposes how the commodity is produced, how it circulates, and how it rises and falls in value according to its moment in time. The biographical and cinematic texts of and with stars expose the intervention of entrepreneurs, agents, managers, and patrons in directing the career of the performer both in the narratives of discovery and in subsequent shaping of the trajectory of the star's career. (Landy 2004, 213)

Considering these premises, we can now outline an overview of the Italian singer's biopic in its first formulation, which moves from the advent of sound and continues, without interruption, into the 1950s.

3 A Flash, a Dream, a Game

Alongside the numerous biographies of composers, there are three films dedicated to opera singers made in Italy in the 1940s and 1950s:[13] it is a small number compared to the biographies of composers that follow with greater regularity in the same period, aimed at celebrating the primacy of Italian musicians.

The first is *Maria Malibran*, directed by Guido Brignone and released in February 1943. It stars Maria Cebotari, a Romanian soprano active in Germany and Austria, who appeared in a number of films with an operatic setting made between Italy and Germany, often directed by Carmine Gallone and scripted by Thea von Harbou. Whilst the singer's notoriety in the Axis countries is a prerequisite for the exploitation of the film in German-speaking markets,[14] Brignone's film nevertheless represents for Maria Cebotari the final act of a cinematic career destined to give way, after the end of the conflict, to a brief concert season ending with her death in 1949. As for Maria Malibran (1808-1836), a Franco-Belgian singer of Spanish origin, married in America and active in Italian and European theatres, her memory is still alive almost a century later. *La Lettura* recalls her as follows:

> An exceptional artistic temperament, a fervent intelligence, a nature overflowing with vitality, whose manifestations shake and impress like the violent and sudden light of a firework: such was Malibran. [...] A singer who spoke five languages, who drew and embroidered, who was skilled and talented in fencing, swimming, and horse riding; who knew how to play and compose romances. (Cametti 1921, 907)[15]

Precisely the difference between the character of the "generous and ardent nineteenth-century heroine" and that of the "graceful and intelligent Cebotari"[16] is considered by critics to be one of the film's weakest points. Not even the body and voice of the singer, the former of which is given numerous close-ups, especially in performative moments, and her undoubted acting competence, manage to make the film more vivid. This remains rather descriptive, and aims more at recreating an environment and a figure than at deeply understanding the personality and main features of the protagonist. Maria Malibran in the film appears caught between male figures who overshadow her: on the emotional level, between the dissolute and violent husband Eugène Malibran and the protective violinist Charles Auguste de Bériot; on the professional level, between the wise and facetious Gioacchino Rossini and the restless (and enamoured) Vincenzo Bellini.[17]

13 On Italian musical biopic, with a specific focus on the relationships between sources and musical sequences, please refer to Renata Scognamiglio 2011, 65-75. I would like to thank Alfonso Venturini for having granted me access to rare materials devoted to Maria Malibran

14 "Indiscrezioni dell'obiettivo cinematografico". *Corriere della Sera*, 1942, 14-15, 3. There is no news regarding the German distribution of the film.

15 More on the singer here: Giazotto 1986; Girardi 2012, 31-50. See also Leonardi 2022.

16 Maria Malibran "has resurrected in a calmer, tamed, poisonless, cruelty free version, one without the fool burst that characterised her real life" (Calcagno 1943, transl. by M. De Rosa).

17 In his review of the film Raul Radice writes that composers Bellini and Rossini "behave more roughly [than in previous films], appearing nearly too free from historical circumstances or from the chronicle of the time". "Rassegna cinematografica", *Corriere della Sera*, 7 febbraio 1943, 2.

It is no coincidence that – forcing historical truth – the singer feels very close to the latter, and her death occurs (almost) on stage, after singing the famous final aria from *La sonnambula, Ah, non credea mirarti* in a visibly altered state.[18]

In this way, Maria Malibran (with her interpreter Maria Cebotari) builds a sort of bridge between two phases of opera history expressed through the reference to two composers, Rossini and Bellini, to whom national cinema has paid a specific attention: both with the film *Rossini* (1942) starring Nino Besozzi and directed by Mario Bonnard, and with *Casta diva* (1935) by Carmine Gallone, focused on the youth of the Catania-born musician (played by Sandro Palmieri) and the origin of the famous aria from *Norma*.[19] This path is made apparent by the series of pieces sung by the protagonist: from the *cavatina* of Semiramide *Bel raggio lusinghier*, from the ninth scene of the first act of the eponymous opera, to the final *rondo* of *Cenerentola (Non più mesta accanto al fuoco)*, then hinting at the famous *Casta diva* and reprising, twice, the final aria of Amina, in *La sonnambula, Ah, non credea mirarti*. The film's music is also drawn from the repertoire of Rossini and Bellini, adapted by Renzo Rossellini. The film serves as a vehicle for the transmission of Italian musical genius and culture to the world, through a cosmopolitan and unsurpassed prima donna like Maria Malibran.

In October 1951, thirty years after the singer's death, *Enrico Caruso leggenda di una voce* was released, directed by Giacomo Gentilomo: as the title suggests, it is a fictionalised biography, indebted to Frank Thiess' volume (1942),[20] which recalls in anecdotal form Caruso's childhood and youth until 1896, the year of the Sicilian tour that marked the beginning of his great fame. The film highlights the Neapolitan setting, in which the singer's personality is defined by the poverty suffered in the childhood years, the first singing experiences, the encounters with singing teachers, impresarios, and influential people destined to eventually direct his career. The narrative emphasises melodramatic aspects, blending the director's taste with the characteristics of Neapolitan and operatic films, as it is had already been shown in *O sole mio* (Giacomo Gentilomo, 1946).[21] In particular, whilst the male characters have the task of either favouring or hindering Caruso on a professional level, the female ones act in the emotional area, becoming vehicles for deeper motivations. The mother Anna, played by the Hungarian-born actress and singer Mária Tasnády, is the one who intuitively recognise her son's talents early on, encourages him to sing, and in return receives deep and religious veneration. The film lingers on her illness and death: sick and exhausted, Anna prays her fifteen-year-old son to go to church to sing for the Corpus Domini service during which, in a sort of mystical communion with him, she draws her last breath, while Enrico's distant singing distinctly plays on. Later, her spirit appears to her son to

18 [Guglielmina Setti], "Le prime dello schermo. Maria Malibran". *Il Lavoro*, 7 febbraio 1943, 3.

19 See Bono 2004; Sala 2024 (see in particular the contributions by Graziella Seminara (88-107) and Giuliano Danieli (110-35).

20 The book was published several times in Germany and in 1946 was followed by the volume *Caruso in Sorrent* (Hamburg: Hamburger Buchring). In Italy the book was instead published just twice, with the second edition following the film and being retitled *La leggenda d'una voce* in 1952 (Roma: Casa Editrice Mediterranea).

21 Please see De Giusti 2008 for a portrait of the director; on the film, see Noto 2011, 86-7.

comfort him at difficult times, while her portrait is shown several times and at length like a sacred effigy.

The other female presence in the film is young Stella's, played by Gina Lollobrigida, erected as a symbol of the singer's first romantic infatuations. Their friendship strengthens over several fleeting encounters, but the age difference and social condition prevent the birth of a romantic relationship, despite mutual attraction. In the end, renouncing to an adulterous relationship – as Stella is married to a wealthy Sicilian baron – becomes the indispensable condition for Caruso's success.[22] Through the encounters between Stella and Enrico, Gentilomo articulates a visual discourse in three movements, simple but effective, on the power of singing. In the first, young Enrico sings *Voce 'e notte* (by Ernesto De Curtis and Eduardo Nicolardi) and the girl, moved, at the end of the song kisses him on the lips. The second contact occurs during an audition at the Teatro San Carlo: Stella sneaks into the boxes and captures the pathos that the tenor puts into interpreting *Vesti la giubba*. The words of Canio, the protagonist of *Pagliacci* who is aware of his beloved's betrayal, also express Caruso's nostalgia for the woman he will never possess, while the camera lingers on the actress' face, validating this parallelism. The gaze of the two lovers never meets, yet the song effectively mediates their relationship: Caruso's voice, charged with a "performative power" (Beghelli 2005, 826; transl. by M. De Rosa), expresses their pain. At the definitive moment of farewell, Stella reveals to Caruso the power of his voice: "It is she who commands. Your voice does not belong to you, you belong to her", and assures him that as long as he will sing, she will always feel united with him. On Stella's face is imprinted the echo of Caruso's song.

Parallel to the sentimental story, on the professional side the film also presents a journey of vocal education. Caruso is the street urchin who struggles to achieve success, and follows a trajectory that moves from children's choirs in which he sings as a contralto, through several performances as a street singer and lessons with various teachers, up to the stabilisation of his vocal register between tenor and baritone, and the performances in theatres. Even in this case, he must surrender to the lack of unity of body and voice: not only is the character of Caruso played by two different actors, in the part of the child singer (Maurizio Di Nardo) and then the adult (Ermanno Randi), but his singing voice does not belong to him, as it is replaced by that of Gina Lollobrigida for the contralto parts and by Mario Del Monaco for the tenor parts. The incompleteness of Caruso's biographical journey proposed by the film, which stops at the threshold of maturity and fame rather than proposing a 'cradle-to-grave' development, seems to highlight this double lack of fulfilment and integrity both on the emotional and vocal level.[23]

Four years later, Gina Lollobrigida returns as the protagonist of Robert Z. Leonard's film *Beautiful But Dangerous* – original title: *La donna più bella del mondo (Lina Cavalieri)* –, a free biographical evocation of the famous Belle

22 Stella's farewell to Enrico unfolds through the following declaration: "Only tonight I understood that I love you, and have always loved you. I will never be happy, and I will feel alone, because this is the last time we are going to see each other, Rico. We will never meet again. But your mother will always be at your side" (Transl. by M. De Rosa).

23 In the same year another biopic on Caruso is released in the United States, *The Great Caruso* (*Il grande Caruso*), directed by Richard Thorpe, produced by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and starring the Italo-American Mario Lanza (see Landy 2004, 213-27; Mosconi 2011, 36-45).

Époque Italian singer,[24] in which the actress also performs the role of singer, thus mending the fracture between star body and voice of the previous film.[25] This work is promoted by Maleno Malenotti, already screenwriter of *Enrico Caruso, leggenda di una voce*, serving now as producer and author of the subject: in evoking Lina Cavalieri's career as a singer and international diva, the film operates an overlap with the actress Lollobrigida, so as to consecrate both. From the very outset, the character of Lina Cavalieri is presented as a symbol of beauty, at times through rather explicit metaphors. This is the case of a sequence set at the Théâtre des Folies-Plastiques, where Gina/Lina is the protagonist of a musical fantasy entitled 'The Most Beautiful Woman in the World' interpreting the archetype of beauty of all times: as a caption explains for less cultured audiences, the scenes range from an evocation of *The Birth of Venus*, explicitly inspired by Botticelli's painting,[26] to *Cleopatra, Beauty of the Ancient World*, and finally to the coronation of *Lina Cavalieri, Beauty of the Modern World*.

In the transition from a young actress in Roman variety shows to a star of Parisian theatres, the protagonist becomes increasingly determined and aware of her seductive power, which drives her to seek to attract the gaze of others, if necessary, by displaying her body. In a key scene that takes place during a duel to which she has been challenged by her rival Manolita, Lina Cavalieri/Gina Lollobrigida – arrived by bicycle at the meeting place, wearing a tight, provocative D'Artagnan-style male costume – strips down to her corset before beginning the unusual combat, to the astonishment of the onlookers. The surprise effect, amplified by the publicity machine on the scene, enhances her star status.[27] At the same time, the woman demonstrates uncommon athletic qualities, achieved through exercise, which are revealed to be necessary to defeat her opponent. This is a superiority conquered at the cost of effort, which seems to compensate and discipline the destabilising effect of her sensuality.

Similarly, singing also appears from the beginning of the film as the result of skills acquired through study, which allow her to move from the repertoire of Roman variety (*'A frangesa*) to the arias of *Tosca*, without even a slight variation in Gina Lollobrigida's voice timbre or expressiveness. Only commitment allows her to ascend to the great theatres of the world, enabling her to courageously tackle the challenging notes of opera.[28] In this way, the filmic image of Lollobrigida – beautiful, determined, and talented – comes to almost entirely coincide with the extra-filmic image disseminated by the media: in Richard Dyer's words, it is a perfect fit between cinematic fiction and star's construction (Dyer 1979, 157-8).[29] The film, "a Lollobrigida vehicle", is "conceived, prepared, and produced for the actress to offer her

24 On Lina Cavalieri please refer to Fryer, Usova 2003. Italian readers can also see the autobipgraphical volume Cavalieri [1936] 2021.

25 On this separation, especially in the case of female characters, please see Fleeger 2014, especially ch. 3; Jeongwon 2013 (especially ch. 5).

26 Gabriele d'Annunzio famously defined Lina Cavalieri as the "highest expression of Venus on earth". See Di Tizio 2019, 159-71.

27 On this very scene, as more broadly as Gina Lollobrigida as a star, please see Vitella 2024, 153-4.

28 In the film, Gina Lollobrigida sings the finale of the third act from *Tosca*, as well as the aria from the second act, *Vissi d'arte*.

29 Italian readers can also refer to Hediger 2000, 29-35.

all-available opportunities to shine and to present to the public the full range of her possibilities" (Kezich 1955, 37).

Gina Lollobrigida is an active part in this process, since through her husband Milko Skofic she co-finances the film for an amount equal to her fee. Also, the contract clauses, which reserve her the right to use a screenwriter and a director of her choice (Robert Z. Leonard, the Hollywood director of *Ziegfeld Girl*) and to impose her name in block letters on the big screen, reflect the will to establish a programmatic identification between herself (Gina) and Lina (Cavalieri).[30]

The examples show how these films are not only influenced by a generic nostalgic impulse,[31] but intend to pass on a heritage of characters and memories that is already belonging to collective imagination and finds new life in cinema, conveying a system of values which becomes updated to modernity. In this sense, within the broader category of musical biopic, the films dedicated to opera singers in the two decades under consideration outline a precise itinerary. *Maria Malibran* highlights the transition process from biopics dedicated to composers to those related to singers, emphasising the role played by the 'prima donna' in assessing the success of the works and the growing importance of stardom in the operatic system. *Enrico Caruso leggenda di una voce* shifts the focus to cinematic melodrama as a genre that draws on the heritage of passions displayed by opera to translate it into pre-packaged formulas, underscoring at the same time the threat represented by the conflict between voice and body. Finally, *La donna più bella del mondo (Lina Cavalieri)* underlines the importance (also on a commercial level) of the new stardom, which can be accessed through natural gifts (beauty) combined with professional ones (exercise). These are processes that can be grasped by broadening the gaze from the investigation of cineopera to a broader field, such as that of films with an operatic setting. Singer's biopics represent a subcategory of such films, they are an expansion that indirectly accounts for the changing and remediation of operatic culture in the national cultural fabric. In light of the present and of the growing importance of acting performance, the impersonation of the singer (but the discourse also applies to a composer, rather than a sportsman or an artist) appears as the symptom and the outcome of an inexhaustible process of biographisation. Grasping such process illuminates the implications in today's increasingly creation of a new (and yet always second) stardom.

30 See Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Presidenza del Consiglio dei ministri. Servizi Spettacolo, Informazione e Proprietà Intellettuale, folder 2199, *La donna più bella del mondo*. The folder contains production figures, the censorship record, as well as the materials about the Lina Cavalieri's family lawsuit aimed at the preservation of her image.

31 This is aptly suggested in Morreale 2009, 47-56.

Mod. 139 (A)

REPUBBLICA ITALIANA

MINISTERO DEL TURISMO E DELLO SPETTACOLO

DIREZIONE GENERALE DELLO SPETTACOLO

Domanda di revisione 55099 - 1 DIC. 1969

Il sottoscritto Pietro Maleno MaLenotti residente a Roma

Via Nizza 56 legale rappresentante della Ditta CRAM FILM S.r.l.

Tel. 866.539 con sede a Roma, Via Nizza 56 domanda, in nome e per conto della Ditta stessa,

la revisione della pellicola dal titolo: "LA DONNA PIU' BELLA DEL MONDO" (2ª revisione)

di nazionalità: italiana produzione: Ge.S.I.Cinematografica anno '55

dichiarando che la pellicola stessa viene per la prima volta sottoposta alla revisione.

Lunghezza dichiarata metri 3.205 accertata metri 3205.

Roma, li 6 Novembre 1969 p.

NAZIONALE

DESCRIZIONE DEL SOGGETTO

Lina Cavalieri, una bellissima ragazza di Trastevere, sostituisce la mamma che si è sentita male sulle scene di un teatrino di Trastevere. Qui incontra per la prima volta il principe Sergio Bariatine. Sergio la protegge e la difende dai soprusi di un giovinastro del quartiere e quando apprende le tristi condizioni della fanciulla, le dona del denaro ed un anello prezioso.
Lina è rimasta orfana e pensa sempre al suo principe azzurro. Con il denaro ricevuto da lui prende lezioni di canto dal celebre Maestro Doria. Spera di diventare celebre, incontrare nuovamente il principe e farsi amare da lui.
Doria la conduce a Parigi per farla debuttare. E' innamoratissimo di lei ma Lina non può e non vuole ricambiare il suo amore.

Allontanatasi da Doria è nuovamente sola e per guadagnarsi da vivere canta e danza all'Eldorado dove, in breve tempo, conquista le simpatie del pubblico.
La vedetta del locale, ingelosita per il crescente successo di Lina, la sfida al duello sperando di trarre profitto da quella insolita forma di pubblicità. Ma la sfida si risolve in una strabiliante vittoria per Lina, la quale viene scritturata alle "Folies Plastiques".

Durante uno spettacolo grandioso allestito per lei, rivede il principe Sergio il quale, come tutta Parigi è in un palco ad ammirare "La più Bella Donna del mondo". Egli non riconosce Lina e gli amici gli raccontano come la bellissima donna sia ritenuta da tutti "irraggiungibile". Sergio scommette che riuscirà a conquistarla e infatti, invitatala al Palazzo Bariatine e rimasto solo con lei, non ha difficoltà a condurla nello chalet del parco dove gli si abbandona e gli rivela di averlo sempre amato dal giorno in cui lo incontrò per la prima volta nel teatrino di Trastevere.

Sergio, sconvolto dalla rivelazione, è pentito per la sciocca promessa fatta con gli amici, ma mentre sta per confessare a Lina il suo amore e chiederle perdono, arrivano gli amici e Lina fugge indignata per l'offesa ricevuta.

Lina Cavalieri è misteriosamente scomparsa. Amorevolmente confortata dal tenore Mario Silvani, ella si è ritirata in una casetta di campagna, per perfezionare lo studio del canto. Mario la farà debuttare con lui nella opera Tosca e il Maestro Doria, che sembra non nutrire più alcun rancore per Lina, sarà il direttore. Lina ha promesso a Mario di sposarlo. La sera del debutto Sergio è tornato per implorare il perdono di Lina e portarla con sè in Russia, ma all'ultimo atto della Tosca, quando il protagonista deve cadere sotto il fuoco del plotone di esecuzione, un sicario assoldato da Doria lo fulmina con una mira infallibile.

Nessuno ha mai sospettato di Doria e neppure Lina la quale è convinta, invece, che l'assassino sia Sergio.

Lina e Doria riprendono la loro tournée per il mondo, finchè giungono alla imperiale Corte di Russia dove Lina incontra ancora una volta Sergio. Lina accetta di cantare la Tosca, ma giunti al terzo atto della drammatica scena della fucilazione Doria crolla sul podio confessando il suo delitto.

Sergio e Lina possono finalmente riunirsi in un abbraccio appassionato ed insieme si avviano verso la felicità.

DESCRIZIONE DELLE MODIFICHE

La riedizione del film che viene sottoposta alla Commissione di Censura, presenta, rispetto alla prina edizione le seguenti modifiche:

- Revisione di tutto il montaggio, per dare al film un tono più veloce e serrato, mediante eliminazione di pause e scene lente.In particolare:
  - Abolizione di metà circa della canzone cantata dalla madre di Lina Cavalieri;
  - Taglio del colloquio Bariatine-Cavalieri-Cameriera nel corridoio del caffè-chantant;
  - Taglio del finale balletto can-can nella scena in cui le ballerine alzano le gonne;
  - Inserimento di esterni campo lungo concorso ippico di Piazza di Siena ma taglio nel medesimo ambiente, del dettaglio su Lina Cavalieri;
  - Taglio dell'intero balletto "Nascita di Venere" nel quale Lina Cavalieri appare seminuda, avvolta in una leggera calzamaglia;
  - Eliminazione di una lunga sequenza di Viaggio di Lina Cavalieri in Russia;
  - Revisione delle musiche della "Tosca" per la parte cantata, che si erano deteriorate.

In totale il metraggio attuale è stato portato a m. 3.205.-

Si fà presente che la copia presentata alla Commissione non è nuova, ma è una copia usata per la lavorazione per il nuovo montaggio.

CRAM FILM s.r.l.

La VII Sezione della Commissione di revisione Cinematografica, esaminato il film il 13 DIC 1969 esprime parere favorevole per la proiezione in pubblico senza limiti di età e per l'esportazione.

Vista la legge 21 aprile 1962, n. 161;

Vista la ricevuta del versamento in conto corrente postale n. 246 dell'Ufficio Roma 26 intestato al Ricevitore del Registro di Roma per il pagamento della tassa di L. 80.300

SU CONFORME parere espresso dalla Commissione di revisione cinematografica di 1° grado

DECRETA

NULLA OSTA alla rappresentazione in pubblico del film La donna più bella del mondo

a condizione di non modificare in guisa alcuna il titolo, i sottotitoli e le scritture della pellicola, di non sostituire i quadri e le scene relative, di non aggiungerne altre e di non alterarne, in qualsiasi modo, l'ordine senza autorizzazione del Ministero.

Ai fini esclusivi della revisione, se ne autorizza anche l'esportazione.

Questo film non è soggetto a revisione per l'esportazione.

Roma, li 13-12-1969

IL MINISTRO

N.B. — Il presente modulo non è valido se non munito del timbro del Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo - Direzione Generale dello Spettacolo.

STAMPATI PER LA CINEMATOGRAFIA
Via Squarcialuno, 7 - Roma - Tel. 429.007

Figures 1-3 Faldone 55099, *La donna più bella del mondo*, 01/12/1969. Direzione Generale Cinema e Audiovisivi, Roma, Archivio della censura cinematografica

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Remediating Opera
Crossing and Encounters Between Film and Music Studies
edited by Chiara Casarin and Laura Cesaro

Voyage at the Ends of Remediation in *Il Marchese del Grillo*

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Abstract The chapter examines the theatre scene from Mario Monicelli's *Il Marchese del Grillo* (1981) as a distinctive case study of opera remediation in Italian cinema. It broadens the conceptual boundaries of remediation, reflecting on its object, rationale and modalities as a complex cultural process. A multi-faceted (dramaturgical, cinematic, medial) analysis of this scene reveals also how music serves to evoke a complex system of socio-cultural oppositions that permeate the whole film narrative, while also illustrating Monicelli's vision of early nineteenth-century musical theatre.

Keywords Opera in cinema. Remediation. Il Marchese del Grillo. Vocalities. Gender Identities.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 *Il Marchese del Grillo*: Reception and Subject. – 3 Clash of Vocalities and Gender Identities: The Theatre Scene. – 4 (Meta)representing Dychotomies: Gender, Class, Progress on an Imagined Stage. – 5 Conclusion.

1 Introduction

In his autobiography *La musica è pericolosa*, composer Nicola Piovani recounts an anecdote related to the initial reception of the film *Il Marchese del Grillo* (1981) by Mario Monicelli. Following the film's release in French cinemas, the director and the composer were contacted "da diversi musicologi d'oltralpe che volevano sapere dove avessimo scovato quell'operina tardosettecentesca di cui non trovavano il manoscritto da nessuna parte, e soprattutto chi fosse questo Jacques Berain" (by several French musicologists who wanted to know where we had found that late eighteenth-century opera for which they could not locate a manuscript anywhere, and, above all, who this Jacques Berain was). Piovani refers here to the scene where the main character, Marquis Onofrio del Grillo (Alberto Sordi), attends a performance of an opera at the Teatro d'Alibert in Rome, attributed to a Jacques Berain and titled *La cintura di Venere* (*La ceinture de Vénus*). The composer concludes the anecdote by expressing his embarrassment over the questions raised by French scholars, as both the opera and its author were entirely made up by Piovani himself, along with Monicelli and theatre director Angelo Savelli, who contributed to staging the performance (Piovani 2014, 134-8).

Edizioni Ca'Foscari
The Future Contemporary 3
e-ISSN 2785-0986
ISBN [ebook] 978-88-6969-911-5
Peer review | Open access
Submitted 2024-12-19 | Accepted 2025-06-11 | Published 2025-10-22
© 2025 Casarin | 4.0
DOI 10.30687/978-88-6969-911-5/002

In the years following the film's release, Piovani has recounted this anecdote on several occasions, also showing a certain degree of satisfaction in having created a "opera fantasma" (phantom-opera) so stylistically consistent with the genre of *opéra-comique* as to appear "real".[1] These elements, together with the reactions from the audience (which can be seen in the video of the 2011 conference), seem to suggest a promotional intent on the part of the composer, who, through this anecdote as well, sought to draw attention both to Monicelli's comedy and to his work as a composer. Especially given the variations among different accounts of the anecdote, it is not certain if it recounts facts that actually happened. However, some of its details are at the core of the three reasons that led me to select *Il Marchese del Grillo* as a case study in examining the remediation of opera in Italian cinema of the late twentieth century.

Before presenting the three reasons behind this choice, a methodological explanation is due. I refer to the concept of remediation as discussed by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin in *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999). They define remediation as the "representation of one medium in another" (1999, 54), a complex process that entails the transformation and re-signification of elements, characteristics, and techniques from the two (or more) media involved.[2] This general definition is built upon a wide range of cases and encompasses multiple variations of this very broad phenomenon. In this paper, I will focus on the phenomenon as a direct reference in a medial product to creative objects, practices, languages, and artistic techniques pertaining to older media.[3]

In this sense, *Il Marchese del Grillo* represents an emblematic example, primarily because it remediates an 'imaginary' opera, "un falso stilistico, una crosta" (a stylistic forgery, a fake) – to borrow Piovani's own words – which did not exist before the film was made (2014, 137). These elements prompt methodological reflections about the object, reasons and

I thank the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions and insights. I am deeply grateful to my research fellowship supervisors at Ca' Foscari, Professors Miriam De Rosa and Vincenzina C. Ottomano, for their advice and encouragement. My special thanks also go to Dr. Giovanni Meriani for his constant support and our stimulating conversations.

1 Piovani recounted this anecdote in 2009 on releasing the deluxe DVD edition of *Il Marchese del Grillo*, edited by Monicelli himself. Among the DVD's extra features is an interview with Piovani, in which, after explaining the reasons behind the creation of a "un'opera-comique fantasma" (phantom opéra-comique), the composer states: "la cosa buffa è che, ancora oggi, a me e alla casa discografica, arrivano delle richieste di studiosi francesi che sono alla ricerca di notizie su Jacques Berain e "La cintura di Venere"! Con un certo imbarazzo, ogni volta, sono costretto a spiegargli che si tratta di una "crosta" "(The funny thing is that even today, both I and the record label receive inquiries from French scholars who are looking for information about Jacques Berain and "La cintura di Venere"! With some embarrassment, I am always forced to explain that it is a 'fake'). In 2011, Piovani returned to the subject during a public lecture held on 29 January at the Teatro Petruzzelli in Bari as part of the BIF&ST (Bari International Film & TV Festival). `https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3d4KrzTcgCU`.

2 In the preface to the Italian translation of Bolter and Grusin's volume, the editor Alberto Marinelli states that: "Elemento costitutivo del concetto di remediation è la presa d'atto che nella nostra cultura un singolo medium non può mai operare in forma isolata poiché 'si appropria di tecniche, forme e significati sociali di altri media'" (A constitutive element of the concept of remediation is the recognition that, in our culture, no single medium can ever operate in isolation, as it 'appropriates the techniques, forms, and social meanings of other media'; Bolter, Grusin 2002, 16).

3 Meaningful inflections of the concept of remediation that show significant points of contact with the one adopted in the present essay can be found in Danieli, *Folk Music* and Targa, *Armonie perturbanti*.

modalities of remediation as a multifaceted artistic and cultural process. If the opera featured in *Il Marchese del Grillo* was composed *ad hoc*, can this be considered a case of remediation? If not, what kind of artistic and cultural process are we witnessing? In other words, what are the purposes and boundaries of remediation?

Secondly, the remediation is emphasized by the scene's setting, which takes place inside the Teatro d'Alibert during the opera's performance, thus further highlighting the embedding of an 'old' medium (opera) within a 'new' one (cinema). The setting and the narrative strategies employed by Monicelli to lead the movie's viewers into the theatre and to 'make them attend' the performance contribute to creating a dialectical tension between the two complementary logics that, according to Bolter and Grusin, underlie remediation: immediacy (or transparency) and hypermediacy. In particular, "the logic of transparent immediacy" aims to preserve a "contact point between the medium and what it represents" and to make the interface of the medium itself to disappear. By contrast, the logic of hypermediacy multiplies the signs of mediation and makes them visible to the viewer (Bolter, Grusin 1999, 21-44). The tension between these components emerges from a multi-perspective analysis – dramaturgical, cinematic, and medial – of the scene and reveals the functions that the musical element assumes within the cinematic narrative.

Finally, if we mean the interpretation of the musical past – including my own interpretation – as a non-neutral account filtered through the historiographical lenses of the interpreter, this study leads us to reconstruct a particular vision of opera at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In particular, the analysis of the theatre scene in *Il Marchese* allows us to focus on which elements of the operatic past Monicelli, Piovani, and Savelli select, present, and refunctionalize for the purposes of the movie narrative. The focus on the cinematic function of this historiographical narration enables us to investigate the dynamics of re-signification and recreation of a given cultural system.

Thus, in the following pages, I reflect on several aspects of the remediation process of an 'imaginary' opera. The first section provides a historical and critical framework of the film, followed by a second section in which I will examine the Teatro d'Alibert scene, analysing its narrative and dramaturgical dynamics. In the chapter's second section, I will focus on the dichotomies that pervade the scene (and the entire film), symbolized and elevated through the on-stage portrayal of contrasting vocalities. Specifically, I will highlight how the remediation of the opera aims to represent gender identity stereotypes, revealing their culturally constructed, recognizable, and recognized characteristics in 1970s and 1980s Italy. Such stereotypes are employed by the authors as a dramaturgical tool within the cinematic narrative and, in particular, in the theatre scene that constitutes a key narrative junction in the construction of filmic meaning. In the third and final section, I will draw methodological and cultural conclusions about remediation, both as an artistic process capable of uncovering valuable insights about the cultural and social context in which it occurred and as a heuristic perspective for potential transdisciplinary exploration, extending the boundaries delineated by musical and film historiography.

2 *Il Marchese del Grillo:* Reception and Subject

Il Marchese del Grillo was released in cinemas on December 22, 1981. The movie enjoyed immediate and widespread commercial success, earning several national and international awards. However, the categories of these awards indicate that critical acclaim was directed primarily toward specific aspects of the movie. In fact, except for a single award for direction (Silberner Bär/Beste Regie, 1982 Berlin Film Festival), all others suggest that the film was mainly appreciated for its portrayal of the historical period and its Romanesque *couleur locale*.[4] Additionally, some of the critical reception was not very favorable. For example, Callisto Cosulich, writing in *Paese Sera* defined it: "Non un film d'autore [...] ma una dignitosa messa in scena, che forse avrebbe avuto in qualche frangente bisogno di una forbice più spietata" (Not an auteur movie [...] but a respectable mise-en-scene that perhaps would have benefited, at times, from a more ruthless editing). Similarly, Stefano Della Casa remarked in a monograph on Monicelli that the film "non aggiunge niente ad una filmografia" (adds nothing to a filmography).[5]

This ambivalent reception is also shared in the broader evaluations of Monicelli's filmography. Although the movie is indeed mentioned in every contribution (monographies, interview collections, catalogues, and the like) about the (extensively studied) Monicelli's production, it only occupies a 'peripheral' position. The movie is often passingly referenced in the contributions and often in relation to other, broader subjects (Italian comedy history, Monicelli's direction practice and artistic collaboration with important actors, like Sordi, or composers, like Piovani, anecdotic narrative of various kinds) (Delfino 2008, 120; Della Casa 1987, 73).[6] To sum up, *Il Marchese* has been regarded as a 'minor' movie within the production of a 'major' director, partly due to the strongly Romanesque character of the subject, which appears 'non-serious', unengaged, almost light, and that largely relies on Sordi's performance.

In fact, *Il Marchese* is a period comedy set in early nineteenth-century Rome that revolves around the elaborate pranks orchestrated by its protagonist, Onofrio, Marquis del Grillo, Duke of Bracciano, Noble Guard, and Papal Chamberlain to Pius VII. He resides in a lavish palace with his pious and conservative mother, his sister Camilla, brother-in-law Rambaldo, nephew Pompeo, cousin Genuflessa, and a host of servants – first and foremost the *factotum* Ricciotto. Onofrio spends his days devising tricks that involve all the characters in the story, from the poor carbon seller Gasperino, to members of the nobility, even to the Pope himself. These pranks drive the narrative, which unfolds as a series of juxtaposed narrative *tableaux*.

4 Three 'Nastri d'argento' (screenplay, costumes, best non-starring actor for Paolo Stoppa's Pius VII); 'David di Donatello' for scenography and costumes.

5 The Italian Ministero del turismo e dello spettacolo requested the film's producers to revise it "per la presenza nel dialogo di numerose espressioni scurrili, controindicate alla particolare sensibilità dei predetti minori [14 anni]" (due to the presence in the dialogue of numerous coarse expressions, unsuitable for the particular sensitivity of the aforementioned minors [under 14 years]) **[figs 1-3]**. Furthermore, part of the Italian critic also condemned the vulgarity of the protagonist, played by Sordi.

6 In addition to the already mentioned contributions, bibliographical titles that discuss the film, more or less extensively, are: Bosio 2014; Buccheri 2005, 128-36; Mondadori 2005; Monicelli 1986; Piovani 2014, 134-8.

For the Marquis' character and his vocation as a prankster, Monicelli drew inspiration from popular stories probably inspired by a historical figure also named Onofrio del Grillo, who lived in Fabriano between 1714 and 1787. These legends had circulated in the Roman popular tradition since the nineteenth century and were eventually written down (in several forms).[7] Monicelli transposed the character and his adventures from the early eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century "in modo da inserire il personaggio [Onofrio] in una temperie storica più importante: l'occupazione dei francesi a Roma, l'arresto del Papa – un episodio della Chiesa molto ignorato" (to place [Onofrio] in a more significant historical context: the French occupation of Rome and the Pope's arrest – an often-overlooked episode in history of the Church) (Monicelli 1986, 110). In the film, the theatre scene directly follows the depiction of these historical events. Specifically, Monicelli dramatizes the Napoleonic conquest of Rome through the symbolic transfer of the flag at Castel Sant'Angelo (from the Papal States to the French Empire) accompanied by the *Marseillaise* and the proclamation of the act of annexation of Papal territories into the Empire. The transition's first immediate political and cultural effect unfolds, at least in the film, at the theatre.

3 Clash of Vocalities and Gender Identities: The Theatre Scene

The scene opens with a close-up of a poster affixed to a wall that reads: "Teatro d'Alibert | Via Margutta N°28 | oggi domenica 25 e lunedì 26 | Novembre 1810 | LA CINTURA DI VENERE | LA CEINTURE DE VÉNUS | Autore Jacques Berain | OPÉRA COMIQUE". These informations are followed by references to all the artists involved in the staging, from the orchestra to the singers and their respective roles. Among them, Olimpia Martin's name in the role of Venus stands out for its prominent position at the top. This highly detailed frame focuses on the performance's paratext, providing the film's internal and external audience with all the necessary information about the opera to be staged.

The detailed shot of the poster is accompanied by an off-screen conversation among characters commenting on the woman's presence in the opera's cast. The tonal qualities of their voices suggest – almost imprinting upon the listener – the speakers' identities. The masculine timbre, albeit in *falsetto*, and the high yet strained pitch point out that the speakers are individuals whose voices defy conventional representations of male or female. The dialogue offers further insight. "Che sanno cantà meglio de noi?... Le femmine non so' voci bianche, solo noi lo semo!" (They can't sing better than us!... Women do not have white voices, only we do): the speakers are the "true white voices", the castrati.[8]

These singers are also characterized by their bitter aversion to the presence of a woman on stage (in this case, Olimpia). This opposition is

7 Cf. Giovagnoli 1887. Some considerations on anecdotes from the oral tradition can be found in Rava 1942, 167-70.

8 The scholarly literature on the relationship between vocality and gender identity is extensive. Suffice it to reference to: Andrè 2006; Chiriacò 2018, in particular Chapter VI, "I own that voice. Timbro e identità", 101-21; Daolmi, Senici 2000; Eidsheim 2019.

both vehement and seemingly inexplicable, given that neither the off-screen characters nor the singer has yet appeared in the film. This hostility is unleashed at the end of the dialogue when, against the auditory backdrop of a fragment of virtuosic coloratura uttered by one of the singers, they deface the poster by erasing Olimpia's name with a walking stick.

The subsequent shot broadens the frame to show five male figures. Here, the costumes and the heavy use of *maquillage* definitively confirm both the stereotypical gender representation of castrati in the film and the intricate references embedded in this portrayal. The singers are dressed in ostentatious late eighteenth-century pastel-coloured attire, voluminous white cravats, long capes, tricorn hats, and flamboyant wigs with curls. The actors' faces are heavily powdered until almost white, contrasting with the bright red color of their lips. This depiction of men whose self-presentation does not conform to traditional masculine norms suggests the homosexuality of the characters. They are further presented as symbols of an endangered musical tradition – eighteenth-century opera – threatened by the presence of women on stage, just as their social and professional roles are perceived to be under threat. The weight of this struggle underpins their vehement opposition, expressed both in the damage to the poster and in the phrase, "Mo' glielo famo vedere noi" (We will show her now), uttered by one of them.

In this scene, two equivalences are established through a network of actions and symbols: 'castrato' equals 'homosexual', but also 'reactionary'. From a dramaturgical perspective, this section serves a dual purpose: on the one hand, it sets up the tensions that underpin the following scene, set in the theatre; on the other, it conveys a series of cues that guide the interpretation of the film. The section ends with the castrati walking away from the defaced poster, stating that they are going to get a loge.

The subsequent scene takes us inside the theatre. However, instead of entering from the castrati's perspective, it places us in the upper gallery (*loggione*). The exploration of the theatrical space unfolds through tightly paced shots: the first reveals the stage as seen from the gallery; the second offers a perspective from the stalls or the first tier of loges; and the third shifts to the stage, showing the entire audience in the stalls and loges. The sequence closes with a shot of the gallery from the stage. Through this series of shots, Monicelli not only showcases the interior of the theatre but also illustrates the diverse composition of its audience, as it emerges from a host of background elements.

The gallery is packed with poorly dressed, dialect-speaking working class people, the pit is occupied – but not overcrowded – by people in bourgeois clothing or in French uniforms, the loges are left semi-empty by the French soldiers and more richly dressed people – maybe nobles. The shot that concludes the exploration of the theatre's interior spaces is particularly significant for a further definition of the social classes that inhabit the theatre itself. It lingers on the gallery and the uppermost tier of boxes, creating a striking visual play of "full/empty". On the one hand, the gallery is overcrowded, forcing its spectators to arrange themselves in multiple rows, standing close together and overlapping parts of their bodies; on the other hand, the loges are occupied by only a handful of isolated figures. In summary, Monicelli appears to construct an exploration of the theatre 'by audience tiers', making a historiographical statement about nineteenth-century musical theatre, which is portrayed here as an entertainment venue populated by an audience diverse in social class and

national identity. In the director's vision, thus, nineteenth-century opera was an entertainment "for everyone": nobles in the loges and the working class in the gallery coexisted, more or less peacefully, alongside French conquerors and the conquered Romans.

The exploration of the physical and social spaces of the Teatro d'Alibert unfolds alongside the beginning of the opera. The film stages the opening fragment, composed of three self-contained pieces interspersed with spoken dialogues. The first number, a sort of two-stanza buffo *aria di sortita*, features Bacchus – drunk, reclined on a litter – served by two male attendants dressed in white. The role of Bacchus is played by a fat, bearded middle-aged man, also dressed in white and crowned with golden vine leaves. At the end of the first stanza, the singer and attendants perform a choreographed routine that provokes laughter from both the audience and the castrati. The camera focuses on the castrati at the conclusion of the piece, highlighting their mockery of the performance and their location in the theatre. The castrati – previously left outside the theatre – are now positioned in the prominent left proscenium loge on the first tier, highly visible to the entire audience and very close to the stage.

Following Bacchus' piece, Mercury enters, "descending from above" via a mechanical hoist while the orchestra plays a lively accompaniment. The tenor assigned to this role is thin, with a gaunt face accented by long, drooping mustaches. His red costume includes a caduceus, a winged helmet, and golden sandals. After this entrance *á grand spectacle*, a brief dialogue ensues between Bacchus and Mercury, the only audible line being, "Su, abbandona il vino ubriacone! Dalle onde argentate del mare una nuova dea è nata… *Une nouvelle Déesse est née*!" (Come now, abandon your drunkenness! From the silver waves of the sea, a new goddess is born… A new goddess is born!). Following a musical pause – which allows for a dialogue involving the Marquis, seated in the loges – Mercury begins what appears to be a *cantabile* in compound time. The piece includes sporadic interjections from Bacchus, serving as a *pertichino* to his colleague. During the aria, a technical mishap with the hoist suspends Mercury again mid-performance. Bacchus tries to deal with the error by yanking Mercury down by the ankle, coinciding with the aria's climactic moment: a faint *falsetto* high note leading into the final cadence. The combination of technical blunder and lackluster vocal performance elicits more laughter from the castrati, visible to the entire audience, as confirmed by the Marquis's quip: "Guarda a quei castrati come je girano le palle!" (Look at those castrati, how riled up they are! Literally, look at how those castrati's balls are spinning right now!).

The third number is a quintessential French-style *entrée*. The backdrop changes, and to a full-orchestra accompaniment based on the film's main music theme (*Mia cara Olimpia*), the prima donna, Olimpia, makes her entrance as Venus. The comic effect is immediate: she is accompanied by a not-so-magnificent parade that includes a single attendant dressed as some kind of horse-like creature. Unlike the previous performers, Olimpia is overtly sexualized: the hair is adorned with a tiara, the makeup is heavy, the costume is nearly transparent, revealing much of her silhouette. Her entrance, greeted by the audience's jeers, includes a spoken monologue in French in which she apologizes for the impoliteness of her lateness. Presented implicitly as a "naughty girl" (with many suggestive undertones), her sexualization is immediate and powerful.

As Olimpia begins her *cavatina*, the audience's protests – "vattene via!" and "Hai visto che schifo? Si vedono tutte le zinne!" (Get off the stage! and How gross! You can see all of the breasts!) – partially drown out the aria's opening. One of the castrati, likely the one who defaced Olimpia's name on the poster (he is the only one carrying a cane at the beginning of the theatre scene), interjects by embellishing a cadence and continues intruding during pauses in Olimpia's singing. These interruptions delight the audience, who egg on the castrato to show her "come se canta!" (how it's done).

The vocal duel between Olimpia and the castrato escalates into a full-fledged contest. The castrato boldly moves from his loge to the stage, shoving Mercury aside. Musically, the duel becomes a sequence of escalating repetitions of the same motif towards higher pitches. The castrato overpowers the soprano with his greater vocal volume, an effect obtained by the audio mixing, creating a tense and exciting atmosphere. Despite her efforts to match his sound, Olimpia loses both the vocal battle and the audience's favor, who continue to cheer the castrato. She then shifts the fight to a physical level, slapping the castrato in the face. In response, the other castrati rush onto the stage, sparking an all-out brawl. The orchestra's uninterrupted and unseen performance creates a comically incongruous contrast to the chaotic melee, punctuated by a flurry of vegetables hurled from the gallery.

4 (Meta)representing Dychotomies: Gender, Class, Progress on an Imagined Stage

The analysis of the scene and the description of the characters reveal the presence of a complex network of dichotomies woven by Monicelli through visual and vocal elements. The first opposition is discernible between the three singers of the opera: the men on one side and the woman on the other. The former are portrayed as unattractive adult men dressed in heavily concealing garments adorned with stereotypical attributes (golden vine leaves, tankard, caduceus, winged helmet, and golden sandals), serving to identify their character in the opera. They are subjected to offensive epithets from the audience (including the Marchese), such as "grassone" (fatso) for Bacchus and "zozzone" (filthy man) for Mercury. In other words, the characteristics defining these male characters are all derogatory and tied to their physicality, which, in various ways, deviates from the ideal of virile masculinity. In contrast, Olimpia is depicted as a young, attractive woman who openly displays her body on stage, thereby attracting insults from the audience, much like her male counterparts. However, while the two male singers are seen as "ugly men" both aesthetically and morally – hence not truly "men" but rather "filthy" and "fat" – Olimpia is judged negatively by the audience for the opposite reason: she is entirely a woman, aesthetically pleasing, and unashamed of showing herself on stage.

The second opposition – established from the outset of the scene and most evident due to its culmination in a conflict – exists between Olimpia and the castrato, characters embodying two distinct gender models. In constructing both, Monicelli employs a series of "stereotipi riconoscibili che incarnano deviazioni dalla norma" (recognizable stereotypes that represent deviations from the norm). On the one hand, the castrato symbolizes "l'effeminatezza maschile come forma di deviazione da ciò che gli uomini

normali dovrebbero essere" (male effeminacy as a deviation from what normal men are supposed to be). On the other hand, Olimpia embodies the stereotype of a "fallen woman", an emancipated figure who does not conform to the morality – albeit contradictory – of the time (Rigoletto 2020, 33). Her being "out of place" and "wrong" in terms of morality emerges at the theatre, where the audience critiques her not for how she sings but for who she is. The conservative Roman audience – the same that takes to the streets to pray after the Pope's arrest – prefers a homosexual castrato to a heterosexual but nonconformist woman.[9]

This apparent paradox conceals one of the possible interpretations of Monicelli's film: it serves as a scathing critique of a moralistic, plebeian, and backward Rome that opposes the *novità* (novelties) introduced by the French: the "regolazione del Tevere", the "restauro dei monumenti" and "donne che recitano" (regulation of the Tiber, restoration of monuments, women performing on stage), all presented as related in the film.[10] Within this interpretive framework, the oppositions that I sketched above align with and interact within a broader semantic network. Olimpia, nineteenth-century theatre, the French, Paris, and Napoleon symbolize the future, survival, and the potential to challenge the *status quo*. Conversely, the castrati, eighteenth-century theatre, the Roman nobility, Rome, and the Pope represent the *Medioevo* (Middle Ages), a decadent tradition that can no longer endure because it has nothing left to say, as Onofrio asserts at the theatre. These oppositions serve as the dramatic mechanism driving the internal tensions of the film. The Marquis's infatuation with Olimpia leads him to abandon the backward Rome for the modern Paris until, during his journey, he encounters French soldiers returning from Russia. Starving and wounded, they inform him of Napoleon's defeat and the restoration of Louis XVIII's monarchy. This encounter prompts Onofrio's return to Rome, restoring his initial state as though nothing had happened.

The French novelties, so fervently championed by the Marquis throughout much of the narrative, take on a markedly different tone by the film's conclusion. In particular, an analysis of the theatre scene highlights how the sole genuine innovation of *La cintura di Venere* is the presence of a woman in a female role. In other words, the audience was not drawn to Olimpia's vocal abilities, nor to the low staging quality, nor to the opera itself. This last element is characterized by the filmic narration as inherently "new" and French, even if in the movie an example of a "traditional" and Italian opera never appears. The circumstance that, in the 1980s, those considered prominent representatives of the eighteenth-century Italian operatic tradition, *castrati* and lower-class audience, opposed to *La cintura* connotes this opera as a 'progressive' one.

9 We can also interpret the opposition between Olimpia and the castrato in light of issues related to vocal technique and its "technological" implications. In particular, Olimpia's female voice may be read as an innovative technological "medium" in contrast to the "old" medium embodied by the castrato's voice. In this light, the singing contest appears as a reaction of the castrati to the potential existential menace of the 'new' technological mean (the woman's voice). I thank the first anonymous reviewer for this insightful reading, which I intend to explore further in future contributions on the subject. On castrati and issues of vocal style, see Davis 2005; Feldman 2015.

10 These quotations are from the dialogue the Marquis has with three anti-French artists at the theatre.

If *La cintura di Venere* does not represent an example of the progress so heavily promoted by French supporters, what do these novelties indeed entail? More importantly, are such novelties a guarantee of progress over the past? The film's final events seem to answer these questions negatively, suggesting, with a pessimistic undertone, that ultimately nothing ever really changes "perché nulla cambia mai, la rivoluzione finisce sempre in restaurazione e 'morto un papa se ne fa un altro'" (because nothing ever changes; revolutions always end in restoration, and 'when one Pope dies, another one is elected'), as repeatedly echoed by various characters in the film (Buccheri 2005, 134).

5 Conclusion

This stratified analysis is only possible if we consider *Il Marchese* as a case of remediation, albeit a peculiar one. Let us, therefore, attempt to answer the initial questions by supporting this interpretation with two elements. Firstly, although *La cintura* is an 'imaginary' work, it demonstrates a process of appropriation of techniques, forms, conventions and language of *opéra-comique* at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Examples include the baritone and prima donna's arias, the duet between the baritone and the tenor, the alternation between spoken dialogue and sung pieces, and falsetto. This stylistic appropriation lends the piece a deliberately generic character, making it believable as an early nineteenth-century composition, to the extent of deceiving both audiences and (even French) specialists.

In other words, this specific moment of the movie in which *La cintura* appears on stage (and its staging in a full-fashioned theatre appears on screen) exposes some of the basic mechanics of remediation. Namely, the fact that the representation of the concrete performance and attendance of *La cintura* finds its place in the movie is a symptom of the form of medial appropriation between new and old media outlined by Bolter and Grusin, even if we are talking about a single moment of a single movie.[11] From a methodological perspective, thus, the framework of remediation represents a privileged point of view for conceptualizing and analysing the case of the *Marchese* (and other analogous cases) for two main reasons. Unlike categories based on the concept of imitation, such as parody and pastiche, remediation allows for a focus on the processes of transformation, shaping, and resemanticization that occur between media, not only between aesthetic objects.[12] Moreover, as formulated by Bolter and Grusin, the concept of remediation lends itself to application in cases of highly diverse nature and historical context. In fact, the two scholars have constructed a concept with porous boundaries that enables them to include both artificial intelligence and a page from an illuminated Book of Hours dating to 1450 within their research horizon (Bolter, Grusin 1999, 12-14).

11 However, it is worth noting that Bolter and Grusin present a number of applications of their theory based on the analysis of individual moments and/or characteristics of individual media products. See, for example, the numerous examples the authors give regarding animated movies in the eighth chapter of the volume. Cf. Bolter, Grusin 1999, 147-50.

12 On the definition of the term *pastiche*, Richard Dyer writes: "It has two primary senses, referring to a combination of aesthetic elements or to a kind of aesthetic imitation [...]. pastiche is a kind of imitation that you are meant to know is an imitation". Cf. Dyer 2007.

The second reason for interpreting the theatre scene of the movie *Il Marchese* as a case of remediation relates to analysing how *La cintura* is accessed, aligning with the two logics of remediation: immediacy and hypermediacy. Examples of hypermediacy include the detail of the theatre poster progressively revealing all the information about the performance, the presentation of castrati through a zoom-out that transitions from vocal timbre to aesthetic elements and then to specific singing techniques, and the exploration of the theatre's interior spaces through camera movements. As Emanuele Senici argues, these "atti di rappresentazione multipli" (acts of multiple representation) create a heterogeneous perceptive space in which "la rappresentazione filmica è rivelata come una finestra aperta su un'altra rappresentazione, quella operistica, e quindi su un altro medium, quello musico-teatrale" (the cinematic representation is revealed as an open window onto another representation, that of opera, and thus onto another medium, the musical-theatrical) (Senici 2019, 66). The viewer's desire for immediacy is satisfied once the performance begins, focusing on what occurs on stage, creating an automatic representation process and a unified, privileged space for accessing the mise-en-scène, especially after Olimpia's entrance.

The fact that *La cintura* 'does not exist' outside the film does not undermine its definition as a case of remediation. On the contrary, this case allows rethinking of the boundaries of remediation, which are here questioned due to dramaturgical and narrative reasons, as Piovani (2014, 136) himself explains:

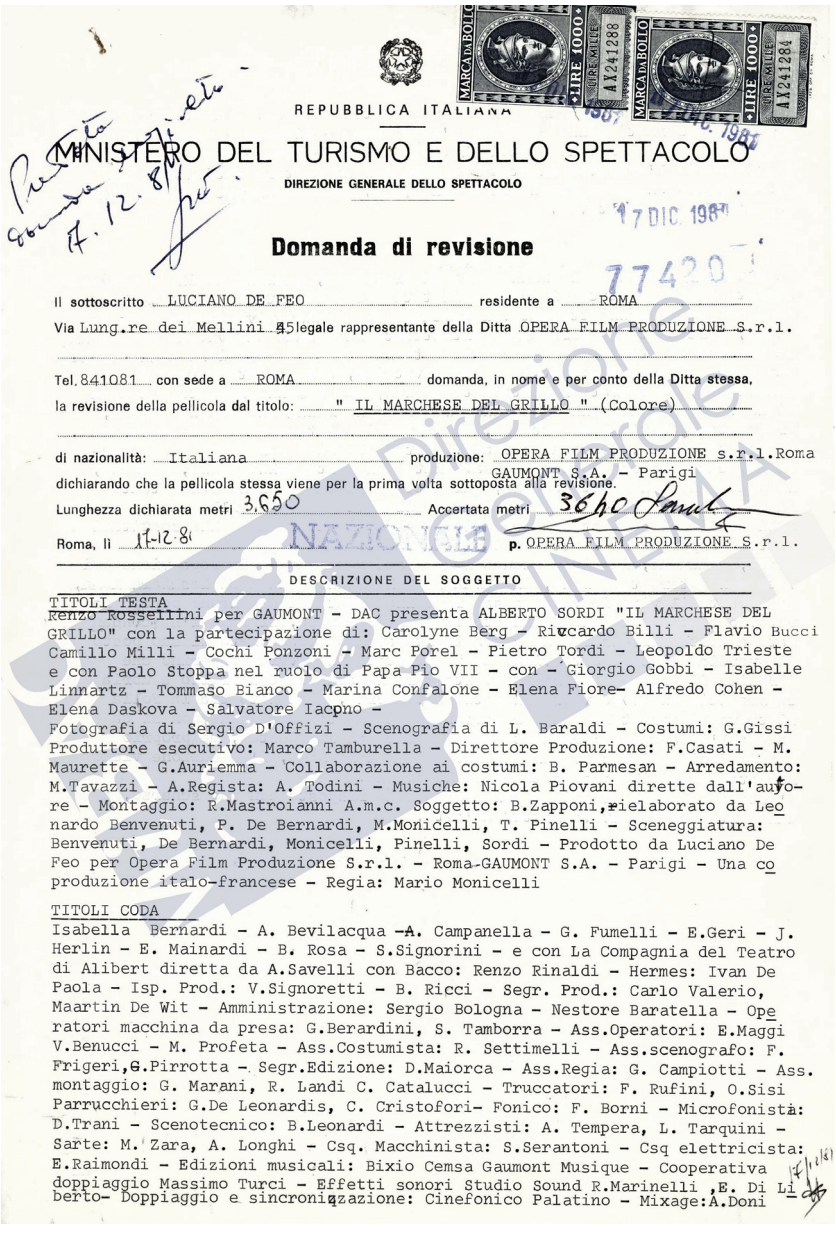
> Per realizzare l'episodio, serviva un'opera che si prestasse alle necessità narrative. Per quanto cercassi, non c'era verso di trovare un'opera francese del primo Ottocento con un'aria da soprano adatta all'uopo, cioè con delle pause buone per infilarci le frasi cantate dal castrato duellante. E allora con Monicelli decidemmo di farne una finta.
>
> To create the episode, we needed an opera suited to the narrative requirements. No matter how hard I looked, I couldn't find a French opera from the early nineteenth century with a soprano aria appropriate for the purpose, that is, with pauses that could accommodate the castrato duelist's sung lines. So Monicelli and I decided to make a fake one.

In other words, they opted for an opera constructed according to the dramatic needs of the film, producing an object 'born' to be remediated, that is to exist only outside its 'traditional' media context. Negatively, this statement reveals that a 'real' opera could not have been used for this purpose because it lacked the representation of *all* the dichotomous tensions that *La cintura* synthesizes within the film's dramaturgy: woman-man, woman-castrato, tradition-innovation, preservation-revolution.

Indeed, the presence in a film of an opera without an original, absent from any text other than the cinematic one, lacks the fundamental attributes required to be interpreted as a citation or intertextual phenomenon. Moreover, this case study compels us to broaden the boundaries of what we interpret as remediation. To date, opera remediation processes have been studied primarily about the film opera, the biopic, and early sound cinema. Regarding Italian film production of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, scholarly attention has focused on two main points of interest. The first

concerns the canonized nineteenth-century Italian opera: Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Puccini, and above all, Verdi. The second is the filmography of highbrow 'auteur' directors (Gallone, Bertolucci, Visconti, Pasolini, Bellocchio, Vittorio, and Paolo Taviani). This case study confirms that the processes of cinematic remediation of opera extends well beyond these boundaries.[13] Indeed, they also occur in "unexpected" situations, such as in the case of "nonexistent" musical works within the repertoire. After all, even if possible, who would attend a theatrical performance of *La cintura* and leave satisfied on anything but an 'ironic' level? Yet, when seen at the Teatro D'Alibert, possibly alongside Onofrio del Grillo, it takes on an entirely different meaning.

13 Citron 2010; Giuggioli 2011; 2019; Mantica 2022; Marchelli, Venturelli 2001; Miceli, Capra 2014; Verona 2019; Vincent 2014.



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Lunghezza dichiarata metri 3.650 Accertata metri 3640

Roma, li 17-12-81 p. OPERA FILM PRODUZIONE S.r.l.

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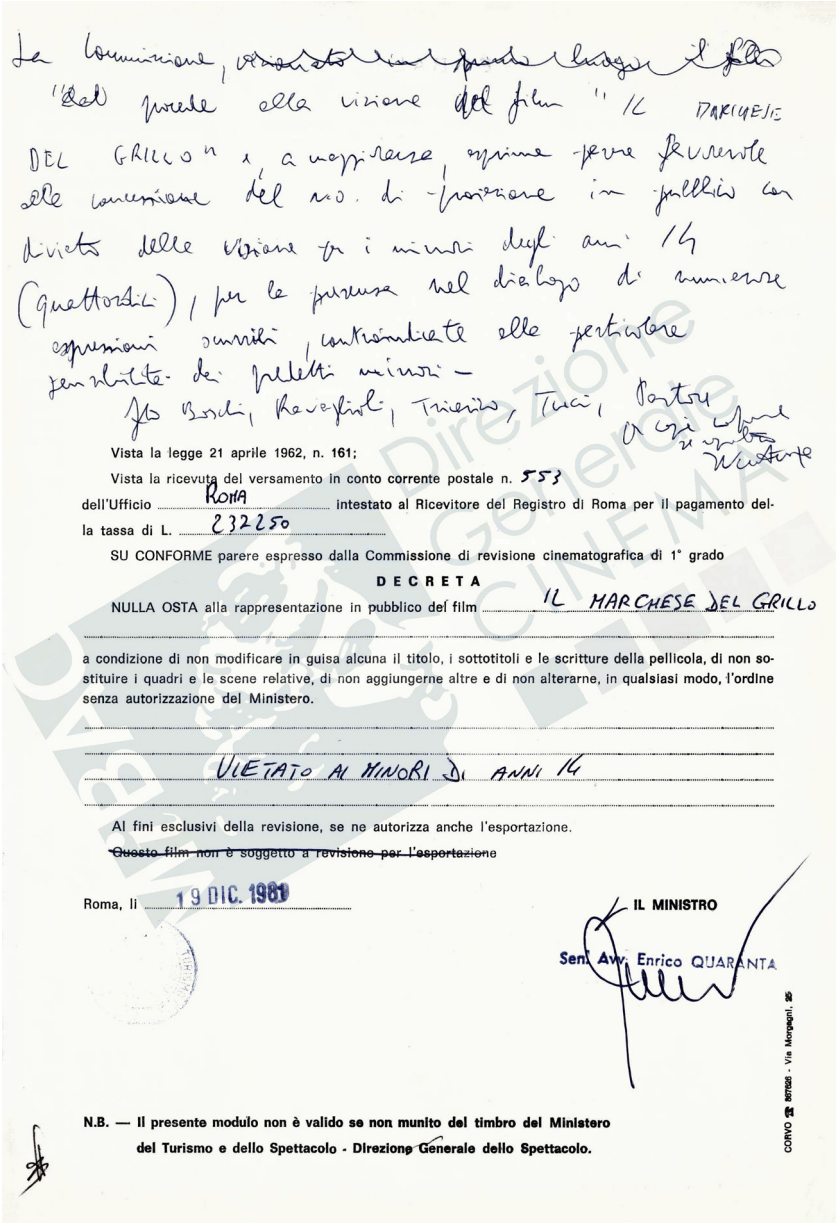
a riprodurre il bando Napoleonico del 17/5/1809 - Copiryght - Opera Film
Produzione - Gaumont 1981

T R A M A

Il Marchese Onofrio del Grillo Duca di Bracciano, guardia nobile e Cameriere segreto di sua Santità Pio VII, é il tipico rappresentante della nobiltà romana dei primi dell'Ottocento.Il Marchese de Grillo vive in una casa da fiaba, circondato da personaggi altrettanto fiabeschi che vivono ognuno in un mondo a se stante e che difficilmente riescono ad inserirsi nella realtà: una madre affezionata: ostile e conservatrice, una parente povera di nome Genuflessa, innamorata segretamente di lui; una sorella sposata e con un figlio. Per fuggire alla noia il Marchese del Grillo si mescola spesso, frequentando bettole ed osterie, ed é proprio al termine di una di queste serate, trova un ubriaco, certo Gasperino carbonaio di professione, che é la sua copia precisa.Spinto dal gusto della beffa, Onofrio, lo raccoglie e lo porta a casa; qui metterà su una geniale farsa tanto da far passare il povero Gasperino per il Marchese del Grillo anche agli occhi dei suoi stessi parenti, che non si accorgono della sostituzione mentre Gasperino si adatta benissimo a questo personaggio.
Siamo, comunque, in piena occupazione francese e quando il Papa viene privato del potere temporale, il Marchese del Grillo decide di lasciare Roma, ma durante il viaggio viene a sapere della caduta di Napoleone perciò fa ritorno a Roma. Ma qui Onofrio troverà una sorpresa, il Papa l'ha condannato a morte per diserzione e tradimento avendo abbandonato il suo posto di guardia . Al suo posto viene così arrestato il povero Gasperino che é felice di passare ancora una volta per il Marchese del Grillo e ubriaco fradicio si avvia verso il patibolo.Onofrio, mescolato tra la folla si trova ad aasistere alla preparazione di questa esecuzione;non si da pace all'idea che un'innocente debba morire al suo posto , ma proprio quando decide di intervenire in favore del carbonaio, l'esecuzione viene fermata perché il Papa ha concesso la grazia.
E' stata quindi la reazione del Papa che ha risposto con uno scherzo, a chi dello scherzo aveva fatto un'arte.



La Commissione, ~~[illegible]~~ procede alla visione del film "IL MARCHESE DEL GRILLO" e, a maggioranza, esprime parere favorevole alla concessione del n.o. di proiezione in pubblico con divieto della visione per i minori degli anni 14 (quattordici), per la presenza nel dialogo di numerose espressioni scurrili, controindicate alla particolare sensibilità dei predetti minori —

Fto Boschi, Ravagliolo, Triarico, Tucci, Pastore

Vista la legge 21 aprile 1962, n. 161;

Vista la ricevuta del versamento in conto corrente postale n. 553 dell'Ufficio ROMA intestato al Ricevitore del Registro di Roma per il pagamento della tassa di L. 232250

SU CONFORME parere espresso dalla Commissione di revisione cinematografica di 1° grado

DECRETA

NULLA OSTA alla rappresentazione in pubblico del film IL MARCHESE DEL GRILLO

a condizione di non modificare in guisa alcuna il titolo, i sottotitoli e le scritture della pellicola, di non sostituire i quadri e le scene relative, di non aggiungerne altre e di non alterarne, in qualsiasi modo, l'ordine senza autorizzazione del Ministero.

VIETATO AI MINORI DI ANNI 14

Ai fini esclusivi della revisione, se ne autorizza anche l'esportazione.

~~Questo film non è soggetto a revisione per l'esportazione~~

Roma, li 19 DIC. 1981

IL MINISTRO

Sen. Avv. Enrico QUARANTA

CORVO 867626 - Via Morgagni, 25

N.B. — Il presente modulo non è valido se non munito del timbro del Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo - Direzione Generale dello Spettacolo.

Figures 1-3 Faldone 77420, *Il Marchese del Grillo*, 17/12/1981. Direzione Generale Cinema e Audiovisivi, Roma, Archivio della censura cinematografica

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Remediating Opera
Crossing and Encounters Between Film and Music Studies
edited by Chiara Casarin and Laura Cesaro

Interview with Roberto Chiesi

Laura Cesaro
Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia

Roberto Chiesi, film critic and head of the Centro Studi-Archivio Pasolini of the Cineteca di Bologna, is a member of the advisory board of the international journal *Studi Pasoliniani* and of the editorial staff of the periodical *Cineforum*. He is also a collaborator of RAI 3 radio programme *Wikiradio*. In 2022 he published the book *Pasolini. Il fantasma del presente (1970-1975)* (Vallecchi). Since 2024 he has been the editor of the international journal *Letteratura & Cinema / Literature & Cinema*, published by Fabrizio Serra.

***Medea* is one of the most frequently adapted and reinterpreted texts: Euripides' tragedy for the stage, Luigi Cherubini's three-act opera, and the cinematic version by Pier Paolo Pasolini. With Euripides, we are in the fifth century BCE: women were unable to act independently, subordinated to men, treated as objects. Greece was already experiencing the tensions that would soon lead to the Peloponnesian War (the first performance took place in 431 BCE). With Cherubini, using a libretto by François-Benoît Hoffman, *Médée*, in its original French *opéra-comique* form, premiered at the Théâtre Feydeau in Paris on 13 March 1797, in the midst of the revolutionary period. And with Pasolini, we are at the end of the 1960s, in 1969. *Medea* by Pier Paolo Pasolini was released in theatres: the Colchian sorceress, niece of the Sun and of Circe, falls in love with Jason and forgets her sacred and wild nature, taking on the roles of wife, queen, and mother. By becoming someone else, she spirals into crisis, enters a vortex of disorientation, and loses contact with reality. Not coincidentally, Pasolini had originally considered titling it *Le visioni della Medea*. Why work on this myth?**

Pasolini had always been fascinated by myths. The proposal from producer Franco Rossellini to direct Maria Callas in a film adaptation of Euripides' tragedy immediately piqued his interest, as it aligned ideally with his cinema of that period: consider *Edipo re*, from two years earlier, *Appunti per un'Orestiade africana*, which he had been filming since 1968, and *Teorema*, both novel and film. Euripides' tragedy is the tragedy of a mother, forming a kind of diptych with *Edipo Re*, the tragedy of a son (and of another mother). Additionally, Pasolini had already drawn inspiration from Medea for the figure of the woman in his theatrical tragedy *Orgia*: a mother who kills her children. And it's not the only example – *Mamma Roma* is also a kind of unintentional

Edizioni Ca'Foscari
The Future Contemporary 3
e-ISSN 2785-0986
ISBN [ebook] 978-88-6969-911-5
Open access
Submitted 2024-12-06 | Published 2025-10-22
© 2025 Cesaro | 4.0
DOI 10.30687/978-88-6969-911-5/003

'devourer' of her son Ettore, and this theme of 'murderous motherhood' can be found in other literary works. Furthermore, Medea gave him the chance to incorporate sequences of an anthropological nature, drawing from Mircea Eliade and other anthropologists. Alongside the theme of the 'tragedy of the mother' and the anthropological influences, there was an ideological motivation: for Pasolini, Medea represented an archaic culture, an ancient and magical world, the Third World in its conflict with the West, symbolically embodied by Jason. Jason violates Medea's realm, desecrating it in order to seduce her, effectively colonizing her. But in Pasolini's utopia, Medea revolts and takes revenge on Jason's "technological" and "desacralized" world, achieving a sort of ambiguous victory. When Rossellini proposed the project, Pasolini envisioned his own version of the tragedy, one that included an anthropological interpretation, drawing from the echoes of Mircea Eliade, James G. Frazer, and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, albeit reinterpreted and adapted, and a bold, visionary expansion: hence *Le visioni della Medea*. The initial project centred on Medea's world as seen through the personal, dream-like perspective of the sorceress: her orgiastic visions; Medea's 'regressive' dreams in Corinth, where, after being rejected by Jason, she dreams of human sacrifices from Colchis; her Corinthian home invaded by animals; the appearances of the Sun god in anthropomorphic form, especially in the primal final scene, where he would lead the child-murdering sorceress away. However, the dream-like dimension was greatly reduced from the original script: the director discussed it with producer Franco Rossellini during scouting, but Rossellini was perhaps concerned that the film would struggle to reach a broader audience. It's possible he persuaded Pasolini to scale it back, worried that the film might exceed two hours in length (the final version is 111 minutes). Even the promotional materials reveal this desire for popular appeal: the film was marketed with peplum-style paratexts, an outdated format by then. This advertising approach proved disorienting for the audience of the time.

8.4 meters of film cut in compliance with the Censorship Commission's requests regarding two sacrifices. But they are not the only ones. Thanks to photographs by Mario Tursi, now preserved in the Enrico Appetito Archive, and a combined reading of the continuity diary by script supervisor Beatrice Banfi, along with recent studies conducted by Maria Andaloro's research group (University of Tuscia), we know that Pasolini had conceived an additional sacrifice: a young girl sacrificed to the Moon. Was this sequence planned, possibly filmed, and left out of the final cut? Could you tell us more about it?

The film, compared to Pasolini's original concept, underwent numerous cuts. Given the director's tumultuous relationship with censorship, these cuts could be attributed more to compromises with the producer than to the demands of the governmental commission. The film first went through review on 23 December 1969, but Marina Cicogna refused to make the cuts suggested by the commission 'in the absence of the director'. As a result, the film was released with an '18 and over' restriction, which was later lifted following an appeal in which Rossellini himself participated. The notes from the proceedings state: "The Commission, having reviewed the film and heard from producer Franco Rossellini, who, upon the request of those present, agreed to implement the following changes: 1) softening the first sacrifice scene by removing the axe strikes and blurring the sequences

showing scattered limbs and blood; 2) reducing the impact of the choking by pole in the second sacrifice". The censorship thus demanded cuts to two sequences. The documents suggest that the first sacrifice scene was shortened by a few shots. As for the acts of cannibalism, this likely refers to the scene where the people of Colchis devour the dismembered remains of the 'sacrificed' boy. However, the term 'softening' is used, not a complete removal of scenes or sequences.

What's more concerning are the departures from the original project, including some parts that were even filmed but removed at the producer's request before the film's submission to the censorship board. Much was cut, and Pasolini, in an effort to create a more 'accessible' film, made compromises and gave up numerous sequences. The imagination and dream-like visions of the sorceress led to the film's duration exceeding the contractually allotted time. It appears that the first version of the film lasted about three hours and included more dreamlike sequences: a second sacrifice scene of a boy with his face covered by a mask, another sequence where Medea's dwelling fills with animals – sheep, etc. – and the appearance of the Sun as an anthropomorphic entity with breasts, in whose chariot – floating in the air through a rudimentary and perhaps imperfect effect – Medea and her children ascend.

Do we know of any scenes that Pasolini filmed in their entirety, but of which no trace remains?

As for sequences filmed in their entirety, we know of one related to the lunar sacrifice: this is evidenced by the on-set photographs taken by one of Italy's greatest film photographers, Mario Tursi (1929-2008). There are 115 black-and-white stills and seven colour photographs, identified by the studies of Maria Andaloro, with the collaboration of Gaetano Alfano, Paola Pogliani, and Valeria Valentini. These photographs are the subject of the exhibition *Medea ritrovata*, set up in May 2024 at the University of Tuscia, in collaboration with the research centre UNITUS – Ricerche e restauro in Cappadocia. During location scouting in March 1969, Pasolini had told producer Rossellini that after the 'solar rite', "there will be a cut to the lunar rite, which is instead a cult of life and death, because life is born, dies, and then is reborn. It represents the rhythm of time, the rebirth" (Chiesi 2007, 19).

From this research, it emerges that in the first version, titled *Visioni della Medea*, the dreamlike character was more pronounced, as was the ritualistic aspect. It couldn't have been otherwise with Callas playing the lead. Specifically, the sequence was intended to mirror the one that remained in the film: the sacrifice of a girl, which constitutes a lunar rite. The shooting of this scene did not take place in Cappadocia (as had happened for the 'solar rite' scene), but in Italy. At the end of June 1969, nearly a month after the filming in Turkey, in Uçhisar and Göreme, Pasolini shot the scene at the Fosso Castello waterfalls in the village of Chia, near Viterbo, in the same location where he had filmed the baptism of Jesus in *Vangelo secondo Matteo* (1964), a space of stones, water, and wild vegetation.

At the end of the shooting, Pasolini wrote a poem about it, which strongly suggests that the outcome left Pasolini with some regret, although he accepted the cuts (in fact, shortly thereafter, he agreed to shoot another film with Franco Rossellini as co-producer, *Il Decameron*). There is a poem, *Lettera dall'interno di una sezione di poesia*, that he wrote in October 1969 and

published in the screenplay volume by Garzanti, after the film was finished. In some verses, he seems to allude to the fact that he accepted certain compromises: "Nella lavorazione la Funzione ha ripreso i suoi diritti. / Il cinema d'altronde la pretende; / e attraverso la fisicità del vedere / la identifica, inoltre, con l'Indizio. / Esso è fatalmente narrazione. / L'idea pilota è dunque morta: seppelliamola. / La storia della storia del film sulla regale sottoproletaria è qua / la storia vera e propria è là: altro rapporto non si dà" (Gambetti 1970, 12).

The images of still and abandoned bodies, alone, return with a certain obsession in Pasolini's cinema. An immobility that is not automatically associated with physical death, quite the opposite. Thinking of *Medea*, we refer to the body of Jason from the very first sequence, when, as a child, he lies on the ground, alone, in a position that recalls the Christological pose of the crucifixion, which is then repeated in the two sequences of intercourse. This *topos* recurs throughout much of the film for Jason, who, let's remember, is played by the athlete Giuseppe Gentile. The study of Medea's body is different; an incessant whirl – despite the bulky (yet spectacular) costumes designed by Piero Tosi – that even a deep sleep cannot calm. If, in opera theatre, the voice is certainly the driving force behind the action, could we say that, in contrast, Pasolini works with Callas on silence and the textuality of the body?

Yes, there is a deep contrast between the body of Giasone and that of Medea, his athletic and moving body, that of the Argonaut and traveller, and her immobile body, hidden by the long, heavy black garments. A brief aside: the study of the costumes was both careful and painful. In an interview I had with Piero Tosi in 2007, the costume designer explained how Pasolini rejected all his initial proposals with a lack of enthusiasm and disapproval, but without explaining why. Tosi suspected that Pasolini feared the possibility of Viscontian aesthetic elements creeping into his film. Finally, at one point, Pasolini told him he wanted to use coarse, rough wool and only poor materials. And so it was.

For Giasone, a simple tunic; for Callas, very heavy costumes were created: his infidelity and her fidelity. I believe that for Pasolini, the body is always a central expressive element, and so it is in his cinema. Maria Callas is almost entirely a face and a mask, a mask of an enigmatic, cruel, and mysterious culture, a mask of a fiction, because we must not forget that Medea pretends with Giasone to have forgiven him for repudiating her to marry Glauce. She acts: she pretends when she entrusts the garments of the murderous spell against Glauce to her children and to Giasone himself. In the end, after the murder of Glauce and the infanticide, Medea no longer acts, and Pasolini frames her face in close-up, full of hatred and triumphant over the triple revenge she has exacted against Giasone.

It is therefore Callas's face that is the theatre where everything happens: from the impassive cruelty with which she witnesses the sacrifice of the boy, to the bloody murder, the butchering of the brother, to the love for Jason, to the disorientation when she abandons Colchis, to the simulation towards Giasone, and finally, the revelation of her ferocity at the end.

A face that, in its expressiveness, is closely correlated with the numerous masks that recur throughout the film.

In particular, those of the Sun and the Moon. The sequence related to the sacrifice to the Moon, which we can reconstruct today through Mario Tursi's photographs, is perhaps the most symptomatic. Two processions of women. We follow the development of the action, from the preparatory phase in which Medea, in the role of priestess, stands next to the maid chosen for the lunar sacrifice. In a ritual where the two bodies alternate in paying homage to one another, Medea holds the white mask that will then be placed on the girl's face, thus initiating the sacrifice. The two faces, Medea's and the maid's, in close-up, are sharply contrasted in their costumes, yet at the same time, the white mask seems to act as a link between the two faces, almost overlapping in their purity and diaphanous features.

This is just one of many examples where Pasolini sees in Callas an actress who can perfectly embody the archaic world, an ancient mask that stands in stark contrast to the male protagonist, played by Gentile. The mask is then worn, the girl is decapitated, and the sacrifice is fulfilled. In the landscape of the Cascatelle di Fosso Castello (Viterbo), where the scene was filmed, the severed head almost blends in with the mask, which seems to take on new life. A white mask held up by a lock of hair. In the distance, Medea watches. Again, a confrontation: just as the whiteness of the mask peeks through the brush and rocks, so does Callas's impassive face emerge from the tunics and black veils in which it is framed: the death and rebirth of the moon have occurred, the death and rebirth of the witch have occurred.

7 May 1953. For the first time, Maria Callas takes Cherubini's *Medea* to the stage: this takes place at the Teatro Comunale in Florence during the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino. The next day, Celli, known to be unsympathetic to the Diva's performances, wrote in the *Corriere Lombardo*: "A great singer and a tragic actress of impressive power. She gave the sorceress a dark vocal quality, fiercely intense in the lower register, terribly piercing in the high notes". *Medea* becomes one of the soprano's signature roles, which between 1953 and 1962 she performs all over the world: 'She was the one who rediscovered and reinvented the role', adds Celli. It therefore doesn't seem strange that Franco Rossellini, the producer, should propose that the soprano, a friend of Luchino Visconti and courted by Joseph Losey, play the role of Medea in the eponymous film by his friend Pasolini. How much did Pasolini allow Callas to bring opera theatre behind the camera? And how much, in your opinion, did Pasolini draw from opera theatre to immortalize the Medea/Callas?

The project was initially proposed to Carl Theodor Dreyer, but I believe it failed due to the Danish director's advanced age and health issues, as he passed away a year before the filming of Pasolini's film, around the same time that *Medea* was proposed to him. In fact, Callas, in an interview with Italian television in 1969, when asked why Dreyer didn't direct the film, candidly responded: "Fate: Pasolini is young; Dreyer was a bit too old, and unfortunately he died in the meantime".

As for the relationship with Pasolini, *Medea* was certainly the project that sparked their connection. Before this opportunity, they had not had the chance to meet in person. Maria Callas knew some of Pasolini's films: she loved *Edipo Re*, but she didn't like *Teorema*. It is curious that in an interview with Jean Duflot, Pasolini said: "What perhaps is not known is that I had already thought of Callas for the role of Giocasta in *Edipo Re*. The fact is that for a long time she represented for me a series of female figures from the

tragic repertoire. [...] I must say that she is a born actress, of spontaneous intelligence and exceptional presence. One of the actresses who gave me the least direction problems" (Pasolini 1999, 1513-16).

It is said that before meeting Callas, Pier Paolo Pasolini detested opera, and I believe he therefore avoided introducing any element in the film that referred to opera. The making of *Medea* brought Callas and Pasolini together in such a strong and complex relationship that it extended well beyond the completion of the film. Reliable witnesses report that Callas even fell in love with him, and it is certain that Pasolini was fascinated by her personality, to the point that he evoked her in some of his poems from that period.

Legend has it that Rossellini's proposal reached Maria Callas on 19 October 1968, on the eve of the marriage between Onassis and Jackie Kennedy. Pasolini will say: "We are dealing with an artist who, in a certain sense, is the most modern of women. However, within her lives an ancient, strange, mysterious, arcane creature that conceals the inner conflicts of today" and he adds, "It was her human peculiarities that made me realize that Callas could be my Medea".

I wouldn't say that Pasolini was inspired by the myth surrounding the diva, but rather by her interiority, by the authentic personality of the woman-Callas, her suffering, her strength, and her vulnerability. Pasolini chose his actors because their personalities resonated with the characters they had to portray. He didn't seek classical acting in the traditional sense but rather a kind of analogy, much like a word evoking another and its meaning in poetry. He thought that Maria Callas had a personality suited to embody Medea, a sort of 'extremism' in her emotions, a 'wild' nature that had been partly repressed but remained her true identity.

One characteristic that certainly struck Pasolini was Maria's 'rough' pronunciation, as well as her vocal expansion, which distinguished her, easily reaching high and tonal notes both in speech and in singing. The poet-director, like Fellini in his early films, preferred accents and dialectical inflections, or, as in the case of Callas, with unusual, foreign, and disorienting inflections. However, producer Rossellini, fearing that the audience might react with amusement to Callas's imperfect pronunciation, managed to persuade Pasolini to have her dubbed, and Rita Savagnone's voice was chosen. It was an unfortunate decision because, in the case of *Medea*, Callas's pronunciation was entirely justified by the 'foreign' identity of the character, the 'barbarian' sorceress in Corinth. Fortunately, Callas's dubbing was preserved and remained in some countries, such as the United Kingdom, where the film was released in theatres with the original audio. In Italy, in 2013, Minerva released the BFI version with Callas's voice. Later, the film was distributed on DVD by Rarovideo, allowing access to both audio tracks. Finally, in 2023, the restoration by the Cineteca di Bologna was completed, though it has not yet been released.

Mod. 129 (A)

REPUBBLICA ITALIANA

MINISTERO DEL TURISMO E DELLO SPETTACOLO

DIREZIONE GENERALE DELLO SPETTACOLO

55222

23 DIC. 1969

Domanda di Revisione

Il sottoscritto CESARE LANZA e AURELIO ROSSI *residente a* ROMA

Via Bertoloni 8 *legale rappresentante della Ditta* SAN MARCO S.p.A. *Tel.* 803496

con sede a Roma *domanda, in nome e per conto della Ditta stessa, la revisione*

della pellicola dal titolo: M E D E A

di nazionalità: ITALIANA *produzione:* SAN MARCO S.p.A.

dichiarando che la pellicola stessa viene per la prima volta sottoposta alla revisione.

Lunghezza dichiarata metri *accertata metri* 3022

Roma, li 22 Dicembre 1969 *p.* SAN MARCO - S.p.A.

NAZIONALE

DESCRIZIONE DEL SOGGETTO

Regia: Pier Paolo Pasolini
Interpreti: Maria Callas, Massimo Girotti, Laurent Terzieff, Giuseppe Gentile

Giasone e i suoi intrepidi amici, gli Argonauti, sono lanciati alla conquista del vello d'oro. L'impresa è difficile, quasi disperata. Il vello, custodito dal Re E eta, figlio del Sole e re della Colchide, appare imprendibile. Fortunatamente per Giasone, Eeta ha una figlia,Medea, potente maga che si innamora follemente di lui. Con il suo aiuto il vello d'oro viene conquistato da Giasone. I due fuggono portandosi come ostaggio Apsirto, fratello di Medea,. Inseguiti dal Re, ed in preda alla follia, Medea uccide il fratello gettandone i brandelli lungo la strada: Eeta in questa maniera è costretto a fermarsi. Giasone e Medea, giunti a Corinto, vengono accolti dal re Creonte. Giasone si innamora della figlia del re Clauce, e abbandona Medea. Su invito di Creonte, Medea, insieme ai figli avuti da Giasone, deve abbandonare la città. Prima di andar via, Medea invia, come regalo di nozze a Clauce, un mantello ricamato d'oro e una corona. Glauce, indossa i doni e subito è avvolta dalle fiamme. Frattanto Medea, uccisi i suoi figli, dà fuoco alle sue cose e si lascia morire tra le fiamme. Giasone, unico rimasto in vita, nulla può contro l'orrendo destino.

TITOLI DI TESTA; Franco Rossellini e Marina Cicogna presentano Maria Callas in MEDEA un film di Pier Paolo Pasolini con Massimo Girotti, con la partecipazione di Laurent Terzieff, Giuseppe Gentile, Margareth Clementi, Paul Jabara, Gerard Weiss, Sergio Tramonti, Luigi Barbini, Gianpaolo Duregon, Luigi Ma Masironi, Michelangelo Masironi, Gianni Brandizzi, Franco Jacobbi, Anna Maria chio, Piera Degli Esposti, Mirella Panfili C.S.C. Graziella Chiarcossi, Operatore alla macchina Sergio Salvati, Tecnico del suono Carlo Tarchi, Ass.Operatore Giorgio Urbinelli Pasquale Rachini, Fotografo di scena Mario Tursi, Il trucco della Sig.ra Callas è stato curato da Goffredo Rocchetti, e le pettinature da Maria Teresa Corridoni, Truccatore Romolo Sensoli, Parrucchiera Marcella de Marzi, Parrucche Ditta Rocchetti, Costumi Sartoria Tirelli, Gioielli Nino Lembo Roma Arredamento armeria attrezzeria Ditta Set Mancini, Roma, Sincronizzazione Nis Film, Teatri di Posa Cinecittà, Ufficio stampa Lucherini, Rossetti, Spinola, Ispettore Produzione Pietro Nardi, Segretario Produzione Paolo Luciani, Segretaria edizione Beatrice Banfi, Amministtatore Aurelio Lalli Persiani, Aiuto regista Carlo Carunchi, Ispettore Sergio Gallianc Aiuto costumista Piero Cigoletti, Gabriella Pescucci, Architetto Nicola Tamburro C.S.C. Scenografo arredatore Dante Ferretti, Direttore della fotografia Ennio Guarnieri, Direttore Produzione Fernando Franchi, Montatore Nino Baragli Commenti Musicali a cura dell'autore che ringrazia per la collaborazione Elsa Morante Edizioni Musicali Bixio Sam Milano, Costumi Piero ~~Xxxx~~ Tosi Eastmancolor della Tecnostampa Prodotto da Franco Rossellini, Una coproduzione italo-franco-tedesca SAN MARCO S.p.A. Roma - Les Film Number One Parigi, Janus film und Fernsehen Francoforte - Scritto e diretto da Pier Paolo Pasolini.

La VI^ Sezione di revisione cinematografica, revisionato il film il 27.12.1969 e sentita la rappresentante della ditta San Marco, Sig.ra Cicogna, cui propone la eliminazione delle sequenze di cannibalismo e di sacrificio umano, e constatato che la stessa dichiara di non sentirsi autorizzata a d effettuare i suggeriti tagli in assenza del regista, esprime parere favorevole per la concessione del nulla osta di proiezione in pubblico col divieto per i minori degli anni 18.

Tale divieto è motivato dalle indicate scene che sono da ritenersi controindicate per la esigenza di tutela della sensibilità dei predetti minori.

Vista la legge 21 aprile 1962, n. 161;

Vista la ricevuta del versamento in conto corrente postale n. .....

dell'Ufficio Roma 56 intestato al Ricevitore del Registro di Roma per il pagamento della tassa di L. 77.656

SU CONFORME parere espresso dalla Commissione di revisione cinematografica di 1° grado

DECRETA

NULLA OSTA alla rappresentazione in pubblico del film Medea

a condizione di non modificare in guisa alcuna il titolo, i sottotitoli e le scritture della pellicola, di non sostituire i quadri e le scene relative, di non aggiungerne altre e di non alterarne, in qualsiasi modo, l'ordine senza autorizzazione del Ministero.

vietato ai minori degli anni 18

Ai fini esclusivi della revisione, se ne autorizza anche l'esportazione.

~~Questo film non è soggetto a revisione per l'esportazione~~.

Roma, li 27 DIC. 1969

IL MINISTRO

N. B. - Il presente modulo non è valido se non munito del timbro del Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo - Direzione Generale dello Spettacolo.

cinestampa roma 8-68 tel. 859182

L. 400

Ministero del turismo e dello spettacolo
Direzione generale dello spettacolo
Div.
19 GEN. 1970
N. Prot. 752 Pos. 55222

MINISTERO DEL TURISMO E DELLO SPETTACOLO

Direzione Generale dello Spettacolo

R O M A

Con riferimento alla pregiata Vs/ comunicazione del 19. 1. 70 prot 751/55222 la sottoscritta SAN MARCO S.p.A. ritenuto eccessivamente severo il provvedimento adottato dalla Commissione di 1° grado a carico del film:

M E D E A

metri 3013

fa domanda affinchè il film stesso venga sottoposto al giudizio di appello al fine di ottenere la revoca del divieto di visione "per i minori degli anni 18".

A tal fine chiede di essere ascoltata nella persona di un suo rappresentante e dichiara di rinunciare ai tre giorni di preavviso previsti dalla Legge.

Con osservanza.

Roma, 19. 1. 1970

SAN MARCO - S.p.A.

Avvertita la società che la visione del film avrà alle ore 18 del 20-1-1970 presso la sala di questo Ministero

R. Chiesi

VERBALE

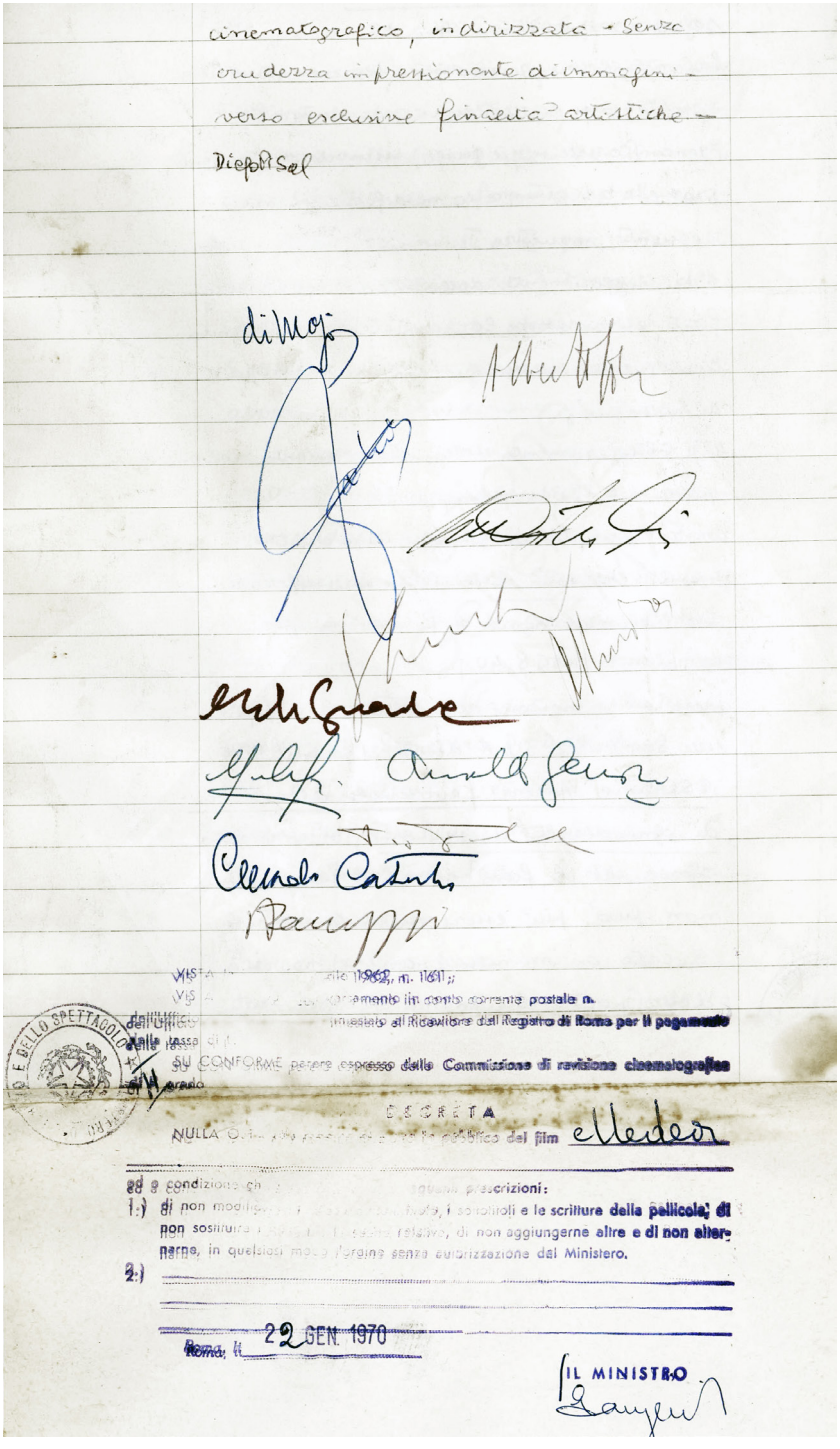
Il giorno 20 gennaio 1970, alle ore 20, nella sala di proiezione del ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo, si è riunita regolarmente convocata la Commissione di Appello formata dalla riunione delle Sezioni II e III per visionare il film, di nazionalità italiana, dal titolo: "MEDEA", di produzione S. Marco S.p.A. in base a ricorso della stessa avverso il provvedimento di divieto di visione per i minori degli anni diciotto adottato il 27 dicembre 1969 su conforme parere della Sezione di 1° grado.

Sono presenti: PER LA II SEZIONE: Presidente Dr. Alberto Zema, Prof.ssa Giuliana Limiti, Prof. Leandro Canestrelli, Dr. Antonio Racioppi, Dr. Angelo Lucano Larotonda, Dr. Mario Cecchi Gori, Segretario Dr. Diego Piscel.

PER LA III SEZIONE: Presidente Dr. Carlo Di Majo, Prof. Pio Fedele, Prof. Eraldo De Grada, Sig. Attilio Fattori, Dr. Arnaldo Genoino, Dr. Corrado Caserta.

Presiede la Commissione, ai sensi dell'art. 3 della legge, il Dr. CARLO DI MAJO. Funge da

segretario il Dr. DIEGO PISCEL.
La Commissione, revisionato integralmente il film e sentito - come da richiesta - il produttore Sig. Franco Rosellini, il quale, su invito dei presenti, provvede ad attuare le modificazioni nelle seguenti sequenze:
1°) alleggerimento della scena del 1° sacrificio, eliminando le accettate e sfumando le sequenze di spargimento di membra e di sangue;
2°) alleggerimento dello strozzamento mediante palo nel 2° sacrificio;
constatato, in data 21 gennaio 1970, che tali modifiche sono state realmente effettuate con l'eliminazione di fotogrammi per complessivi mt. 8,40;
preso anche visione della lettera di impegno della San Marco S.p.A datata 21 gennaio 1970;
esprime parere favorevole alla revoca di ogni divieto di visione, in considerazione che il film - con tali alleggerimenti - non può più essere ritenuto controindicato ai minori, anche in vista della particolare forma del racconto



cinematografico, indirizzata - senza crudezza impressionante di immagini - verso esclusive finalità artistiche -

Diego Pisel

di Mojo

VISTA ... 1962, n. 161;
VISTA ... in conto corrente postale n.
dell'Ufficio ... intestato al Ricevitore del Registro di Roma per il pagamento della tassa di ...
SU CONFORME parere espresso dalla Commissione di revisione cinematografica di II grado

DECRETA

NULLA O... pubblico del film Medea

ed a condizione che ... seguenti prescrizioni:

1.) di non modificare ... i sottotitoli e le scritture della pellicola; di non sostituire ... relativo, di non aggiungerne altre e di non alternarne, in qualsiasi modo l'ordine senza autorizzazione del Ministero.

2.)

Roma, li 22 GEN. 1970

IL MINISTRO

Figures 1-7 Faldone 55222, *Medea*, 23/12/1969. Direzione Generale Cinema e Audiovisivi. Roma, Archivio della censura cinematografica

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Displaced in Time: Opera and Cultural Memory

Remediating Opera
Crossing and Encounters Between Film and Music Studies
edited by Chiara Casarin and Laura Cesaro

Opera, Offstage
Visconti and Bertolucci Between Reflection and Performance

Giorgio Biancorosso
University of Hong Kong

Abstract Italian filmmakers have long shown interest in opera as both an aspect of their cultural heritage and occasion for imaginative storytelling. Taking the trope of the soirée at the opera as my focus, I show how the cinematic representation of operatic performance has inspired the virtuosic display of cinema-specific effects and with it the acknowledgement of the film audience. Examples include Bertolucci's *Before the Revolution* (1964) and *La Luna* (1979), and Visconti's *Senso* (1954).

Keywords Opera Film. Visconti. Bertolucci. Performance. Script.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 The Script as Collective Knowledge. – 3 *La luna* (1979): *Il trovatore,* Act I, scene 2 (Teatro dell'Opera, Rome). – 4 *Prima della rivoluzione* (1964): *Macbeth* (Teatro Regio, Parma). – 5 *Senso* (1954): *Il trovatore*, Act III, Scene 2; Act IV, Scene 1 (Teatro la Fenice, Venice).

1 Introduction

1.1 Balázs *Redux*

This essay began as a survey of the use of operatic music in the cinematic oeuvre of Luchino Visconti, Bernardo Bertolucci, and Marco Bellocchio: three directors who either for geographical reasons or because of their family background – or both – claimed to have a personal relationship with opera (and particularly the work of Giuseppe Verdi). As work got under way, I soon began to narrow down the scope of my research to just a handful of examples of, in Béla Balázs's words, "reproduction[s] of an ordinary operatic performance" (1952, 276). In the event, I settled on one excerpt each from Visconti's *Senso* (1954) and Bertolucci's *Prima della Rivoluzione* (1964) and *La Luna* (1979), respectively.[1] Balázs distinguishes between the

The completion of this essay would not have been possible without the support of the National Humanities Center, where I was 2024-25 Luce East Asia Fellow in Musicology.

Edizioni Ca'Foscari
The Future Contemporary 3
e-ISSN 2785-0986
ISBN [ebook] 978-88-6969-911-5
Peer review | Open access
Submitted 2024-12-11 | Accepted 2025-01-28 | Published 2025-10-22
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DOI 10.30687/978-88-6969-911-5/004

film as a historical record of past performances ("the film of an opera") and the opera-film as an art form in its own right ("film opera") (1952, 275). Strictly speaking, my examples are representative of neither. Like a story within a story, the operatic performances are cast in a larger filmic narrative. However, I did make strategic use of Balázs's intuition that the stylized world of opera is fundamentally incompatible with the "unutilized, photographed 'natural' [sic] world of the film", and that therefore filmmakers ought to capture opera in its original environment – the opera house – so as to offer a "faithful reproduction of a familiar reality" (276).[2]

1.2 Beyond Reflectionism

Pace Balázs, soon I also began to think of my examples as recreations rather than mere reproductions. As such, they prompted me to ask questions about performance: not just operatic performance and how it translates into film but also cinematic performance. But is the term 'performance', when applied to cinema, ever going to be more than just a metaphorical flourish, a nice turn of phrase? Can the term transcend its traditional association to acting? How to redefine performance with reference to a medium that would seem to resist it? These questions reflect my interest in redefining performance as ritual behaviour or a framed event that unfolds before an audience irrespective of the oft-mentioned divide – or blurred lines – between liveness and mediation (Auslander 2023). In offering what I hope is a persuasive account of cinematic performance, I also provide a rationale for the embrace of opera on the part of two filmmakers whose career is symptomatic of the attractions of cinema to opera or, to paraphrase Tom Gunning, opera as cinematic attraction (cf. Gunning 1990). I have chosen to privilege the cinematic recreation of operatic performances to counter the tendency to interpret operatic excerpts as a pool of characters and motifs that may be held up as a mirror to the subject of the film in which they are embedded. As against this *reflectionist* approach, in what follows I showcase operatic performance as a string of events – the musicians' work, mechanics of theatrical production, and the performance of spectatorship – that inspire the performative display of cinematic storytelling.

2 The Script as Collective Knowledge

2.1 Re-Enactment

Music is the source of the ordinary or some will say primary meaning of the term 'performance'. This meaning resonates in cinema as well. When we think of cinema and/as performance, we may be referring to the live presentation of so-called silent films, whether it involves a pianist, orchestra, live sound effects or a narrator (as in Japanese cinema during the silent era).

1 As will be apparent, the analyses unfold in reverse chronological order, ending with what I see as the archetype (*Senso*) of the re-creation of opera in Visconti and Bertolucci's films.

2 A representative example of the type is Ingmar Bergman's *The Magic Flute* (1976). On Bergman's deliberate embrace of stylization and theatricality, see Ibáñez-García 2021.

Or we may be referring to the virtuosic display of a technical feature or element of the apparatus (be it lighting or camera movement, for example). Expanded cinema is also construable as performance: the conjuring of unique, unrepeatable situations as the result of the manipulation, in the here and now of the screening event, of the projection and playback apparatuses of a particular venue. We may also use 'performance' reflexively, finally, to indicate extreme or especially involved types of audience participation. Classic examples range from the participatory and interactive mode of spectatorship that used to be common in Indian cinemas to cult film viewership. My own definition of performance follows from anthropology and sociology rather than music or media studies, and posits that cinema's performativity lies in the play between a script and its realization. Such play takes the form of ritualized behaviour: the re-enactment of an event as informed by a protocol or set of conventions (cf. Goffman 1990; Schechner 2006). By 'script' I do not mean the screenplay of a film but rather a shared sense of how a certain incident or topical situation unfolds. This definition can be traced back to the ordinary meaning of performance in music, too: the score and in particular a known musical work is the script and the performance is its realization.[3] But at the same time it also differs significantly from it on account of the staggered, scattered and highly mediated nature of film at both the production and the reception ends, a dimension film shares with recorded music rather than musical performance as ordinarily understood.

2.2 The Role of Conventions

The relationship between a script and its realization is dynamic in that it is underpinned by evolving conditions of productions and sets of expectations. The extent to which the unfolding of a given realization conforms to a script depends on what expectations one brings to the negotiating table, which is to say that the script is not a static object authored by the filmmaking team, let alone the individual film auteur, but is a live matrix that exists in the public domain. One important implication is that genre films, adaptations and remakes are especially good candidates for the type of performance I am positing here – as are topical situations.[4] An even more significant point is that performance is emergent: neither the intrinsic property of the film work nor solely the quality of a spectator's experience. It emerges out of an encounter and manifests itself as a type of relation. Performance is in constant flux, unpredictable, mercurial, but also pervasive. It can be spotted in unlikely places, and argued for. It cuts across not just the dichotomy between liveness and recording but also that between immediacy and mediation.

3 For an early articulation of the relevance of the notion of 'script' in the study of musical performance, cf. Cook 2001.

4 Think of how Scorsese revisits the televisual trope of the boxing match in *Raging Bull* (1980), for example, or Visconti's recreation of a seemingly routine visit to the barber in *Death in Venice* (1971).

2.3 Framing the Event

In the three examples that follow we shall see Bertolucci and Visconti 'riff' on a known script, or established trope: the soirée at the opera, trope that film has inherited not from opera but rather the nineteenth-century novel (Newark 2011). It is precisely their status as representations of performances in the ordinary sense of the word that drew my attention to them as embodiments of cinematic performances: the record of textual decisions, technical solutions and various enactments reconstituted as performance via the imaginative perception of the spectator (cf. Biancorosso 2018). Borrowing from the toolkit of opera analysis, I will interpret my examples as set pieces. I use the term to evoke a musical number that, unlike recitative, has a set tempo, meter, key and exhibits a fixed, and predictable, formal design but also in the sense of a framed event, one associated to a set firm of societal expectations and around which representational codes have gradually accrued (as they have, over decades of live television broadcasts, around a boxing match).

3 *La luna* (1979): *Il trovatore*, Act I, Scene 2 (Teatro dell'Opera, Rome)

3.1 "Let's Go Back to the Opera"

There is no question that filmmakers themselves have encouraged reflectionist readings. This is especially the case in Hollywood cinema. Consider the following object lesson: the performance of *Cavalleria Rusticana* that functions as the background to the ending of *The Godfather Part III* (F.F. Coppola, 1990). The film is not parasitic on prior knowledge of Mascagni's opera. The opera's lurid subject matter and demonstrative mise-en-scène are sufficient in making sure that anyone can grasp the echoes between the onstage action and the film. The putative reason for the inclusion of the opera, the debut of Michael's son (Anthony) as an opera singer, is a mere *alibi*. Its true *raison d'être*, one surmises, is that *Cavalleria Rusticana* allegorizes the story of the film and in so doing brings the saga to a close in the home turf of Western Sicily (where the Corleone family come from).[5] But Michael is no Hamlet. The gratuitousness or, which comes to the same thing, unconcealed instrumentality of *Cavalleria Rusticana* is exposed in a memorable, and unwittingly funny, line spoken by Michael: "This Pope has powerful enemies. We may not be in time to save him. Let's go back to the opera".

3.2 Oedipal Attachments

Something akin to the logic of the alibi also accounts for Bertolucci's use of opera in *La luna*. The female protagonist, Catherine (Jill Clayburgh), is an American soprano travelling to Italy for work with her adolescent son Joe

5 *Cavalleria Rusticana* is set in Sicily, and the performance takes place at the Teatro Massimo in Palermo.

(Matthew Barry). The film unfolds as the chronicle of the ups and downs of the quasi-incestuous son-mother relationship, and features two major operatic sequences (both of which feature Catherine as *prima donna*). The first is the end of Act I of Verdi's *Il trovatore*, set in Rome's Teatro dell'Opera.[6] The second interlaces the finale of *Un ballo in maschera* with the ending of the film itself: the reunion between Joe and his biological father (Tomas Milian), having his adopted father died in New York just as Catherine was about to leave for Europe. The performance of *Il trovatore* is prefaced by the scene of Joe's sexual initiation inside a movie theatre during a screening of *Niagara*, starring Marilyn Monroe, and directed by Henry Hathaway (1953). As if to colour this rite of passage with a hint of the magic, the ceiling of the theatre suddenly opens up to reveal a clear sky with a full moon. At this juncture, the boy suddenly realizes that his mother is performing *Il trovatore* that very night – a classic instance of 'post-nut' clarity. His memory lapse mirrors her own forgetting that it is his birthday. Determined to see his mother nonetheless, Joe leaves the cinema (the Teatro Adriano, in Piazza Cavour) with his female companion. An elliptical cut takes us to the other side of town, at the Teatro dell'Opera. The performance has already started. Joe stops to catch a glimpse of his mother from behind the glass panel of the foyer doors **[fig. 1]**.

Figure 1 *La luna* (1979). Joe relishes the view of his mother impersonating Leonora in *Il trovatore*

She is performing *Tacea la notte splendida*, in splendid isolation, enveloped by a starry sky complete with a full moon. Joe eventually moves inside and sits on the floor in rapt attention (not without scolding a paying spectator for chatting during the performance). Following Michal Grover-Friedlander, one could reimagine the episode as the display of an archetypal, rather than specific, opera, and reimagine the moon as seen through the gaze of the young boy as the visual displacement of the operatic voice (cf.

6 The backstage action and portions of the trio that ends the act were most likely shot in the Teatro Cinema Il Vascello in the Monteverde Vecchio neighbourhood of Rome (not far from Bertolucci's own home along the Tiber).

Grover-Friedlander 2005).[7] In a reflectionist reading, one encouraged by the director himself, one could view the entire episode in psychoanalytical terms (cf. Lesley Caldwell 1994). The choice of this particular excerpt from this particular opera would be accounted for by the oedipal resonances of the libretto, the uncertainty over the father that casts a shadow over the relationship between the two male leads, and of course the moon as the plenitudinous symbol of the boy's erotic attachment toward his mother (as well as his unconscious search for the biological father). Joe's oedipal attachment to the mother would also explain his apparent displeasure at seeing his tacit dialogue with her during the cantabile disrupted by her – to him premature – departure from the stage and the entrance of Conte di Luna (at which point he goes backstage to look for her).

3.3 A World of Plaster and Cellophane Wraps

Bertolucci's realization transcends the psychoanalytical plot that, if one is to believe the director, provided the initial impetus. The first part of the sequence, set in the stalls during the cantabile, is representative of the film as a whole. It is staid and gimmicky: the record of a stumble more than a performance. It is when Joe goes backstage that we begin to notice a director relishing the opportunity to *perform cinema*. Bertolucci is inspired by the challenge of rendering the wide-eyed innocence of Joe but also the unmasking of the opera stage as a world of plaster and cellophane wraps, people in prosaic, civilian clothes going matter-of-factly about their job, and fallible star-singers in need of the prompter at every other line. The decision to capture a performance in the making through the lenses of magical realism yields a novel reiteration of the trope of the soirée at the opera. Particularly memorable is the pun on Manrico, the tenor role, who not only sings *Deserto sulla terra* offstage, as indicated by the libretto, but also offscreen (we're initially bound to Joe's perspective, so we only see him when Joe notices him). More striking still is the dwelling on the prompter which doubles or better splits our awareness of time passing: as we mentally prepare for the next utterance we are simultaneously experiencing the current one in the here and now of the sung performance.[8]

3.4 In and Out of the Changing Room

A child-like enthusiasm for theatrical performance, and in particular the sheer madness of staging an opera, is nothing new, of course. One need only think of the backstage musical or the opera scene in Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941), which is simultaneously also a celebration of the Hollywood studio as the greatest toy ever devised. *La luna* injects new life in this trope, too, via a surprising ending. Following an abrupt cut to the changing room, where the music is piped through the PA system, we realize Joe had in fact soon

7 Grover-Friedlander's understanding of the attraction of cinema to opera is guided not by a reflectionist but rather a *metamorphic* principle.

8 For an interpretation of the prompter in contemporary opera, cf. Grover-Friedlander 2011.

lost interest in what was happening backstage. The camera had lingered on the performance more than he had, investing the images of the prompter, the backstage paraphernalia, and the ensuing trio with a significance they did not have. The spectacle of the supreme artificiality of opera was, as far as Joe is concerned, merely a function of his desire to be close to his mother. Catherine and Leonora are one. Once Manrico and the Conte di Luna compete for the attention of Leonora/Mother, he retreats.[9] When the second act begins, Joe is still in the changing room. But it is only when the camera closes in onto the PA loudspeaker that we hear the music. The sync point between the zoom and the appearance of the music is the playfully exaggerated take on Joe's ability to reshape the reality around him: his denial of the performance taking place next door.

4 *Prima della rivoluzione* (1964): *Macbeth* (Teatro Regio, Parma)

4.1 Prodigal Boy

Verdi's presence has long been deemed central to the definition of Bertolucci's cinema.[10] As is well known, Verdi is from Busseto, between Parma and Piacenza. Bertolucci himself, while born in Parma, lived at a farm outside the city proper. Inevitably, much has been made of the presumed link between them, and between them and their ancestral homes.[11] The story of Bertolucci's Verdi is a subset of the larger myth of his Parma, a city he nonetheless cannot have known too well by the time he left when he moved with his family to Rome at the age of thirteen. In the Rome of the economic boom, and especially the fiercely competitive film industry, the tag of 'boy from Parma' must have suited Bertolucci perfectly. It was a quick and easy identifier, and in going along with it he played the tag to splendid effect so as to shape the reception of his work.[12] When he returned to the city like a prodigal son to shoot *Prima della Rivoluzione*, in 1963, the city did not quite embrace him but connections both old and new proved handy. A case in point is the penultimate sequence of the film, shot in Parma's Teatro Regio, which marks the definitive end of the relationship between Fabrizio (Francesco Barilli) and his aunt Gina (Adriana Asti).

9 I note in passing that in Bertolucci's staging of the scene, Manrico and the Conte di Luna wear the same clothes. The detail was most likely inspired by the production staged by Luca Ronconi in Florence in 1977 (Riccardo Muti was the conductor). Emilio Sala notes how the identical costume points to the tragic premise of the opera: Azucena's fatal and inexplicable mishap (see Sala 2024, 72). Dramaturgical implications of the costume aside, what interests me here is that injects new life into a difficult nexus of the opera narrative.

10 On the use of Verdi's music in *The Spider's Strategem*, see Caldwell 1994; Crisp-Hillmann 2001.

11 The most powerful statement of the myth of Verdi's ties to the Po Valley is Barilli 2000. Bruno was the great uncle of Francesco Barilli, who plays Fabrizio, Bertolucci's alter ego, in *Prima della Rivoluzione*.

12 Framing Bertolucci's work through the lens of its reception outside of Italy, Caldwell considers how "specifics which […] are cherished by Bertolucci as evocative of his personal past" are diminished by their association to clichés about Italy (Caldwell 1994, 224). One such cliché is that Italians love opera.

4.2 Fuzzy Dating

The sequence is at least partially the record of a production of Verdi's *Macbeth* that premiered on 10 October 1963. Or is it a reconstruction? The opening shots show the audience entering the opera house and call to mind a news bulletin (they look like archival images today). Matteo Giuggioli interprets the newsreel quality of the opening as "one of the techniques used in the film" (Giuggioli 2019, 21). I agree that the choice is in keeping with what he calls the "stylistic mobility" of *Prima della Rivoluzione* but I also wonder whether Bertolucci actually gained access to television footage of an earlier performance and spliced it with images he himself shot with film cameras at a later stage. Alessandro Marini correctly identifies a poster of *Luisa Miller* in shot #77 of the film (Marini 2012, 189).[13] *Luisa Miller* opened the 1962-63 season on 26 December 1962.[14] In the intertitles that accompany the images, Bertolucci kept the same date.[15] This is in keeping with the temporal setting of the film (1962). The narrow time span of the story casts into relief the urgency of the protagonist's return into the rank and file of the city's upper bourgeoisie, his repudiation of communism and his seemingly premature decision to marry a girl his age (after a long and potentially scandalous relationship with Gina). While the date remains the same, Bertolucci changed the title of the opera. Was this because he found the story of *Macbeth* a more significant parallel to that of his film, as both Giuggioli and Marini seem to believe? Or was it rather because he was shooting in Parma at the same time as the Teatro Regio scheduled the premiere of *Macbeth*? *Prima della rivoluzione* was filmed between September and November of 1963. The theatre's records tell us that the performance of a new production of *Macbeth* took place on 10 October as part of a festival meant to mark the 150th anniversary of the Verdi's birth year in 1963 (Verdi was born in 1813).[16] The production also stood out because it featured sets by the painter Renato Guttuso.[17] Guttuso was by then already a fixture of the Roman artistic scene of which Bertolucci was also part. Like Bertolucci a self-professed leftie, Guttuso wore the hat of the engagée artist much more comfortably than the young filmmaker, who was still struggling to come to terms with his bourgeois upbringing. Guttuso may have had a hand in allowing the young filmmaker to shoot on the eve of the performance.

13 It goes without saying that such detailed reconstruction of the profilmic is made possible by modern playback technology.

14 See "Casa della musica" here: `https://www.lacasadellamusica.it/it-IT/Archivi-1.aspx`, where, to make things more confusing, the year is incorrectly identified as "1963" when it should read "1962".

15 The intertitles read: "26 Dicembre 1962 / MACBETH / Inaugurazione della stagione lirica del Teatro Regio".

16 Records also indicate that there was a second performance on 13 October. The conductor was Franco Capuana and the stage director Filippo Crivelli.

17 On the occasion, Guttuso also left behind a portrait of Verdi which to this day functions as the logo of the yearly Verdi Festival.

4.3 Regio *Sacrificio*

No other episode of *Prima della rivoluzione* exhibits a similar spur-of-the-moment quality nor the interlacing of drama and documentary that is so striking a feature of the episode. The Teatro Regio is the hierarchically ordered foil to the public park where Fabrizio, in the immediately preceding segment, witnesses a rally sponsored by the communist party. The opera performance, in turn, paves the way for the film's deeply ambivalent ending. The celebration of the wedding between Fabrizio and Clelia that ends the film is, at least nominally, in keeping with the genre of the comedy. Yet it comes at a high cost: the sacrifice of Fabrizio and Gina's liaison. It is in the opera house that this sacrifice is consummated. But the film goes beyond this ironic denouement. Alternating between long shots of the theatre during the performance and closer, cutaway shots of the film's protagonists Bertolucci is, on closer scrutiny, cross cutting between two different stages of the filmmaking process: the images of the December 1962 and October 1963 performances on the one hand and the subsequent film shooting done with the benefit of rehearsals and full technical support on the other. The grain of the images set in the corridors and the family box of the opera house is different: the backgrounds are more polished, the mise-en-scène more orderly and deliberate, so much so that they almost seem to have been shot in studio hence not in Parma or at any rate not during an actual performance **[fig. 2]**.

Figure 2 *Prima della rivoluzione* (1964). The breakup of Gina and Fabrizio during the performance of Macbeth

4.4 Recomposing Opera

In *Prima della rivoluzione* Bertolucci is engaging in a contest with such Nouvelle Vague directors as Jean-Luc Godard but also, and perhaps more decisively, the Truffaut of *Shoot the Piano Player* (1960) or *Antoine et Colette* (1962). In the latter film, the two would-be lovers famously attend a performance of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*. The episode features both a cut in action from one movement of the symphony to another and a to-and-fro play of pointed glances and feigned indifference between Antoine

and Colette across the fully packed hall. If we think of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* as an instance of what Goethe called referred to as 'invisible theatre' then the sequence will appear to be an irreverent realization of the drama implicit in the work's program: the unrequited love of the opiate artist. But Truffaut's images also rewrite the symphony in suggesting sync points between the music and the actors' gestures. While the music imparts its own tempo and rhythms to the onscreen action it also plays off the rhythm of the editing as well. Bertolucci recomposes the opera more radically. The whole of *Macbeth* unfolds elliptically as a montage of discrete audio fragments stitched together.[18] No attempt is being made to smooth over the cuts. There is a conspicuous sync point at the entrance of Gina into the house (we hear Lady Macbeth's cavatina at that point).[19] But in the main the elisions in the music do not synchronize with the subdivisions of the visual sequence. The artificiality and arbitrariness of the temporal compression is made palpable. Most significantly, finally, the inability to shoot any footage of the onstage action, perhaps in compliance with house rules, is repackaged by the director as the deliberate indeed striking choice to leave the performance offscreen for the entire duration of the sequence.[20] After all, the true theatre of the action is the area offstage.

5 *Senso* (1954): *Il trovatore*, Act III, Scene 2; Act IV, Scene 1 (Teatro la Fenice, Venice)

5.1 The Audience, Onstage

In recasting the stage not merely as secondary but indeed incidental, Bertolucci follows the example of a famous precedent: the performance of *Il trovatore* at La Fenice that marks the beginning of *Senso*. Visconti wastes no time in introducing the setting. As the beginning credits roll, we are inside the opera house, the scene between Leonora and Manrico that ends Act III already under way.[21] Manrico gets wind of Azucena's arrest and

18 In a 2005 interview, Adriana Asti says that Bertolucci deviated from the script and improvised new lines or an action as a matter of course. The point must also apply to dubbing. Marini observes that Bertolucci also recomposed the dialogue as heard in the cutting copy (Marini 2012, 205). The interview and the cutting copy are featured as bonus material in the 2023, Ripley's Home DVD video of the film. The interview can also be streamed on youtube at: `https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HYWRdoVVoD4`.

19 Giuggioli (2019, 23) also notes the sync-point, and reads it as a commentary on Gina via Verdi or better, Shakespeare. On the use of *Macbeth* as a source of allusions to the narrative of the film, see especially Kolker 1985, ch. 2. As my analysis makes, I hope, clear, I am not especially sanguine about any programmatic resonances between the music of the opera and the film's story if only because they implicitly posit that, first, the opera performance is merely a vehicle for plot lines and characterization and, second, that there is a degree of separation between the performance and the film proper (which the opera allegedly glosses from a position of epistemic distance). I rather view Stendhal's source novel, and especially his use of the opera house as a setting, as the more pertinent intertextual reference. On this, see Marini 2012, 186.

20 The film only shows the singers briefly as they take the bow at what is ostensibly the end of Act I. Judging their costumes more germane to a comic/popular opera, Marini suggests that Bertolucci is using images from yet another performance. On the basis of the cutting copy, he also observes that Bertolucci omitted two shots of the performance of *Macbeth*: the witches's sabbath at the beginning of Act I and Lady Macbeth's aria in "her fifth scene" [sic, 211]. It is more likely that the latter refers to the cavatina in Act I, scene 2.

21 Opening with an ending is a most effective means of beginning a story *in medias res*.

throws himself into a cabaletta ("Di quella pira…"). The film proper begins with the immediate aftermath, having the chorus brought the cabaletta to an end. Voices from the upper circle precipitate an explosion of patriotic, independentist fervour inside the theatre. The episode is not in Camillo Boito's short story which Visconti and Suso Cecchi-D'Amico used as the source for the screenplay. Nor is it reliant on recorded information. While not documented in the strict sense of the term, the episode is nevertheless verisimilar. We know from a wide range of sources that *Il trovatore*, and especially the cabaletta that ends Act III, did in fact play out as a thinly veiled call to arms during the third war of independence. Visconti himself says as much in an interview for a French television program devoted to Maria Callas.[22] A heart-felt homage, the interview also provides an explanation for the choice of placing Contessa Serpieri (Alida Valli) in a box to the side and slightly behind the line of the proscenium. The unusual vantage point was one Visconti knew all too well. There, on 23 February 1953, he had attended a performance of *Il trovatore* with Callas cast as Leonora. Visconti recalls how, at the beginning of Act IV, he saw Callas emerge from the backstage in profile and walk toward the proscenium against the penumbra of the silent crowd. The roles temporarily reversed, he felt as if he were onstage whereas the singer was offstage.[23]

5.2 One Hundred and Eighty Degrees

What Visconti does not address in that interview is the remarkable technical feat that underpins the credits. In one long, unedited shot, the camera advances from above the stalls toward the proscenium only to rotate almost one hundred and eighty degrees on its axis and eventually show the audience (as if the latter were its true target). The camera movement is the brilliant visual manifestation of the process of drawing an analogy between the opera stage and the area offstage. It is obvious that the cinematic recreation of an opera performance had a galvanizing effect. Visconti and his team must have been enthralled with the then recently restored Teatro La Fenice and the potential the interior offered for visual compositions of the most audacious kind **[fig. 3]**.[24]

22 *Conversations avec Maria Callas*, with Maria Callas, Pierre Desgraupes, and Luchino Visconti, ORTF (20 April 1969).

23 Visconti's tale is corroborated, albeit in slightly different terms, by an anecdote told by Franco Zeffirelli (1954).

24 As if to corroborate Balázs's idea of the opera film as historical record, when La Fenice burned down in 1996, the images of *Senso* were used as evidence during the restoration.

Figure 3 *Senso* (1954). An audacious view of the Teatro la Fenice

Also compelling are the subtler signs of the impact of cinema-specific techniques in Visconti's rewriting of *Il trovatore*. For example, the framing of the transition between the tempo di mezzo and the cabaletta expedites the exit of Leonora and with it the demise of the Act III finale's romantic interest.[25] Most innovative, perhaps, is Visconti's choice to use opera, that most artificial and cumbersome of art forms, to establish not merely a realist but for the time shockingly quasi-documentary register. The director's interest in the reality of musical performance is most apparent at the beginning of Act IV. The aptly chosen length of the shot, nicely calibrated sound perspective, and carefully rendered impression of the hush descending upon the audience following the climax of the previous act finale draws us into the space of La Fenice with the force of an illusionist's trick. We almost hear the murmuring of the audience in the house and the rubbing of their clothes against the velvet of their seats. It's a moment of almost Bazinian adherence to the doctrine of cinema as the trace of the real. This precedent sets an impossibly high standard of realism that the film will in vain attempt to replicate in the gritty shots sets in Venice's dirty back alleys, the battle of Custoza, or the execution of Franz Mahler.[26]

25 Leonora remains in fact onstage during Manrico's cabaletta but we cannot see her as she remains offscreen until, near the end of the number, an aerial shot shows the choir stepping onto the stage.

26 On the glossiness of the battle scenes, see Rondolino 1981, 305-6. Needless to say, my reading also runs counter to a long critical consensus according to which the opening sequence imbues the remainder of *Senso* with an alleged operatic quality. After the operatic preamble, the film changes register entirely and morphs into a romantic melodrama in the Ophulsean and Sirkean tradition (as is also reflected in the use of Bruckner in the soundtrack).

5.3 *Coup de théâtre*

With the benefit of hindsight, we know the performance to be a set up for the riot of the patriots positioned in the upper circle. Yet this is only subtly hinted at in the course of the sequence. We, the film audience, are not in on the plot until very late. Like the cut to Joe idling about in his mother's changing room in *La luna*, the outcome of the elaborate opening of *Senso* is meant to come across as a surprise that causes an adjustment: the realization that we had been looking at the opera under one aspect, aligned with the slightly detached or worse clueless Austrian officers, perhaps, whereas a whole other section of the audience was engaging with the same performance under a different aspect. To this audience, the finale of Act III was like a stopwatch marking the time remaining before the two short speeches and the throwing of leaflets. It is a classic instance of a *reversal*, one that brings the swapping of roles between on- and offstage, respectively, to its ultimate fulfilment. But it is also a not-so-veiled address to us, the film spectators, and the role of our horizon of expectations in shaping the scripts that underpin *the performance of cinema*.

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Remediating Opera
Crossing and Encounters Between Film and Music Studies
edited by Chiara Casarin and Laura Cesaro

Symphonies of Labour: Opera Traces Inside and Outside the Walls of the Factory

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Abstract This contribution intends to investigate how the investigative cinema of the 1960s and 1970s reinterprets melodrama in a radical way, taking it on as the main dramaturgical modality: for its aesthetics as a symbol of a culture, of a landscape; for its being a mass genre (in the century of mass communication); for its assumption of performance, of the register of representation, as the constitutive ontological principle of the device. The form of remediation enacted gives shape to a trace, according to the Derridean reading.

Keywords Labour. Trace. Derrida. Italian cinema. Dialogism.

Summary 1 Dialogism and Remediation: Towards a Stratified Media Experience. – 2 Textual Contamination: Opera and the Stratified Trace. – 3 Listening to Labour: Operatic Intrusions in the Soundscape of the Factory.

The collective intonation of the great Risorgimento hit *Va', pensiero* by both the common people and the police, the exploited and the oppressors; Manrico's *aria* and the chorus of armed men calling out "all'armi! all'armi" and the gallery of the *Fenice* erupting in collective patriotic enthusiasm: these two scenes taken from *Casa Ricordi* (1954) by Carmine Gallone, and *Senso* (1954) by Luchino Visconti are just two of the most cited examples of a tendency in Italian cinema to draw on opera, and particularly on Verdi's works, to narrate about communities with melodramatic register (cf. Verona 2016, 307-27). These are communities that, paraphrasing a successful work by Thomas Elsaesser, tell of 'noise and fury' in response to the shocks of modernity in the second half of the last century (Singer 2001). Intuition that finds ample scope in the seminal work of Peter Brooks (1976) to which we refer. Historical, political and cultural upheavals affected, according to Brooks, the very function of the melodramatic imagination, which is here intended as an aesthetic horizon for negotiating the anxieties of the time as much as the hopes of an era. The lens that is applied in the following analysis with respect to the valorisation of the individual sphere, of the ethical, but also psychological-emotional drama of the individual, refers to this intuition.

Edizioni Ca'Foscari
The Future Contemporary 3
e-ISSN 2785-0986
ISBN [ebook] 978-88-6969-911-5
Peer review | Open access
Submitted 2024-12-02 | Accepted 2025-01-14 | Published 2025-10-22
© 2025 Cesaro | 4.0
DOI 10.30687/978-88-6969-911-5/005

The kind of cinema attending to such a socio-historical scenario, as Lorenzo Marmo reminds us, narrates amongst others the disparity between the individual's position and the forces that oppress them. It does so by emphasising codes of excess to convey the repressed energy which cannot find an outcome due to the unequal struggle in which its protagonists – especially as a group – are involved. An aspect that emerges from a mapping of such stylistic excesses in Italian cinema of this period is undoubtedly the recourse to lyrical melodrama, particularly that of the composer from Parma. He is given a prominent place, finding in his works a strong 'Risorgimento' reference, serving as a sound commentary on a universe in which the outcomes of individual trajectories are no longer *a priori* guaranteed by the positioning of individuals and groups within the social structure. Instead, they arise from their moral and emotional conduct. This tendency is often presented as an intent to underscore a strong patriotic sentiment, recognising in operatic traces a heroic and libertarian significance. One might consider the studies by Carlotta Sorba (2015), who reflects on the role of melodramatic imagination in the formation of the Italian national sentiment, and analyses the transmedial dimension of the Risorgimento. She concludes that it is possible to find a central element of discourses and experiences regarding the sacrifice for collective freedom in the melodramatic mode, an especially the commentary – also proposed by films – on representative characters of an oppressed Italy, both politically and economically.

However, upon further analysis of the selection of case studies, we tend to align with what Daniela Goldin Folena has rather pointed out. In relation to opera, in particular the texts of Arrigo Boito and the music of Giuseppe Verdi, she treats it like "the symbol of a culture, of a landscape" (Goldin Folena 2013, 23), based not on didactic traits but on rhetorical affinities.

Starting with the study conducted for the filing and metadata of the files of the Italian film censorship archive from 1944 to 2021,[1] it emerges how this rhetoric seems to intensify in the 1960s and 1970s. The Opera becomes a preponderant tool for 'rebellious authors' – think of the filmography of Marco Bellocchio (cf. Verona 2016, 229) and Bernardo Bertolucci (187) among others – to narrate the disruptive charge of the conflict with the shared middle-class conscience; a cinema of denunciation against the culture of the past, based on the assumption that Massimo Mila succinctly summarises by stating that there is much of Verdi

> in the fabric of our common consciousness of Italians. […] Verdi as the father, even if today we feel he is so different from us, or rather, precisely because today we feel he is so different from us, of that chronological diversity of customs that accompanies the passage of generations and alienates children from the ideals of their fathers. (Mila 2012, 82)

1 We refer to a project within the framework of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), *Mission 4 "Education and Research" – Component 2 "From Research to Business" – Investment 1.3, Extended Partnership "Changes", theme" 5. Humanities and Cultural Heritage as Laboratories of Innovation and Creativity"*, identification code PE_00000020 (CUP n. H53C22000850006), PNRR CHANGES – Cultural Heritage Active Innovation for Sustainable Society, Spoke 2. The database can be accessed at the following link: `https://filmcensorship.changes.unimi.it/index.php`.

An unprecedented attack is being launched against Verdi, who is considered both a symbol of a national identity and an emblem of a stale bourgeoisie, a remnant of the past from which we feel ensnared and from which it is necessary to free ourselves. This culminates in a desire for revolution against the withered and the faded, taking the shape of an unnecessary burden of a past that must be eliminated, of which the melodrama is a bearer: this is perfectly represented by director, Marco Bellocchio, in his debut film *I Pugni in Tasca* (1965). We refer to the continuous staging of death through exaggerated acting, typical of melodrama, and in particular to the last sequence of the film: Ale, after having exalted himself listening to the finale of the first act of *La Traviata*. The soprano's joyous high notes overwhelm the protagonist in the throes of an epileptic fit: in the last scene, we see his motionless body on the ground and the record player continuing to turn.

This film is paradigmatic of a kind of productions, where the blending of genres is not merely a reference but encourages the creative *mise-en-scène* towards figures of discourse that open up a horizon of thought able to raise critical inquiry, in terms of denunciation (about yesterday as well as today). The choice has been made to shape the theoretical interlude through non-canonical audiovisual texts in the study of opera in cinema of the 1970s. These are productions that find their place in an Italy – primarily in the North – punctuated by political and social demands, where opera, alongside the filmic image, serves as a trace, as we anticipate, to reflect on the sense of belonging.

In this essay, we want to suggest that associating melodrama with the imagery of conflict from the 1970s allows to frame the narrative of work as an element able to reflect gender dynamics as well as social expectations of that period. This connection highlights how these dynamics influence the experiences and identities of the characters. Through melodrama, in other words, the representation of work becomes a means to address issues of masculine and feminine identity, revealing the complexities of interactions between professional life and personal relationships. In this context, melodrama not only amplifies social tensions but also serves as a critical reflection on the expectations and roles that define the era.

Moving from these premises, in what follows we will seek for some structuring tendencies, which could be useful in better orienting an informed reading of the corpus in relation to the symbolic nexus labour/opera.

1 Dialogism and Remediation: Towards a Stratified Media Experience

As Mariapia Comand reminds us, the osmotic relationship between different media allows, from a semiotic perspective, a dual or even multiple codification of the entire text: the dialogic play characterises the text at the level of signs (Comand 2001, 29). Let us therefore attempt, before proceeding, to borrow Comand's methodological suggestion and read this osmotic embedding through Bachtinian dialogism. Firstly, it is worth reminding that Bachtin highlights how the conscious or unconscious reference to another's word is not at all neutral, on the contrary, it activates a reciprocal influence with the discourse that frames it. This is not a "mechanical contact", but rather a "chemical combination" that unfolds on a semantic and expressive level

(Bachtin [1975] 2001, 148). The dialogism does not ask us to philologically uncover the precise source underlying a word or a mechanical discourse, but rather to certify that the dialogic encounter gives rise to a transformation and a mutual exchange, prompting us to undertake a rhizomatic journey, exploring what the processes and effects may be. The Russian linguist indeed speaks of stratification (Bachtin [1975] 2001, 119). We must be aware that we cannot isolate utterances from their originating environment, as "every word has the aroma of the context and the contexts in which it has lived its life full of social tension; all words and all forms are inhabited by intentions". Consequently, in the game of embeddings, we must bear in mind that every segment "is not a neutral medium, which easily passes into the intentional ownership of the speaker" (Bachtin [1975] 2001, 101).

In our path, therefore, we must always remember that no word exists in isolation from others and from its social context, as it always retains signs of the other, even of those who may have used it previously. Since there are no isolated utterances separate from others, two concomitant operations become active, namely one of extraction and the other of embedding. To delve further into understanding our field of investigation, let us try to intersect the reading of the utterance with that of the media.

When it comes to the media, we take as a starting point the binary evoked by Bolter and Grusin: the pole of transparent immediacy – namely, the desire to create media that provide the illusion of immediate access to reality and thus present themselves as transparent, ideally tending to disappear, not to be noticed– and the pole of ipermediation, the pleasure derived from the compliant encounter of increasingly sophisticated mediation and therefore with media that, instead of dissolving into transparency, become opaque and invite our gaze to linger on their very functioning. This dual pattern can also be taken up in our study.

The blending of dialogism and remediation lies precisely in the response that Francesco Casetti (2012) gives when he speaks of relocation, where he centres the analysis of media not so much on devices and techniques, but on the type of experience they propose regardless of where this unfolds. This exercise invites us to read the fusion by tracing the passages of transposition, of shifting, the migration towards other devices, other spaces, other contexts of the above-mentioned "chemical reaction". Applying this to the intermingling we examined, a process emerges. The latter is not unidirectionally oriented along a linear trajectory, on the contrary, it is bi-directional, in so far as both types of text are enriched: in this form of remediation, the text proper becomes less relevant and the emphasis is placed on experience, a territory that is complex and stratified by definition. We are aware of the existence of a vocabulary that is not yet fully shared regarding the activation, or rather, the questioning of cinema in relation to melodrama: scholars speak of citation, reference and presence. Labels that do not seem to us to fully represent the works that fall into the category of remediation outlined here.

It is thinking of this incorporation as *trace* that seems to us, instead, could allow us to raise stimulating inquiries as well as aid in a categorisation of practices. The trace is not referring as a product (musical trace, for example): here we identify trace as a process. In this way, it thus semantically carries the idea of a movement that is inherent in the etymology of the noun: *tractiare*, derived from *tractus*, the past participle of *trahĕre* 'to draw'.

We therefore understand trace as an act that activates the production of meaning to describe and outline in a synthetic way with respect to the whole. This is not a system but rather, as Derrida reminds us, "an open strategic apparatus, upon its own abyss […] a non-closed, non-closable, and not entirely formalizable set of rules for reading, interpretation, writing" (Derrida 1990, 446). The second aspect of interest: this is an incisive action. In *De la grammatologie* (Derrida 1967), the French philosopher justifies the choice of *trace* recognizing in it the specific function of presenting thought with a temporality removed from the dominance of the present. It is a movement that cannot occur in the fullness of a here and now, as it endows the alterity of a past that has never been and yet can never be experienced in the form, original or modified, of presence. These traces seem to carry the weight of memory: they transmit a complex structure.

And it is precisely this complex structure that characterizes the representation of the figure of the worker. A structure that becomes an articulated site of narration – both with regard to cultural identities and in relation to sociopolitical tensions – within the corpus of films we are referring to. A structure that emerges from the work relocated by cinema.

2 Textual Contamination: Opera and the Stratified Trace

Applying this interpretation to the field under investigation here, the trace leads us to consider that the textuality we are examining induces us not to distinguish between the two-source text, as they become one and the same. The text taken from musical theatre will not appear as a foreign body with respect to the rest of the film (or vice versa); especially if it manifests in the form of a sung text. It takes the shape of an 'intrusion' and it is never neutral. We can further build up on this thanks to the important contribution by Giulia Carluccio and Federica Villa, according to whom we can only attribute "a new and important function to the spectator, who is called upon to activate explicit and implicit relationships" (Carluccio, Villa 2006, 19), since the organisation of the word imprints itself in all its semantic layers, complicating its expression and influencing its entire stylistic physiognomy. The reference to opera thus invokes the spectator's competencies, who is repeatedly called to undertake a hermeneutic task on the text, thereby becoming an active principle of interpretation: the use of what we would like to term a *pre-existing musical trace* and the degree of understanding of the metalinguistic function of the utterance, lead us to identify two types of traces.

The first trace pertains the level of meaning. The spectator recognises in that chemical mixture an extratextual context, that is, the belonging of the musical piece to a given cultural world, to a recognisable atmosphere to the spectator-listener. Let us rehearse this point, which we find of particular significance: even where there might be a completely ignorant spectator, unable to fully contextualise what they hear, we believe that the operatic intervention, through the profound linguistic shift it establishes within a

film, produces meaning (cf. Verona 2016, 32).[2] We might call such a meaning 'superficial', or better, a commentary within the diegesis. The spectator, in this sense, is not required to identify either the composer of the music, the opera in question, or even the precise dramatic moment: what matters is the fracture between cinematic narration and its immediate recognition as generic 'lyrical music' (cf. Verona 2016, 32).

However, opera theatre presents levels of complexity in that not only it encourages to investigate linguistic sedimentations, but also to look into the various narrative and dramatic implications. This is why the second type of trace we propose to identify is a stratified level in which the evolution of the narrative, and therefore the situational definition of the story, can be found in the intratextual reference. The trace thus leads us to break away from the idea of an autonomous, isolated text in favour of complex textualities, which, however – and here lies the importance of Derridian concept of trace – undergo an unstoppable process of transformation; and it is precisely in this significant movement that both the source text and the arriving text are enriched. This trace, in its dialogic bearing, becomes such only in the presence of someone capable of grasping and deciphering it, otherwise, it would not exist and would remain a textually inert reference. The melodramatic fragment can open up horizons that refer to both a historical and dramatic perspective. Let us therefore attempt to dissolve the distinction through the analysis of some chosen cases.

3 Listening to Labour: Operatic Intrusions in the Soundscape of the Factory

In 1968 and during the 'hot autumn' of 1969, the theme of industrial labour assumes an unusual centrality in the public sphere: the spread of discourses on labour rights, as Lorenzo Marmo reminds us, translates into a new attention to the concrete physical experience of the worker (Marmo 2018, 52). Among the many audiovisual texts, including those outlined in the prologue, Elio Petri's thought is certainly symptomatic of this attention. While in some of his works the emphasis is subtle, it is central in a piece that we could still define as current: *La classe operaia va in paradiso* (1971). The film, almost shockingly in some respects, is a true tribute to the body of the worker, subjected to the inhumane and repetitive rhythms of the factory. The protagonist of the film, Lulù Massa (Gian Maria Volonté), initially identifies with his role as a producer of goods: the iconic sequence, one of the first, in which the protagonist articulates his condition, offers a comparison between the functioning of the factory where he works and that of his own body, calling it "una fabbrica di merda" – the epithet he reserves for the two elements in dialogue: two factories producing waste and superfluous items – remember that the man declares his digestion and sexual appetite irreparably compromised; yet both are factories that produce goods.

After a workplace accident, Lulù changes his attitude and puts his keen intelligence at the service of workers' rights. He is portrayed with immense

2 It should be emphasized that this work stems from a close engagement with the doctoral theses of Dr. Francesco Verona and Dr. Lorenzo Marmo, works that have been partly published and partly – unfortunately – not yet published.

neurotic energy (both before and after his transformation) by Volonté. At the same time, the film's grotesque excess is actually functional to a lucid analysis of the complex interactions between workers, unions, and the student movement, where cultural distances and dynamics of idealisation seem to hinder fruitful collaboration in the struggle for the right to health. The film thus concludes with the image of a dead end: reinstated after being fired, Lulù finds himself demoted back to the assembly line, and in the final scene – amid the deafening noise of the machines – he recounts to his coworkers the dream of overcoming a tall wall and entering paradise.

Petri's cinematic vision makes the industrial worker the crucial figure for "a conflictual modernisation of society". And it does so with a dramatic and aesthetic foundation that is, we suggest, absolutely unparalleled. The frenetic, neurotic montages – this is the second chapter of the neurosis trilogy –[3] incorporate the dynamic energies of production rhythms, cutting from close-ups of the industry's functioning to Lulù's concentration on his operations within it. Alongside Ruggero Mastroianni's editing work, it is undoubtedly the rhythm of the sound commentary crafted by Ennio Morricone that prevails.

The strike sequence and the arguing with his wife following it is a case in point. Lulù has already lost a finger. Once appreciated by his superiors, he has become one of the instigators of worker unrest. He participates in workers' struggles, becoming the right hand of disorder in front of the factory: he becomes aware of his own alienation and considers his life miserable, thus aligning himself against what he sees as the blackmail of piecework, and joining the radical demands of students and some factory workers, in contrast to the more moderate positions of the unions. Following a union strike and a destructive clash with the police, he retreats home with some comrades. But if the body of the worker and the man are one, then the turmoil of the factory also translates into the home, via Lidia (Mariangela Melato). After a gesture in which the man accuses the woman of being fake (he gestures to remove her wig), she rebels against his remarks: "Workers! But this one is useless. I know workers, more than communism!" When he asks her to go buy eggs, thus assuming housewife duties, she adds, "There you go, your communism".

With her words, the triumphant march from Verdi's *Aida* begins. The *Marcia Trionfale* from Verdi's *Aida* is one of the most famous and spectacular moments of the opera, and it appears in the second act during the triumphant return of the Egyptian army, which has won against the Ethiopians. The narrative context concerns the moment when the victorious leader Radamès returns home with the prisoners and is received with great honour by the Egyptian court. The scene takes place in a large ceremonial space. Radamès enters with his army, accompanied by the Ethiopian prisoners, and is welcomed by the Egyptian court in a triumph of applause and salutations. The *Marcia Trionfale* is one of Verdi's most powerful and solemn compositions, and it is built with a grandeur that reflects the military

3 Elio Petri, in the early 1970s, began working on what is recognized as the "trilogy of neurosis": *Indagine su un cittadino al di sopra di ogni sospetto* (1970), *La classe operaia va in paradiso* (1971) and *La proprietà non è più un furto* (1973). The director explores a different aspect in each film: the obsessive need for control and dominance (i), existential struggles related to work and identity (ii), and the impact of wealth and the desire for money (iii). These films offer a comprehensive exploration of how social forces influence the lives of the characters, illustrating how power, work, and money shape and sometimes distort human experience.

triumph. The march opens with an imposing orchestral theme that evokes a sense of solemnity and power. It is characterized by the massive use of percussion, brass, and woodwinds, creating an atmosphere of magnificence. The music is marked by a regular, strong rhythm that simulates the step of marching troops. The orchestration is rich and majestic, with wide brass sections (especially trumpets and trombones) emphasizing the solemnity and honour of the moment. The brass, with their full and triumphant tones, are used to underline the sense of victory and triumph. The choral part is equally significant, with the choir entering to support the march, amplifying the solemn and celebratory character of the event.

There is no victory or triumph for the protagonists in Petri's film. Lidia continues her attack against the apathy of her comrades: "And if you come to power, what will you do? Without the bosses, what would you be? A starving beggar!". And then her comrades urge her to be quiet, not to speak. The overlap of narrative timelines seemingly has no connection. On one hand, Verdi's synopsis tells of a victory – that of the Egyptian people over the Ethiopian people – and the glories and honours reserved to the commander Radamès at the start of the second scene of the second act. On the other, Petri's female character tries to bring forth her voice, in direct contrast to that of the majority, only to be immediately silenced.

Reminiscent of Derrida's perspective as we outlined above, we shall suggest that the trace featuring the sequence, should not be read as a tangle but as a space for action, one that reminds and compels the subject to respond to the situation in which they find themselves:

> the absolute difference of the immemorial past of a trace so conceived does not, therefore, lead to the oblivion of indifference, nor does it drive toward meaninglessness, but rather incites or opens up […] to a non-indifference to this difference. (Petrosino 2010, 10)

In our case study, Petri's choice seems to take on a symbolic value to the viewer: against the immobilisation and narcotised stupor of the guests, against a flat narration of the revolutionaries' habits, the triumphant march – recognisable even to those unfamiliar with it – signals to the viewer the need for an element of disruption. In summary, in Petri, the *Marcia Trionfale* is not a piece of great visual and sonic impact, but it also serves to highlight the suffering of the protagonist, making tangible the dramatic intensity of the moment.

Of a completely different intent is Lina Wertmüller's use of opera in her storytelling,[4] as seen in many of her films, where the intersection between private and public life is constant, often featuring romantic inserts. Many examples could be cited, but the very first film that showcases this is *Mimì metallurgico ferito nell'onore* (1972). The title is self-explanatory: on the one

4 The director has not only staged several operatic productions, including *Carmen* and *La bohème*, but she often enriches her films with clear operatic references, which become particularly evident when they create a true sonic tapestry that accompanies the images. Lina Wertmüller's extensive filmography represents a valuable case, still to be explored, for approaching the presence of opera in Italian cinema.

hand, it defines the young Carmelo 'Mimì' Mardocheo [5] as a metalworker ('metallurgico'); on the other, it characterises him as being wounded in his 'honour' ('ferito nell'onore'). This reflects the values inherent in (Southern) Italy patriarchal structures. The protagonist is a Sicilian man who arrives in the North, in the grim city of Turin, in search of work. His first encounter with the city is marked by the sinister sadness that characterises the orchestral introducing the fourth part of *Il Trovatore*. The punctuating bassoons vividly describe the man's new condition, accentuated by a shift in perspective, landscape, and hues: from the warm colours of the south to a photograph tinted in greys and leaden tones (cf. Verona 2016, 33).

Mimì finds himself at a crossroads. While this initial movement might tempt us to interpret it as a signifying trace, the words of Ruiz upon arriving with Leonora at Aliaferia resonate: "We have arrived; here is the tower where the prisoners groan…". The overlap between the two narratives is strong. The eye of the camera – Ruiz's double – guides the viewer/Leonora to meet Manrico, imprisoned in the castle and ready to be executed the next day. Like Manrico, Mimì is alone, imprisoned, with vehicles obscuring his body multiple times, and the wide shots alternating with closer ones: thus, the escape to the big city is ominously characterised from the start. A foreboding negativity hangs in the air. By paying attention to the commentary verse – even without knowing the entire Verdian work – the director signals to the viewer that the melodrama will not merely serve as accompaniment; it manifests as an artificial construct.

The film presents a construction that indeed takes on the traits of an illustrative commentary but, at a higher level of interpretation, is simultaneously able to "taking on the interiorised emotions of the characters, thereby conveying messages that are less direct but still coherent with the generating sources" (Miceli 2009, 651). This constitutes a use of the operatic text in a somewhat uncritical manner.

As seen with the use of the *preludio* from *La Traviata* which supports the narrative of the love story at several moments: it serves as a sound glue for the romantic skirmishes of the two lovers, Mimì and Fiore, characterised by rapprochement followed by abrupt separations (Verona 2016, 34). It is precisely the romantic entanglement of Violetta and Alfredo, made up of meetings and partings. As the film progresses, this harmony between narrative demands and their corresponding atmospheres intensifies, presenting the stylistic hallmark that Miceli labels as the narrative "livello critico esterno" (2009, 652). This is understood as commentary "with discordant solutions generating… a semantic short circuit that negates the viewer's expectations, prompting them to take on an active, interpretive role" (652). Here emerges a layered understanding of the mechanisms employed by the director, which involves a substantial use of certain famous passages from *La Traviata*. We can only highlight the celebrated "Libiam ne' lieti calici", pleonastically underscoring the cheers at Mimì and Fiore's

5 The first dialogue between Mimì and Fiore is marked by a clear reference to a duet from *La bohème*: when the woman asks the man what his name is, he replies, "Mardocheo Carmelo, but my friends call me Mimì", to which Fiore, unable to contain her surprise and amusement, retorts, "Then you should call yourself Lucia". Wertmüller's intent is not to parody Puccini's opera, but to create, through a misunderstanding born from the man's ignorance, a play of misinterpretations typical of comedy: in fact, Mimì, not grasping the reference, is offended to see his Sicilian virility mocked and belittled (cf. Verona 2016, 110).

son's baptism; then "Sempre libera degg'io" echoes during the couple's first encounter; and finally "Ah! tutto, tutto finì, or tutto, tutto finì" from "Addio del passato" comments on the film's concluding sequence that seals the definitive separation between the two lovers (Verona 2016, 33). The clear reference to a bourgeois context, juxtaposed with the precarious images of the two protagonists' domestic environment, serves as a denunciatory commentary, driving the encounter between the two characters. The same purpose is reserved for the Prelude of the third act when the two lovers spend their first night together: the music begins with the sorrowful *pizzicati*, then interrupts before the trill of the violins, on a close-up of Fiore (Verona 2016, 34-5). The physical pleasure is inextricably linked to Violetta's illness and the suffering brought on by her condition. While the semantic level may seem asynchronous, the continuation of the narrative leads us to reread this as an act of refined skill on Wertmüller's part: the pleasure experienced by Fiore is, in fact, nothing else than the doorway to a painful journey that will lead her to suffer in solitude, much like the courtesan character. The piece evokes the poetry and seduction exerted by a life of violent and dramatic contrasts, joy, frequent vicissitudes and continuous excitement. Precisely because it is an open strategic apparatus, the trace used by Wertmüller allows for numerous in-depth interpretations, ranging from context analysis to the psychology of the characters. Each possible scenario within this dynamic terrain can only coincide with the subject's experience.

Whether it is semiosis for purely expository purposes, or a diachronic approach focused on textual genealogy, the encounter and clash between foreign, diverse objects inevitably brings to mind, time and again, this overlap we have called a trace – a protean textuality. By 'protean' we mean that the trace, living as much in presence as in absence, can produce diverse forms; through these different outcomes, it allows us, each time, to better savour hidden facets, to write and fix latent instances. In doing so, it will never annul the base element, which, in the space of mediated relocation, will continue to fully live out its most intrinsic identity. In forms still awaiting exploration.

Mod. 129 (A)

REPUBBLICA ITALIANA

MINISTERO DEL TURISMO E DELLO SPETTACOLO

DIREZIONE GENERALE DELLO SPETTACOLO

Domanda di revisione

59798

16 FEB. 1972

Il sottoscritto AURELIO ROSSI residente a ROMA

Via le Rossini, 7 legale rappresentante della Ditta

EURO INTERNATIONAL FILMS S.p.A.

Tel. 872841 con sede a Roma domanda, in nome e per conto della Ditta stessa,

la revisione della pellicola dal titolo: MIMI' METALLURGICO FERITO NELL'ONORE

di nazionalità: Italiana produzione: "EURO INTERNATIONAL FILMS S.p.A."

dichiarando che la pellicola stessa viene per la prima volta sottoposta alla revisione.

Lunghezza dichiarata metri ..... accertata metri 3294 [illegible] 17 mt. [illegible] 3277

Roma, li 14 FEB. 1972 p.p. EURO INTERNATIONAL FILMS - S.p.A.

NAZIONALE

DESCRIZIONE DEL SOGGETTO

Regia: Lina wertmuller
Interpreti: Giancarlo Giannini, Mariangela Melato, Turi Ferro, Luigi Diberti.

Carmelo Mardocheo, sottoproletariato siciliano, decide di votare senza obbedire agli ordini della mafia locale. E la mafia onniscente lo costringe ad emigrare a Torino. Nel Nord dopo traumatizzanti esperienze nel giro cottimista dei mafiosi, riesce ad entrare in una grande fabbrica. Diventato metallurgico e sindacalista s'innamora di Fiore con cui mette su una seconda famiglia. Rosalia, la moglie trascurata, durante l'assenza del marito subisce graduali cambiamenti divenendo una donna moderna. Carmelo e Fiore hanno un bambino. Il giorno del battesimo, nel caffè dove stanno festeggiando il lieto evento succede un regolamento di conti tra mafiosi. Carmelo si salva per miracolo ma per paura non rivela alla polizia il nome del mafioso, che è lo stesso che lui incontrò al suo arrivo a Torino. Da Torino,Carmelo viene trasferito a Catania a pochi chilometri da casa portando con sé Fiore con il bambino. Il menage di Carmelo tra le due famiglie ha però breve durata. Rosalia colpita dalla freddezza e dall'indifferenza del marito, allaccia una relazione con Amilcare Finocchiaro, brigadiere di finanza con moglie e 5 figli. Durante una concitata spiegazione Rosalia confessa a Carmelo di aspettare un figlio dall'altro. Carmelo studia una sua vendetta: corteggia e seduce la grassa moglie di Amilcare, e poi quando lei gli ha ceduto, le confessa le sue intenzioni di vendetta. La mette incinta, poi pubblicamente comunica al paese lo scandalo. Una domenica mattina, sulla piazza principale, davanti alla chiesa, fa la scena madre. Amilcare che è armato reagisce ed un Killer, che la mafia ha messo alle calcagna di Carmelo con il compito di sorvegliarlo, lo uccide, lasciando però la pistola nelle mani di Carmelo che viene così incriminato ed arrestato. All'uscita del carcere, ritrova le tre famiglie ad aspettarlo. Carmelo è terrorizzato e vorrebbe rientrare in carcere, ma alla fine accetta di far parte del giro mafioso e di non combattere più lo stato di cose che all'inizio lo aveva costretto ad allontanarsi dal suo paese.

Direzione Generale CINEMA e AUDIOVISIVO

Titoli di testa:

La Euro International Films presenta (marchio) - un film di Lina Wertmuller — prodotto da Daniele Senatore e Romano Cardarelli per la Euro International films - Giancarlo Giannini in - Mimi' Metallurgico ferito nell'onore - con: Mariangela Melato - Agostina Belli - Luigi Diberti - Elena Fiore - Tuccio Musumeci Ignazio Pappalardo Rosaria Rapisarda - Umberto Lentini Salvatore Savasta Andrea Maugeri Salvatore Centamore Sara Micalizzi Antonia Micalizzi Ottorino Russo Francesco Pellegrino Gianfranco Barra Giovanni Cori Giovanni Pulone C.S.C CLAudio Trionfi C.S.C. - e con la partecipazione straordinaria di Turi Ferro - Operatore alla macchina Blasco Giurato Assistente Operatore Giancarlo Martella Fotografo di scena Antonio Benetti Aiuto Regista Giovanni Arduini Assistente alla regia Sergio Mazio Segretario di edizione Giovanni Siragusa - Ispettori di Produzione Paolo Gargano Hermes Gallippi Amm/re Cassiere Antonio Mastronardi Assistente Montatore Pierluigi Leonardi Aiuto Montatore Luigi Zita Ufficio Stampa Nella Garozzo Capo Truccatore Michele Trimarchi Capo Parrucchiera Rosa Luciani I° Truccatore Alfredo Tiberi I° Parrucchiera Marisa Centanni Fonico Mario Bramonti Microfonista Giulio Viggiani Mixage Franco Bassi - Scenografo Amedeo Fago Arredatore Emilio Baldelli Si ringraziano i Sigg.ri Gino Persico e EFI KOUNELLIS per la collaborazione ai costumi - I costumi della Sig.na Mariangela Melato sono stati disegnati da Enrico Job - Alcune scene sono state girate presso: Stabilimento Fiorentini di Roma Stabilimento "La Milanese" di Carbone S;p.A. Catania S.N.T. F.lli Gondrand - Catania Negativi Eastmancolor sviluppo e stampa Technochrome - Teatri di posa Stabilimento De Paolis Attrezzature Tecniche ONIA Costumi G.P.11 Parrucche Rocchetti Carboni Registrazione sonora Fono Roma - Soggetto e sceneggiatura Lina Wertmuller - Montaggio Franco Fraticelli - Musica Piero Piccioni edizioni musicali Bixio Sam - Direttore della fotografia Dario Di Palma - Regia di Lina Wertmuller -

La V^ Sezione della Commissione di Revisione Cinematografica revisionato il film il 17.2.1972, ed ascoltato, come da richiesta, i rappresentanti della Ditta interessata, preso atto che i medesimi si sono impegnati ad effettuare al film stesso le seguenti modifiche: a) alleggerimento della scena di Mimì a letto con la moglie; b) alleggerimento della scena di Mimì a letto con Fiore; esprime parere favorevole alla proiezione in pubblico senza limiti di età. La Commissione ha accertato l'avvenuta esecuzione dei tagli, per complessivi metri 17, il 18.2.1972.

Vista la legge 21 aprile 1962, n. 161;

Vista la ricevuta del versamento in conto corrente postale n. 241 dell'Ufficio Roma 6 intestato al Ricevitore del Registro di Roma per il pagamento della tassa di L. 84 670

SU CONFORME parere espresso dalla Commissione di revisione cinematografica di 1° grado

D E C R E T A

NULLA OSTA alla rappresentazione in pubblico del film Mimì metallurgico ferito nell'onore

a condizione di non modificare in guisa alcuna il titolo, i sottotitoli e le scritture della pellicola, di non sostituire i quadri e le scene relative, di non aggiungerne altre e di non alterarne, in qualsiasi modo, l'ordine senza autorizzazione del Ministero.

Ai fini esclusivi della revisione, se ne autorizza anche l'esportazione.

~~Questo film non è soggetto a revisione per l'esportazione~~.

Roma, li 19 FEB. 1972

IL MINISTRO

N. B. - Il presente modulo non è valido se non munito del timbro del Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo - Direzione Generale dello Spettacolo.

MAJONE – ROMA – RABELLA, 24 – 461817

Figures 1-3 Faldone 59798, *Mimì Metallurgico ferito nell'onore*, 16/02/1972. Direzione Generale Cinema e Audiovisivi, Roma, Archivio della censura cinematografica

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Remediating Opera
Crossing and Encounters Between Film and Music Studies
edited by Chiara Casarin and Laura Cesaro

Interview with Michal Grover-Friedlander

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Professor Michal Grover Friedlander is head of the Musicology Program at Tel Aviv University, and the director and artistic founder and manager of TA OPERA ZUTA specialising in contemporary opera, music theatre and collaborative projects. She has directed in Israel, Italy, Germany and Japan. She has written three books: *Vocal Apparitions: The Attraction of Cinema to Opera*; *Operatic Afterlives*; *Staging Voice*.

Besides several important articles, at least two of your books – *Vocal Apparitions: The Attraction of Cinema to Opera* and *Operatic Afterlives* – can be considered as real milestones regarding the theory of intermediality with specific reference to opera and film. Was there any specific theoretical or artistic work that inspired this research?

My research on opera and cinema has been spread out over many years, but if I think of my initial inspiration drawing me to the subject, it would have to be Carolyn Abbate and Stanley Cavell's writings and the film version of *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925) that starred Lon Chaney. Abbate's work brings out the uncanny nature of voice and singing in opera and shows how such strangeness becomes inherent to the medium as such. One aspect of this uncanniness is elaborated in Abbate's paradoxical claim establishing the presence in opera of 'unsung' voices, unheard song that sings itself and stands for the unattainable in song.

Cavell's ontology of opera has similarly influenced my formulations. It has informed notions such as opera's hovering between worlds; singing as a form of passage, an in-between; and the particular relationship between an operatic voice and the body as the voice's disembodiment within the body carrying it. Cavell's philosophical writings give a philosophical underpinning to the myth of Orpheus and singing's power to cross over to the other world in an attempt to bring back the dead. Cavell's interpretation of the power of singing to cross between worlds holds that singing is the power to revive this world, to show this world as transfigured. Singing has the power to revive the deadness of our world, opening it up to a higher significance.

Edizioni Ca'Foscari
The Future Contemporary 3
e-ISSN 2785-0986
ISBN [ebook] 978-88-6969-911-5
Open access
Submitted 2024-12-06 | Published 2025-10-22
© 2025 Cesaro | 4.0
DOI 10.30687/978-88-6969-911-5/006

With *The Phantom of the Opera*, I worked with the idea that in this silent film I can actually hear the operatic voice – but with my eyes, not my ears. This sensual mode of experiencing opera is quite intense, and it is no less "operatic" than what occurs when we listen to opera. The stylistic features, and predominantly the presentation of the figure of the phantom, the plot, and the filmed scenes from Gounod's opera *Faust*, make the film in fact feel more operatic than opera itself. I came to realize that relating to opera from the outside, as it were, through another medium, can elucidate what opera is all about. In a way, then, I was using film to understand opera.

In the project we are working on, we aim at focussing on under researched case studies that highlight nonetheless the influence of opera or operatic music on film music. Amongst other things, we deal with opera as a medium in relation with cinema as a medium too, which you also address in your writing. What are the points of encounter between the two media and what macro areas you believe is necessary to look into?

Opera today is very different from what it was a few decades ago, and as a result, the points of encounter with film have changed. Opera has become multimedial and employing the latest technological developments. Crucially, it is no longer necessarily defined by the presence of voice and thus doesn't rely so heavily on the auditory. I think it would be safe to say that, to a large extent, film features such as screens and modes of virtual reality are embedded within recent operatic works.

Take, for instance, Michel van der Aa's opera *After Life* (2005-06), or any of his operas for that matter. Van der Aa's style on the whole is hypermedial. He works with and through several media, being fascinated by the possibilities opened up by the questioning of boundaries, by intermedial slippage, passage, and diffusion. He rethinks oppositions, particularly those between the virtual and the real, the live and the virtual. In his aesthetics, audiovisual and musical material are integrated; sound, music, and image permeate one another; screen and stage flow in and out of one another; live music is integrated with prerecorded electronic sound. His experiments with new media and technologies of audiovisual reproduction and remediation have been transforming opera as a performing art and, obviously, bringing it in greater proximity to film.

Marina Abramovic's opera *7 Deaths of Maria Callas* (2020) is another example of reconfiguring the relationship between opera and film. Films screened on a large scale accompany the onstage singing of arias, the live singers dwarfed by the huge screen. In the compositional process, Callas's recordings of these arias were used to determine the length of the films. In the performance itself, Callas's singing was replaced by the performances of live singers. These singers, however, needed to learn to match their performances to Callas's in accordance with the length of the film. In other words: singing determines film, which then in turn comes to determine singing. Where does the operatic lie in this work? Where is the cinematic located?

There is, however, one scene in *7 Deaths of Maria Callas* in which we hear Callas' voice. Here there is no corresponding film. Callas's voice emerges from an onstage turntable. The curtain goes down, and Callas's voice, extracted from a recording, is reconnected to the live orchestra. Abramović steps in front of the curtain and gestures with her hands, mimicking Callas's

concert gestures. She abstains from lip-synching Callas's singing: her mouth is closed, her lips are sealed. It is not, though it could have been, a cinematic dubbing scene. The scene exemplifies, once again, the flexibility of the relation of the operatic to the cinematic.

Orlando (2018), by Julie Beauvais and Horace Lundd, is an opera that does not require the voice. The work's open score allows any musician to join in and perform at any given performance. There are seven large screens on which images of seven people named Orlando are simultaneously projected. The performance I attended during Opera Days Rotterdam in May 2019 had no musicians. All in all, there is no singing. *Orlando* is an example of a voiceless opera. In response to your question, then, I would be curious whether, and if so how, the merging of opera and cinema occurring in recent opera bears on the dialogue with cinema.

Using the term from the French philosopher Alain Badiou, who defines an "event" (1988; 1989) as something that causes a break in temporal continuity, producing the emergence of a new possible meaning, the voice in cinema often seems to play the role of an agent activating a discontinuous movement able to open up "the space of an event" in the narrative. In the dialogue between opera and film, if we consider more specifically voice and image, we could say that a clash between the two allows for the space of the event to emerge. Is this sense of a clash present in any way in your concept of 'Orphic death'? What does the visual element represent in your idea? Does it necessarily have a connotation in relation to the survival of the opera?

This is a very interesting angle to reflect on the meaning of 'Orphic death'. I am not sufficiently well versed in Badiou's writings but let me try to express the way I conceive of the 'other' temporality that is at play in the concept of Orphic death. To start with, there is no successive and continuous progression insofar as the Orphic moment is a crossing between worlds. As Cavell puts it: "Such a view will take singing, I guess above all the aria, to express the sense of being pressed or stretched between worlds" (1994, 144). We do not have something merely happening that is determined, causally or otherwise, by previous events. The 'event' character has to do with the total shift implied in the Orphic moment, as if from the world of the living to the world of the dead.

Similarly, insofar as we think of the narrative or dramatic time of opera, the Orphic moment (which I call "Orphic death" since it is recognizable in singing in the aria preceding the heroine's death) is not continuous with what has come before: it is not a developmental moment in the narrative. Rather, the death scene creates a pause or a caesura. It is the emergence or eruption of another time, to some extent similar to the tragic time that intrudes, say, in Oedipus's belated recognition of his origins.

Not only does operatic time work against linear sequence, but particularly at that moment it is not the narrative but singing itself that determines how the passage of time is experienced. Opera lets go of narrative logic in favour of the internal time of song. Time manifests itself authentically in moments of dramatic stillness, moments when progressive time is suspended, and everything is incorporated into the ecstatic and self-absorbed singing.

Put slightly differently, the unfolding narrative moves from an initial scene, which serves as a premonition of death (the entrance aria) and the time of its realization (in the death scene). But this continuity does not

determine the authentic experience of time. In addition to the complete halt and the surfacing of an internal emotional time, the death scene is taken out of succession, referring not to what immediately precedes but rather back to the entrance aria, whose significance is recognized only at the end. The death scene is foreshadowed at the outset, and time now appears in terms of what was always there: the fulfilment of a preordained fate. So even though time does not flow forward in any customary sense, forming a break in temporal continuity, what happens here is not some aleatoric, unpredictable occurrence. Rather, the death song signifies the achievement of self-closure, the seeds of which are planted in the very first sounds of singing.

In your analyses, you consider films that thematise the power exercised by opera over film, identifying a certain 'pull' toward opera and suggesting that cinema may risk its own 'cinematicness' in being so haunted by opera. We are interested in the very idea of 'risking', because it hints at a transposition of one medium into the aesthetic field of the other. For example, the comparison of an opera by Poulenc and a Rossellini film, both based on Cocteau's play The Human Voice, shows the relation of the vocal and the visual to be surprisingly affected by the choice of the medium. In this remediation of each medium, do opera or film lose what characterizes them? Or, on the contrary, does the transformation reveal the specificity of each in ways that a consideration of opera or film alone cannot?

With *The Human Voice*, the example you mention from my book, in Poulenc's opera, as well as in Rossellini's film, an intense vocal presence is created. And following your interesting question I think we can say that here both opera and cinema are at risk. The voice is employed differently in each work, but the use of the voice undermines the medium in both instances. In the opera, the voice interprets for us what is acoustically inaccessible, and in a sense, it erects an opera with nothing but voice. The film constructs vocal close-ups, rendering claustrophobic visuals and persecuting gazes.

The transformation reveals the specificity of each medium in ways that a consideration of opera or film alone cannot. Saying this, I would stress that each case is specific.

In an interesting recent interpretation of Poulenc's opera, Barbara Hannigan, known for her rare double gift as singer and conductor – and singing and conducting simultaneously – conducts and sings *La voix humaine*. Clemens Malinowski, responsible for the live video design, positions cameras relaying Hannigan's performance, i.e. conducting and singing from the conductor's podium, viewed on large screens facing the audience. One could say that in this example, neither medium holds on to its specificity as medium. The film is created live and is completely derived from the musical performance. There is nothing but the orchestra and singer/conductor in the film. In turn, the opera is bound by the podium, by the need of the orchestra members to be able to see the conductor at all times. The interpretation of the opera moves in and out of entrance cues, how loud or fast to play and so on. The interpretation of the conductor – gestures, signals, bodily movements, facial expressions, in short everything that holds and manages the piece – mixes with and at times merges with the interpretation given to the *dramatis personae*. Hannigan's performance is an example in which an opera creates a live film, and each performance will create a different film, as if it were an opera performance. The film embodies the belly of the

opera, the view from within – from the conductor's position. Both the opera and the film are a kind of choreography, something just beneath the surface of each of these mediums, waiting to be exposed.

In *Vocal Apparitions: The Attraction of Cinema to Opera* (2005) you state: "Paradoxically, cinema at times can be more operatic than opera itself, thus capturing something essential that escapes opera's self-understanding". Initiating a dialogue between cinema and opera understood as media places the outcome of this dialogue in a very fluid landscape, full of shifts and experiments. Also, in the same text suggest that such an operation allows cinema to look beyond itself, beyond the more canonical horizon, so to speak. Does the same apply to opera? And to the *personae* populating opera as a medium? (i.e. Maria Callas depicted by Zeffirelli).

I understand the question to be asking whether there is a symmetry of sorts: Can opera at times be more cinematic than cinema itself, and thus capture something essential to cinema that otherwise escapes cinema's view of itself? Just as cinema can be more operatic than opera itself and capture something essential that eludes opera's self-understanding.

In the last few decades opera has changed so dramatically that we must acknowledge that 'opera' refers to many things. Today, as you observe, the media are fluid, and so is the dialogue between them. What is considered 'less' or 'more' operatic, what opera entails and signifies, is quite open. Operatic singing, or any kind of singing, is no longer necessarily the mark of opera.

And yet, however true all this is, Maria Callas remains an exception, even today. Her figure crosses into film as well as cinematizes opera. Even the fact that she modelled herself on the beauty ideal of a movie star, Audrey Hepburn, is significant. Following her death, Callas has been depicted over and over again in film, by film stars, but she has rarely been depicted as a character in opera! An odd take is Zeffirelli's film, *Callas Forever*, in which the character of Callas refuses to sing in a film-opera, which will use a past recording of her voice. To create the film-opera, her present body is aligned with her past voice. In other words, Callas is to be re-created using cinematic dubbing; there will be no live singing. It is precisely this – what Callas in Zeffirelli's film calls a trick, dishonesty, a sham – that she refuses to take part in. Ultimately, the project of reviving Callas on film fails in this film. Zeffirelli portrays an unbridgeable abyss between opera as a live medium and film as a mediated technological media. But he does so by calling out both opera and film's shortcomings with regard to the singing voice.

A *Return to the Voice* has become even more evident with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, a watershed event that plays a key role in this particular context as well. In the absence of live bodies, over the past two years, voices played a key role into triggering our nostalgia to feel close to others, including from whom we were so frighteningly distanced. In the theatrical realm, for example, the voice served to supplant a stage presence that was impossible at that time – think of the radio dramas broadcasted by artists and later diffused in the empty spaces of theatres; or the television projects of major opera houses where the stage space was reimagined through the dramatization of the vocal space. The nostalgia for bodies has transformed into a recovery of a haptic dimension of the voice, which was already imposing itself in the domains of everyday communication even before the virus. With this in mind, do you

foresee any potential new avenues opened by the exchange between opera and cinema? Let's think, for example, of the reading of *After Life* you recently proposed: which aspects of *After Life* make it an innovative production?

Let me say first that the operatic voice is already from the start in some sense 'disembodied' within the body of the singer. Hearing its presence does not give us the sense of a unity of voice and body, as we would say occurs when we listen to and see someone speaking. It is almost as though the singing voice is a foreign presence in the body. In recent opera, this separation of the voice is intensified. Let me return once again to Michel Van der Aa's opera *After Life*. The opera is based on Hirokazu Kore-eda's film *After Life*, which spans one week in a way station between zones of death and eternity. Here the dead, rather than being judged, are each tasked with reviewing their lives and choosing a single memory that will remain with them for all eternity. Apart from this memory their lives will be consigned to utter oblivion. Every Monday, newly deceased individuals arrive in this liminal Limbo and are given a few days to select which memory to preserve. Toward the end of the week of their stay this memory will be staged and filmed to be dispatched with them to the afterlife. Kore-eda reflects on the power of film to constitute an afterlife, in the form of the memorable moment that encapsulates a life and remains one's sole memory for eternity. Van der Aa's opera takes this series of transfers out of life and into an afterlife one step further when he translates the cinematic into the operatic space.

The film's climactic scene is a vertiginous sequence of shifting gazes that includes five cuts over two minutes: one moves between the present of the character in the way station, their memory moment, and the cinematic re-enactment of that moment. In the corresponding scene in the opera, each of the live singers in the scene (they have a live presence but are not alive) has three onscreen virtual singing selves. The film's multiplicity of gazes is converted, as it were, into splintering singing selves in the opera: an onstage singer and his multiplied reflections on a screen/mirror. Onscreen selves are singing simpler melodic phrases and long-held notes together with the more fluid melodic lines of the live singers. At times, the music is more evenly distributed among the onstage and virtual singers. The characters sing with themselves and one another in an odd duet resonating across media. The scene is the high point of the opera: a duet between two characters singing live, simultaneously, with their multiple virtual selves. The scene refigures images and voices and transforms them into the new place or medium that we call opera.

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To Betray to Remain Faithful: The Afterlife of Opera

Remediating Opera
Crossing and Encounters Between Film and Music Studies
edited by Chiara Casarin and Laura Cesaro

Opera in (Italian) Film: From Intermediality to Remediation

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Abstract This essay focuses on Italian opera in film. Initially, the theory is reconsidered, showing how intermediality, intertextuality, and remediation are perspectives that coexist in studies of opera in film, yet they are not entirely overlapping. A case study is then examined, the Italian film *The Spider's Stratagem* (*Strategia del ragno*, 1970) by Bernardo Bertolucci, highlighting how an approach based on the dynamics of remediation is essential, to fully understand how, in this film, opera contributes to define a way of critically representing and analysing history.

Keywords Opera in film. Intermediality. Intertextuality. Remediation. The Spiders' Stratagem. Bernardo Bertolucci. Italian political cinema.

Summary 1 When Film Meets Opera. – 2 Deconstructing Memory. – 3 Shaping the Past.

1 When Film Meets Opera

In the title of this paragraph, I refer to the title of a book by Marcia Citron, *When Opera Meets Film* (2010), which is one of the reference studies on the relationship between opera and cinema. However, I voluntarily invert the terms. What I would like to focus on in this paper is a perspective on the relationship between opera and cinema that takes the latter as the primary point of observation in the process of remediation of the opera into film. The relationship between opera and cinema is a well-established topic in the context of musicological studies.[1] It seems to me, however, that despite the different approaches, the studies dedicated to this subject tend in principle to converge on a common attitude, if indeed on a common theoretical fundamental. They tend to focus on the intertextual and intermedial relationship between opera and film following analytical and critical paths

1 Just to mention some of the major contributions: Tambling 1987; Citron 2000; 2010; Joe, Theresa 2002; Kuhn 2005; Joe 2013. In Italy see at least Verona 2016.

Edizioni Ca'Foscari
The Future Contemporary 3
e-ISSN 2785-0986
ISBN [ebook] 978-88-6969-911-5
Peer review | Open access
Submitted 2024-12-12 | Accepted 2025-02-19 | Published 2025-10-22
© 2025 Giuggioli | 4.0
DOI 10.30687/978-88-6969-911-5/007

that go precisely from the first to the second, from opera to film, as can be deduced even just by considering their titles.[2]

In the film, we mostly examine the effects of the opera as a given artistic elaboration, endowed with its own particular, structural and expressive profile and a vast, but still determined symbolic potential. In other words, we observe more how opera is capable of transforming the film that hosts it, ensuring the film an often decisive factor in defining its own identity, than on the contrary how the film transforms the opera (or operas) that it hosts. Perhaps because they mostly come from the area of historical musicology, accustomed to think according to the scheme of production/reception of the musical work of art and following a chronology from the past to the present, these studies, whose validity I certainly do not want to question here, are mainly interested in the 'difference' between opera and film when these two art forms meet in a film.[3] Difference is essentially at the heart of these studies not only when the presence of the opera in a film contrasts with the 'rules' and conventions of cinematic narration and representation, but also when it seems to fit in with the other components of the film.

According to Citron, then, the ideal theoretical framework for studying the encounter between opera and film is a theory of intermediality oriented primarily to clearly recognize and categorize the modes of combination between media, such as that of Werner Wolf (1999):

> Wolf's system features two categories that capture the relative importance of the components in the medial combination. An encounter qualifies as overt intermediality if "both media are directly present with their typical or conventional signifiers and if consequently each medium remains distinct and is in principle 'quotable' separately". The other category is covert intermediality: "the participation of (at least) two conventionally distinct media in the signification of an artefact in which, however, only one of the media appears directly with its typical or conventional signifiers and hence may be called the dominant medium, while another one (the non-dominant medium) is indirectly present 'within' the first medium". These include, among others, the intensity of the intermedial relation and the fact that one or more of the media may themselves be hybrid – the situation for both opera and film. (Citron 2010, 7-8)

The objectives of the research are not too different if an intertextual approach is adopted that interprets the presence of opera in the film, for example, as a quotation. The relationship and the combinatorial play between media or textual forms remains the central point. Anyway, the intermedial approach according to Wolf's theory already allowed to "capture the relative importance of the components in the medial combination" (8). Similarly, the intertextual study of the operatic quotation in the film allows to grasp the process of reciprocal transformation between both textual forms, the opera and the film, on the basis of the following strong principle of the theory of intertextuality:

2 See the titles of the studies mentioned in fn. 1. Giuggioli 2015 and 2019, for example, are no exception. More oriented to the perspective I discuss in this paper is Giuggioli 2024.

3 I am obviously oversimplifying here: Western historical musicology has been busy for some decades reviewing and expanding its paradigms. There is a huge bibliography on this, which does not need to be cited here.

> che non esistono testi isolati, ma che tutti compartecipano a un fitto intreccio di relazioni, in un reciproco scambio che genera inesauribili processi di trasformazione; e tale scambio non è affatto orientato unidirezionalmente secondo una vettorializzazione tesa lungo una direttrice cronologica dal passato al futuro, ma al contrario è biunivoco, arricchendo così sia il testo di partenza che quello di arrivo. (Verona 2016, 10)
>
> that there are no isolated texts, but that they all participate in a dense interweaving of relationships, in a reciprocal exchange that generates inexhaustible processes of transformation; and this exchange is not at all unidirectionally oriented according to a vectorization stretched along a chronological line from the past to the future, but on the contrary it is biunivocal, thus enriching both the source and the target text.[4]

This emphasis that both the intermedial and the intertextual approaches place on the process of transformation that the opera undergoes and at the same time causes in the film is, we might say, even more marked if we observe the phenomenon of the opera in film through the lens of remediation. It is worth returning to the well-known formulation of this principle proposed by those who first enunciated and observed it in action in the context of contemporary digital media: "we call the representation of one medium in another *remediation*, and we will argue that remediation is a defining characteristic of the new digital media" (Bolter, Grusin 1999, 45). But the roots of remediation, as Bolter and Grusin themselves point out, lie in the distant past and this principle is fully active in the audiovisual media of the twentieth century. If we turn to the opera in film as a form of remediation, this entails a decisive shift in perspective more towards the film and a reversal of direction, from film to opera.

Rather than on the dialogue between opera and film, such research will focus on how, on how much and how radically the film recalls, represents and drags opera within itself. The intermedial and intertextual approaches to the opera in film, that I synthetically call approaches based on 'difference' allow us to understand in detail the structural, expressive and symbolic 'play' between the two parts. The approach based on remediation, on the other hand, allows us to understand more deeply how the opera becomes part of the body of the film and how, by assuming opera among its components, the film traces its own path in contemporary media culture, maturing its own strategy of representation of the real and of the media themselves, and thus pronouncing itself on "the twin preoccupations of contemporary media: the transparent presentation of the real and the enjoyment of the opacity of media themselves" (Bolter, Grusin 1999, 21). Aspects such as time and 'corporeality', as a theme linked to human nature or to cinematographic representation itself, thus take on importance. By re-mediating opera, the film can effectively face and problematize them.

A meaningful indirect confirmation of this tendency is offered by the important study on the relationship between opera and film by Michal Grover-Friedlander (2005). It is an indirect confirmation, since it is not a work focused primarily on remediation as Bolter and Grusin discuss it.

4 Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the Author.

By examining the contact between the two media in terms that can be considered as orbiting in the sphere of remediation, Grover-Friedlander investigates the concept of survival. Note how in the title of her book (*Vocal Apparitions: The Attraction of Cinema to Opera*) the word 'cinema' is placed before the word 'opera'. Grover-Friedlander starts from the myth of Orpheus, who is able, with his singing, to bring the deceased Eurydice back to life. Orpheus' miraculous ability, however, is thwarted by his improvident gaze towards his beloved, which makes her disappear this time forever. Opera as a medium, and Grover-Friedlander refers exclusively to Italian opera, is characterized by an extraordinary and unmistakable use of the singing voice. The operatic voice ideally retains some of the properties of Orpheus' mythical voice. Like the voice of the mythical Greek singer, opera singing, thanks to an overflowing expressive potential, is capable of reaching out towards transcendence, towards a fullness of sensations and feelings that exceeds the earthly nature of things.

Placed in the media context of the film, opera singing seems to try each time, with its own materiality and at the same time with its absoluteness and otherness with respect to contingency, to activate the passage from death to life of something that is no more. The visual element reintroduces contingency, hindering this process. Like Orpheus' gaze, in cinema as in theatre, this element prevents the complete survival of what one wanted to bring back to life. However, Grover-Friedlander notes how the continuous return of opera to the moment of death and the search for overcoming the material limit of existence through singing manage to weaken the very idea of mortality and to fulfill, albeit in a fragile and evanescent way, Orpheus' will. But what kind of survival is it, in a film, that is linked to operatic singing? Is it a truly complete survival, that is, 'credible' as a concrete experience represented by the film, or is it just an effect, a 'ghost', an idea?

Taking this last point into account, I would like to discuss a case study, returning to an Italian film of the second half of the 20th century that remediates Italian opera, *The Spider's Stratagem* (*Strategia del ragno*, 1970) by Bernardo Bertolucci, well known to studies on opera and cinema.[5] In Italian cinema, the encounter with the opera often presents a high symbolic density, due to the link between opera and the fields of Italian history, memory and politics, all full of problems and unresolved questions.[6] Among the film directors most attracted to opera, and especially to the operas of Giuseppe Verdi, in the season of Italian political cinema of the 1960s and 1970s there is notoriously Bertolucci. He draws from Verdi's operas not only material for the soundtrack of his films. In Verdi's operas Bertolucci looks for narrative and dramaturgical models and themes to import and elaborate in his films. In some of them, opera imposes itself as the primary force.[7] *The Spider's Stratagem* is one of Bertolucci's 'Verdian' films.[8] In the

5 See also Dalle Vacche 1992, 219-250; Basini 2001; Crisp, Hillman 2001; Giuggioli 2011; Verona 2016.

6 See Dalle Vacche 1992; Basini 2001; Crisp, Hillman 2002; Giuggioli 2015; 2019; Verona 2016.

7 See Caldwell 1994; Giuggioli 2011, Verona 2016.

8 As 'Verdian' I indicate Bertolucci's films in which Verdi's operas are present with extended excerpts that play an important role in the film: *Before the Revolution* (*Prima della rivoluzione*, 1964), *The Spider's Stratagem* (1970), *La luna* (1979). Verdi's opera is also cited and has an influence on *1900* (*Novecento*, 1976) and *Tragedy of a Ridiculous Man* (*La tragedia di un uomo ridicolo*, 1981).

following two paragraphs I will focus on the encounter between Verdi's operas and film in this film by Bertolucci. First I will do so in the perspective of intertextuality and intermediality, through an approach interested in understanding the characteristics of the difference between the two genres and media within this film and the features of their combination. Then I will adopt the point of view of remediation, showing how deeply Verdi's operas participate, in this film, in the definition of a certain way of representing reality and historical time through cinema.

2 Deconstructing Memory

The plot of *The Spider's Stratagem* focuses on the investigation that a man of about 35 years old called Athos Magnani carries out into the violent death of his father. The investigation takes place in a time that we can assume is contemporary to that of the realization of the film (the end of the 1960s), in Tara, the imaginary town in the Po Valley where the father (who was called Athos like his son) was born, lived, and was murdered. According to the local narrative, Athos father was killed, thirty years earlier, by the fascists. Athos the son' investigation is promoted by a woman, Draifa. At the time of the crime she was her father's lover. Athos comes to discover the painful truth: the gesture from which the heroic aura that still surrounds the figure of his father derives was a set-up. Athos the father had planned an attack on Mussolini. According to the official memory still shared thirty years later in Tara, he had been cowardly murdered by the fascists before he could carry out the attack. He had actually betrayed. When he was about to carry out his plan, frightened by the idea of the murder, he had revealed the plan to the police. Mussolini had not been brought to Tara and Athos had planned, with the same comrades who had previously helped him conceive the plot against the dictator, his own killing. This had taken place in the same place and at the same time as had been envisaged in the original plan for the murder of Mussolini, in the theatre during the performance of *Rigoletto.* The murder of Athos had been consigned to history as the exemplary martyrdom of an anti-fascist.

Verdi's operas, with excerpts from *Rigoletto*, *Il trovatore*, *Un ballo in maschera*, *Attila*, enters the film on several levels. *Rigoletto* is the most present opera. In the film, the murder of Athos senior is relived through Athos junior. On the same stage and near the same passage of the opera in which the murder of his father was committed – the desperate cry "Ah!… la maledizione!" that *Rigoletto* lets out at the end of the first act, when he realizes that he has participated in the kidnapping of his own daughter – Athos son understands how things really happened.

The plot of the film itself, in turn modeled on the story by Jorge Luis Borges, *Theme of the Traitor and the Hero*, shows a contact with the plot of *Rigoletto* in the themes of the conspiracy and the betrayal of the father towards his children. In *Rigoletto* there are two conspiracies: one is hatched by the courtiers against *Rigoletto* and leads to the kidnapping of Gilda, the other is the plan devised by *Rigoletto* to kill the Duke of Mantua. This murder plan involves *Rigoletto*'s betrayal of Gilda, since he intends to have his daughter's lover murdered without her knowledge. Gilda will in turn betray her father's mad love by allowing herself to be killed in place of the Duke. In *The Spider's Stratagem* there are also two conspiracies: the one

organized by Athos and his companions Rasori, Costa and Gaibazzi against Mussolini and the one arranged by the same towards history, staging the heroic death of Athos. Each plot is connected to a betrayal. Athos senior betrays his own plan for the political murder of the dictator. By creating a sensational historical fake, he betrays the future, the generation of the 'sons', including his son Athos.

In the film there are other connections with Verdi's opera. Opera is a strong presence in the cultural imagination of Athos father and his friends. This is highlighted, for example, by the operatic passages sung passionately by Gaibazzi, an amateur opera singer in some moments of the film. Gaibazzi condenses his own thoughts and feelings in these quotations from Verdi's operas, also giving voice to those of his friends. His singing always takes on a political value as well. During the dinner organized by Draifa in the presence of Athos to try, in vain, to resolve the ancient rivalry between the three elderly companions – and with them ideally Athos father – and Beccaccia, an evil and fascist landowner, Gaibazzi faces his opponent singing from Renato's aria in Act III of *Un Ballo in Maschera*, "Eri tu che macchiavi quell'anima". Later during the same dinner, the three friends recall a curious episode, which took place when Athos father was still alive: the escape of a lion from a German circus occasionally passing through Tara and the subsequent death of the animal, from fever, in the woods. In a flashback, the funeral procession with which the four companions had brought the roasted head of the lion to the table for their lunch is re-enacted. The procession is accompanied by Gaibazzi's singing: "Miserere d'un'alma già vicina", from Part IV of *Il trovatore*. The serious and solemn religiosity of Verdi's opera passage contrasts with the grotesque images of this sequence. Overall this sequence can be read as a political allegory of the fall of the fascist regime.[9]

These references to Verdi's opera aestheticize the actions and wills of the four anti-fascist friends. A peculiar relationship between reality and representation is thus triggered, in which this aesthetic projection confuses or deviates the practical intention of their gestures and purposes. The operational background chosen for the attack that was supposed to change the course of history thus fatally ends up hosting a sabotage of history, which the four friends carry out with the assassination of Athos senior. Verdi's opera cannot be avoided even in the path that leads to the unmasking of their act of falsification of history. Athos junior cannot reach awareness of the truth of what happened without participating in the performance, both in the one staged by his father and companions, and in Verdi's *Rigoletto.*

The sham of the four anti-fascists refers to the delicate question of the transmission of historical memory, underlining how the falsification of historical data is intrinsic to the discursive act (it does not matter whether it is a historiographical text or an artistic production) although essential to pass it on. The problem is amplified in the film by flaunting the theatricality of the representation. The setting, the profile and the way of acting of the characters, the music, dominated by Verdi's excerpts, are clearly theatrical. Verdi's opera are figures of ambiguity that profoundly mark the meaning of this film. In *The Spider's Stratagem* is also through opera, that ambiguity takes on concrete

9 See Crisp, Hillman 2001, 258-60. Crisp and Hillman point out that while the references to *Rigoletto* are connected with the plot and the existential side of the film, those to *Un ballo in maschera* and *Il trovatore* are linked to the political motif of taking a stand against Fascism.

form on a spatial, temporal and political level. In the wake of this widespread ambiguity, the celebration, in the name of opera, of Italian national history can be replaced, in the political cinema of the 1960s and 1970s, as this film shows, by an investigation. There is a movement of attraction and repulsion towards Verdi's opera.[10] It can embody high revolutionary ideals, but also lend its resources to the realization of an act of historical falsification. Opera itself, however, contributes to making the political indictment that the film seems to want to take on elusive. By posing itself as a means both for the falsification of historical memory and for the subsequent discovery of truth, it introduces a fracture at the very point where it indicates a transition between generations. The political gesture of the film thus becomes ferocious and indulgent at the same time, disturbingly distancing any hypothesis of ethical redemption in the path of national history.

3 Shaping the Past

In the key sequence of the discovery of the truth about his father's murder, with which the final part of the film begins, Athos Magnani son is at the Tara railway station, with a suitcase, ready to leave. Until that moment he has not been able to reconstruct how the events unfolded. The inhabitants of Tara have been evasive and sometimes hostile to him. Athos is embittered and indignant. He imagined that his investigation, urged by Draifa, a local woman implicated in that strange story, would be well received in the village. He thought that the inhabitants of Tara wanted to re-establish the historical truth as he did, and thus make the memory of his father's heroism even more magnificent. In the sequence of discovery, however, there is something that holds Athos son to Tara. He wanders around the deserted station. No trains pass, the environment is suspended in an unreal atmosphere: the horizontal movements of the camera that try to follow the nervous movements of Athos in the empty rooms of the railway station flow along the walls of the building as if they were backdrops of a theatrical scenography. The light is uncertain. From some shots it seems to understand that night has arrived, from others it seems that it is still day. The electric lights inside the station and those of the public lighting in the streets surrounding it are on.

What attracts Athos' attention and pushes him to retrace his steps and resume the road to the small town is the music of Verdi. The Prelude of *Rigoletto* resonates at the beginning of the sequence as if it were extradiegetic music. The repeated note that will be, in the opera, a main element of the motif of the curse, the dissonant chords in which the repeated note deflates, the orchestral crescendo: this music contributes in a decisive way to charge the rarefied and enigmatic atmosphere with anguished expectation. Athos hears the music and as if called by it resumes his way to Tara. Along the way he sees some loudspeakers. The music comes from them, so we now discover that it is a diegetic presence mediatized through recording. *Rigoletto*, in the form of a musical *potpourri* of excerpts from the first act and the beginning of the second act that follow one another without interruption, is the constant musical element of the sequence,

10 On the ambiguous and at times hostile reception of Italian opera in Italian culture, not only in the second half of the twentieth century, see Bracci 2020.

which extends for about six minutes [01:14:20-01:21:41]. The dramatic arc of the opera linked to that music, from the Prelude to *Rigoletto*'s despair when he discovers that Gilda has been kidnapped and understands that Monterone's curse has fallen on him, corresponds to the dramatic arc, in this sequence in the film, of the disconcerting discovery of the betrayal and the fabrication of Athos father and his friends. Athos junior' active listening to opera, active because through that listening he seeks and finally finds an answer to his question about his father's death, is counterbalanced by the passive, ecstatic listening to the opera in which Athos sees the villagers absorbed when he returns to Tara. The unnatural act of this second type of listening is exhibited in the film in shots of two men standing in their chairs with their ears stretched out towards the same speaker. Similarly, we see some women totally immersed in listening to opera and immobilized by it as they tell Athos son the false story of his father's death, the one artificially constructed to maintain the memory of him as an anti-fascist hero.

The fundamental logics of immediacy, hypermediacy and remediation identified by Bolter and Grusin are clearly at stake in this sequence and Verdi's opera is the main element through which, at this point in the film, but with influences on the whole film, a peculiar strategy is elaborated in their use. This strategy concerns the film in its essence as a medium capable of representing the real as space-time. This level of sense goes beyond the 'intellectual' level of Bertolucci's refined reflection, at the same time pessimistic and mockingly amused, on the artificiality of historical memory that we were able to understand through the intertextual and intermedial approaches. From the point of view of remediation Bertolucci, in his use of Verdi's opera in this film tends towards the logic of hypermediacy. Bolter and Grusin explain that

> where immediacy suggests a unified visual space, contemporary hypermediacy offers a heterogeneous space, in which representation is conceived of not as a window on to the world, but rather as 'windowed' itself – with windows that open on to other representations or other media. The logic of hypermediacy multiplies the signs of mediation and in this way tries to reproduce the rich sensorium of human experience. […] In every manifestation, hypermediacy makes us aware of the medium or media and (in sometimes subtle and sometimes obvious ways) reminds us of our desire for immediacy. (Bolter, Grusin 1999, 34)

In listening to Verdi's opera, a listening open to different possibilities, from the restless cognitive action of Athos junior to the ecstatic paralysis of the inhabitants of Tara, this "desire for immediacy" is reflected in *The Spider's Stratagem*, which is here first of all the impossible immediacy of the historical truth of the facts that concerned Athos senior and all the inhabitants of Tara at the time of fascism. By remediating *Rigoletto* and staging the different listening practices in relation to it, this film shows us the action of giving shape to the past. As Emilio Sala recently wrote: "L'opera è un dispositivo che viene *dopo*: implica sia l'incredulità sia l'illusione retrospettiva e l'utopia incantatrice" (2024, 15; Opera is a device that comes *after*: it implies both disbelief and retrospective illusion and enchanting utopia). If in this sentence we replace the word 'opera' with the word 'history,' I think we have found the ultimate meaning of the thought to which Bertolucci gives shape to in *The Spider's Stratagem* through the remediation of opera in film.

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Remediating Opera
Crossing and Encounters Between Film and Music Studies
edited by Chiara Casarin and Laura Cesaro

Opera at the Time of COVID-19: Intermediality and Scenic Rewriting in Mario Martone's Film-Theatre Triptych

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Abstract This article examines Mario Martone's film-theatre triptych – *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (2020), *La Traviata* (2021), and *La Bohème* (2022) – realized during the COVID-19 pandemic. Conceived for empty theatres, these hybrid works merge cinematic and operatic languages, turning absence into a narrative resource. Through editing, spatial reframing, and metatheatrical devices, Martone redefines operatic staging, transforming theatre into cinematic space. His approach challenges traditional performance boundaries and opens new aesthetic and political paths for opera in the context of audiovisual media and contemporary crises.

Keywords Mario Martone. Intermediality. Opera and cinema convergence. COVID-19 and performing arts. Media archaeology of opera.

Summary 1 Reimagining Opera in the Time of Crisis: A Cine-Theatrical Project. – 2 *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*: Performing Absence, Framing Space. – 3 From *La Traviata* to *La Bohème*: Reimagining Opera Through Cinema. – 4 Opera as Historical Mirror: Melodrama, Memory, and Contemporary Relevance.

1 Reimagining Opera in the Time of Crisis: A Cine-Theatrical Project

In addition to having established himself as one of the central figures of contemporary Italian auteur cinema, Mario Martone has, for several years now, been engaged in an in-depth exploration of the connections between the domains of cinema and opera. Adopting a perspective that allows both observation and illumination of the historical, social, and artistic tensions and transformations that characterize our present time, between 2020 and 2022 – at the height of the pandemic – Martone directed three iconic works from the Italian melodramatic tradition: Gioachino Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (henceforth *Barbiere*, 2020), Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata* (2021), and Giacomo Puccini's *La Bohème* (2022). These productions resulted in

Edizioni Ca'Foscari
The Future Contemporary 3
e-ISSN 2785-0986
ISBN [ebook] 978-88-6969-911-5
Peer review | Open access
Submitted 2025-05-12 | Accepted 2025-06-11 | Published 2025-10-22
© 2025 Rossi | CC BY 4.0
DOI 10.30687/978-88-6969-911-5/008

audiovisual works that defy easy categorization, falling somewhere between filmed theatre, cinema, and television. These 'cine-theatrical' works (cf. Forestieri 2021), produced by Rai Cultura in collaboration with the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma (Teatro Costanzi), were initially broadcast on Rai 3 (on 26 December 2020, 2 April 2021 – Good Friday – and 23 December 2022, respectively) and subsequently uploaded to the RaiPlay streaming platform. From their inception, they were conceived as hybrids of different languages and have represented one of the boldest experiments in narrating opera through the moving image, becoming symbolic of a unique historical moment in our contemporary experience: the television production of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* began in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, as part of a broader production strategy adopted by Rai. This strategy,[1] implemented in response to the closure of theatres and the suspension of live events, aimed to consolidate the relationship between opera and television through special programming designed to ensure cultural continuity and to reaffirm the role of public service during a phase of emergency and redefinition of the spaces for artistic engagement. Martone's three operations also established themselves as a kind of dialogue with the historical genre cinema he has explored in recent years – particularly evident in his sweeping historical fresco *Noi credevamo* (2014) – and with the sociopolitical resonance that the referenced operas had assumed during key moments of pre- and post-Risorgimento Italian history.

Yet Martone's path does not end with the development of alternative performance models prompted by the pandemic emergency. Rather, it is rooted in his long-standing experience as a theatre director. This experience reveals at least two key elements: on the one hand, the ability to grasp – and consequently convey – the expressive specificities of opera, in order to use them as communicative codes accessible to a far broader audience than that traditionally associated with classical melodrama; on the other, an exceptional mastery of techniques involving "work on the performance space, scenographically articulated in always different and personalized ways" (Pernice 2022, 210). Martone demonstrates a continuous ability to reframe the visual grammar he employs, in accordance with the internal

1 In this context, alongside the production of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (2020), other emblematic examples stand out, testifying to a broader strategy of reconfiguring the relationship between live performance and audiovisual media. Among these are Rigoletto at the Circus Maximus, staged in the summer of 2020 for the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma and broadcast on Rai 5, and Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, presented at Teatro alla Scala in November 2020 in concert form, without an audience and specifically filmed for television. In these cases as well, Rai ensured the broadcast on Rai 5, reaffirming the role of television as a tool of cultural mediation during a time when theatre activities were suspended. Also worth noting is the 2021 New Year's Concert from Teatro La Fenice in Venice, broadcast on Rai 1: a national event, performed without an in-house audience, which assumed a strong symbolic value by reaffirming the central role of culture in the public and institutional narrative of the emergency. As a point of comparison, we may also cite the program *Ricomincio da Raitre*, conceived during the crisis phase as a platform for revitalizing the performing arts – particularly theatre, music, and dance. Broadcast in prime time on Rai 3 between 2020 and 2021, the episodes featured the participation of actresses and actors, directors, musicians, and composers in a format alternating live performances, testimonies, and moments of reflection. The project explicitly aimed to 'keep the spotlight on' cultural venues closed to the public, transforming the television space into a medium of cultural substitution and resistance. The initiative, strongly supported by Rai Cultura's management, represented a productive response consistent with the institutional line adopted in those years: making television a privileged channel for cultural continuity, capable of absorbing – and partly reworking – the crisis of traditional modes of cultural engagement.

tensions of the text and scenic action. It is a balance capable of resolving – or at least mediating – that "constant tension" (Barra 2020) which has long defined the relationship between opera – indeed, cultivated music more broadly – and its television transposition. Indeed, it is precisely the use of (not only) scenic space that emerges as the principal element of innovation across the three Martonian productions under analysis. Not only in how theatrical space assumes a dialectical connotation (as a result of the forced emptiness imposed by pandemic restrictions), but also in how it is rendered expressive through contamination with the cinematic medium: an outcome Martone achieves by working attentively with the essential coordinates of filmic representation, such as enunciation, narration, and above all, editing – as we shall see. His decision not to adhere to the more traditional canons of the film-opera[2] – "a hybrid form by definition" (Pescatore 2001, 10) – or to the musical genre (of which the operatic film is but one possible declination, with cinema accommodating multiple forms, from musical to musical drama to musical comedy) also allows for an "original [...] blending of different forms" (11). This in turn generates a unique corpus that prompts a significant reflection on the relationship between cinema, opera, and history.

2 *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*: Performing Absence, Framing Space

The staging of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* is, in this respect, one of the most accessible examples through which Martone's process of remediation can be clearly identified. Conceived and created within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and first aired on 5 December 2020, the production was from the outset imagined for a theatre emptied of its audience – thus, potentially, without scenic boundaries or the relational coordinates usually linking singers and spectators. The orchestra was conducted by Daniele Gatti, while Martone directed both the theatrical staging and the televised version. This was therefore neither a 'live opera' nor a classical opera film in which the theatrical plane is entirely translated into a cinematic one,[3] but rather a continuous dialogue among different dimensions of performance and representation, designed to reflect, in every element, the complexity of the present moment in which it took shape.

From its earliest conceptualization, the staging took the form of a political gesture rooted in the present. The use of theatrical architecture was entirely unconventional – not only because the stage appeared empty, but also because the relationship created with this emptiness was conceived in a markedly dialectical fashion. Every internal and external space of the theatre became a stage:

> the [t]heatre [...] painfully empty is first Seville, with the stalls as the town square and the boxes as the windows of houses from which the characters sing [...] and then becomes Don Bartolo's house and Rosina's room. (Forestieri 2020)

2 For a discussion of the notion and definition of the concept of 'film opera', see Pescatore 2001.

3 *Il teatro vuoto*. https://www.fatamorganaweb.it/il-barbiere-di-siviglia-rossini-martone-opera-di-roma/.

The scenographic apparatus, by contrast, was deliberately left bare: there is "no scenography [and] nothing, aside from the singers' costumes, to suggest we are in Rossini's 1800s" (Forestieri 2020). Scene changes were introduced by black title cards indicating the location, while the physical space remained the same: the performers alternated their presence between the proscenium, the boxes, the stalls, and the foyer, even entering and exiting the theatre building itself[4] – visually materializing the spatial and textual hybridity evoked by the production's concept.

The result is therefore something closer to cinema than to theatre or television. While the setting and dramaturgical adaptation are the most immediately visible elements, Martone's operation is fundamentally based on the remediation of the theatrical and operatic performance tradition, in the name of a *cineficazione*[5] of its linguistic structures – that is, a scenic, spatial, and dramaturgical construction conceived as a profilmic device. The exceptional nature of Martone's work lies in his ability to reconcile the demands of a live performance (without interruptions) and of a live television recording with those of a narrative that adheres to the specific requirements of cinematic language: namely, recording and editing. While the music functions as a connective tissue that flows without pause, as in traditional operatic performance, the images appear fragmented and varied, generating a narrative that differs from both the classic opera film and the live opera broadcast. In addition to traditional narrative editing – aimed at clarifying plot progression and achieved through the use of numerous simultaneous camera angles, with minor ellipses to omit some scene changes and performer movements for fluidity and rhythm – Martone also includes found footage. These are archival segments from different periods, all in black and white, which interrupt the scenic flow.[6]

This free use of editing signals Martone's clear intention to pursue an inquiry that challenges the conventions of classical theatrical representation, aiming instead to construct a perspective on operatic performance that is as unrecognizable – and nontraditional – as possible. A similar notion had already emerged in Martone's reflections on cinema and theatre at the time of his successful stage work *Ritorno ad Alphaville* (1986):

> scene and sound traverse space and time: the space and time we live in are traversed by media [...]. Cinema first, and then television, are expressive forms born alongside new concepts of space and time; they introduced the

4 The most striking moment of the opera is undoubtedly the performance of its most iconic aria, the famous cavatina of Figaro (*Largo al factotum*), which Martone stages by showing the performer of the protagonist, baritone Andrzej Filończyk, arriving at the theatre on a scooter driven by conductor Daniele Gatti. The sequence, intercut with the opening credits (Figaro's entrance in the score comes about 18 minutes into the performance), shows Filończyk running errands around Rome before reaching the theatre, dismounting the scooter, entering the foyer, putting on his costume, and finally making his entrance into the auditorium.

5 The concept of *cineficazione* – a term aptly applied by Laura Pernice to Martone's work – should be understood in the sense proposed by Mario Verdone, who defines it as the adoption, by theatrical language, of principles specific to cinematic language. Verdone discusses this concept particularly in relation to the productions of Erwin Piscator, Futurist synthetic theatre, and the *Fregoligraph* developed by Leopoldo Fregoli (Verdone 1983, 51–62).

6 At the end of the first act, during the ensemble piece *Mi par d'esser colla testa*, images of various Italian theatres filled with audiences are shown. Among them appear several famous faces from the world of performance, such as Anna Magnani, Gina Lollobrigida, Maria Callas, and Sofia Coppola – iconic female figures who symbolically merge theatre, cinema, and opera.

> tool that allows them to harmonize with these two dimensions: editing. (Martone 2004, 38)

Martone's *Barbiere* thus demands to be viewed through this lens of remediated spatial and temporal experience, shaped by the cinematic language and understanding editing as "a natural mechanism for filmic languages that [does not question] the division between literary text, image, and sound" (38).

In this light, the issue of expressive choices becomes particularly significant, because what Martone asserts is the evident inseparability between what is represented (the signified) and the mode through which it is represented (the signifier). Formal choices, then, are never neutral, but charged with symbolic and metaphorical meaning that contributes to shaping the overall vision of the representation. Likewise, all these elements acquire additional meaning when considered in relation to the historical moment in which the work is produced. Scenic, visual, and performative choices are never isolated – they are deeply influenced by the cultural, political, and social context of production and reception. A clear example of this appears in the opening of the first act (in fact, the singers' entrance following the overture), when bass Roberto Lorenzi, in the role of Fiorello, enters singing Piano, pianissimo together with the chorus, wearing a face mask as he sings "piano pianissimo senza parlar", before stepping to the centre of the stalls and exclaiming "tutto è silenzio, nessun qui sta!". At that point, he removes the mask and completes the verse: "che i nostri canti possa turbar!". This gesture is "just the first of many ironic, intelligent, and biting references to Covid in this staging by Mario Martone – yet, in its lightness, it conveys the sense of a *Barbiere* that is anything but ordinary, just like the times we are living through" (Forestieri 2020).

Much more evidently, and with greater complexity, this same level of reflection on the present through Rossini's score can be observed from the middle of the first act onwards, when – during Rosina's cavatina (Una voce poco fa) – the empty theatre is suddenly crisscrossed by a spiderweb of ropes stretched chaotically across the space: from side to side, top to bottom, between stage, boxes, stalls, and orchestra pit. This visual element does not merely serve to aestheticize the environment; it also evokes a network of social traps and control mechanisms that, in Beaumarchais's original play – adapted in Cesare Sterbini's libretto – weigh upon the characters. The spiderweb thus becomes a layered visual metaphor that reveals the mechanisms of deception typical of Rossinian theatre, with the ropes "evoking Rosina's entrapment in Don Bartolo's grip" (Forestieri 2020). At the same time, it stands as an image of the invisible and oppressive web that characterized both public and private spaces during lockdown, "symboliz[ing] even more strongly the 'yoke' of the pandemic that 'traps' live performance, preventing it from physically meeting its audience" (Pernice 2022, 215). In this sense, the gesture at the end – where singers and musicians, armed with shears, simultaneously cut the ropes, making the spiderweb disappear – is clearly imbued with hope for the future: a "still-possible collective catharsis of the theatrical event" (217).

This perspective is explicitly affirmed by Martone in his comments on the tight relationship between cinema and theatre in his work:

> cinema and theatre remain an open field of play for me [...]. In the *Barbiere di Siviglia* film, all the materials are purely theatrical – from the ropes crisscrossing the space to the trunk normally used to store stage props, which becomes part of the scenic furnishings. (Capitta 2020)

Martone's staging therefore represents an uncharted territory within opera film. The hybridization between cinema and opera is more than a technical device – it becomes a poetic and political choice, inviting us to rethink the relationship between art and audience, and between tradition and innovation. It shows how the empty theatre can be a laboratory for new forms of community, new modes of engagement, and new expressive possibilities – not merely a response to crisis, but a model for the future of musical theatre in its relationship with the audiovisual medium.

3 From *La Traviata* to *La Bohème*: Reimagining Opera Through Cinema

The clearest confirmation that the 2020 production of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* offered Martone an opportunity to initiate a project aimed at rethinking (and redefining) the relationship between cinematic language and operatic staging lies in the fact that the Rossinian opera was not the only work he staged using a hybrid form of representation designed for an audience-less space. With *La Traviata* (2021) and *La Bohème* (2022), Martone expanded and deepened his experiment, consolidating the intermedial inquiry he had begun with *Barbiere*. By engaging with Verdi's melodrama and Puccini's verismo, he effectively completed a sort of foundational triptych of the Italian operatic tradition, reactivating its cultural force through a hybridization of languages that was only partially shaped by the pandemic context and instead evolved into a form of investigation capable of raising fundamental questions about the aesthetics of opera in the contemporary era.

Martone traces a developmental path for operatic staging that cuts across cinema, theatre, and television. This trajectory unfolds through three experimental models and, building on the approach taken with the Rossinian work, pushes even further the use of theatrical space. The theatre building becomes a genuine narrative device – stripped bare and even deprived of its traditional function.

In *La Traviata* – which aired on Rai 3 on 9 April 2021 – even more so than in *Barbiere*, the theatre becomes a universal site of representation: in addition to expanding the scenes into areas usually reserved for viewing (boxes, stalls) and reception (foyer, side rooms, atriums), these spaces are entirely emptied of furnishings. The stalls are cleared of seats – just like the boxes and the gallery – effectively becoming a second proscenium, mirroring the traditional one, from which it is separated by the orchestra and situated on a lower level. The backdrop is entirely absent, allowing the rear of the stage and the movement of scenic panels – vertically, horizontally, and in depth – to remain visible, as is the "massive use of metatheatrical devices, visible stage machinery (and even stagehands)" (Forestieri 2021): in effect, everything usually hidden becomes visible.

But there is more. As in *Barbiere* with Figaro's cavatina, the editing in *La Traviata* includes sequences filmed outside the theatre, such as Alfredo's carriage ride to Paris or his duel with Duphol, set in the area of the Baths

of Caracalla in Rome, as well as the carnival procession filmed outside the Teatro Costanzi "amid confetti and parked cars" (Pernice 2022, 217). The most evocative moment in this regard occurs during *Parigi, o cara*, in the final act. In what is perhaps the most heartrending aria of Verdi's score, Martone momentarily cuts away from the two protagonists – clinging to one another, their clothes dishevelled, their faces marked by melancholy – to show them, still in the same position, but now beneath the massive Bohemian crystal chandelier that looms over the stalls, happy, radiant, elegant, wearing the costumes from Act I, shortly after their first meeting.

Here, editing ceases to serve merely a narrative function and instead assumes a clearly conceptual value, thus revealing the full expressive potential of cinematic language, which – configured in this way – surpasses the expressive limits of theatre. The dialogue created between these images not only reshapes the scenic space but also transforms its temporal coordinates, suggesting a production conceived from the beginning with a cinematic sensibility. A similar strategy appears shortly afterwards during *Addio, del passato bei sogni ridenti*, as Violetta – now close to death – remembers happier, carefree times. Martone stages a crossfade flashback – where present and past images never fully dissolve into each other but remain perceptibly intertwined – showing early scenes in which Violetta sings, dances, plays with friends, and meets Alfredo for the first time.

This apparatus – far more complex than that used in *Barbiere* – could not have been realized as a live performance. For this reason, *La Traviata* becomes an opera built through the expressive conventions of cinema, largely abandoning the linguistic structures of both theatre and traditional opera. As Martone explained, *La Traviata* is "theatre that dissolves into cinema – made up of – scenes shot in five days, out of chronological order and then edited together, but with singers and orchestra performing everything live" (Scotti 2021). The empty theatre becomes a cinematic set in which the theatre building itself becomes both the locus of representation and the site of vision. "Deprived of the theatre, we took possession of the whole theatre" (Scotti 2021), Martone declared. And from this perspective, the gradual dissolution of traditional spatial hierarchies transforms the building into an extension of the diegetic space, in cinematic terms.

La Bohème – broadcast, again on Rai 3, on 8 April 2022 – the concluding act in Martone's creative arc, reveals his full awareness of the hybrid and intermedial nature of this new stage language, presenting itself as an almost experimental expression of that very language. In this staging, the theatre building is not only reinvented and resemanticised in spatial terms – it is eliminated altogether. The opera, while retaining a strong link with the Costanzi, does not use the theatre space as a scenic setting. Instead, the Scenography Workshops of the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma serve as the backdrop. These are a series of large warehouse spaces for sets, costumes, and stage props, housed in a vast early 1930s building near the Circus Maximus. Here, singers, chorus, and orchestra are distributed across the expansive workshop areas, and – just as in a soundstage – each of the four tableaux into which the opera is divided is reconstructed with essential scenography, allowing the industrial structure of the building to remain visible.

Though filmed in real time, the shots are not continuous, and as in the previous two works, the final edit includes two scenes shot outside the

scenic space. These include the opening of the second tableau, in which the bohémiens head to Café Momus, with sequences shot on the streets of Rome and Paris, and the start of the third tableau, when Mimì reaches Marcello at the inn to confide her heartbreak. This latter scene is set outside the workshops, under snowfall, with Mimì arriving from the direction of the Circus Maximus and walking through scaffolding and snow machines.

Beyond the location, however, another fundamental novelty distinguishes *La Bohème* from *Barbiere* and *Traviata*: its historical setting. Martone shifts the time of the story to the 1960s, transforming the 1830s Parisian bohémiens into young artists and intellectuals of the French New Wave. Numerous scenic elements explicitly reference the works of Godard, Truffaut, and others – posters of *Jules et Jim*, *À bout de souffle*, and a copy of *Cahiers du Cinéma* appear prominently. Costumes and makeup similarly evoke the visual lexicon of May 1968.

> I wanted to tell the story of *Bohème* as if it were a New Wave film: youth, friendship, dreams, rebellion, betrayal, love. And it's incredible how much energy can still be released by an opera written over 120 years ago.

Martone explained (Urbani 2022) explicitly declaring his intent to reinterpret Puccini's work through the lens of a cinematic aesthetic defined by spontaneity, realism, and formal freedom.

This cinematic inspiration is manifest not only on a dramaturgical level, but also in representational choices. Martone seems intent on shifting opera from the theatrical to the cinematic realm, both narratively and in terms of language and meaning. The naturalism of the night sequences filmed outdoors – in urban settings in Rome and especially Paris – with dark, unfiltered lighting primarily from ambient sources, directly echoes the expressive freedom of Truffaut's Les Quatre Cents Coups, conveying a sense of vibrancy, intimacy, and emotional immediacy. Similarly, the extensive use of the Steadicam and moments of fourth-wall breaking evoke Godard's formal disruption, while the long takes following the actors in motion function as a more direct and continuous way of describing scenic space than classical découpage.

If the reference to the New Wave confirms the full semantic 'cinematisation' of theatrical space – "a cinema that looks in the mirror and sees reflected also the opera"–[7] then Martone's intervention becomes a true prototype for a new musical cinema. A device capable of engaging with history, memory, and the present – and of opening up new expressive possibilities.

7 *La bellissima "Bohème" progetto opera-film di Martone.* `https://www.musiculturaonline.it/la-bellissima-boheme-progetto-opera-film-di-martone/`

4 Opera as Historical Mirror: Melodrama, Memory, and Contemporary Relevance

As the complexity just described demonstrates, the Martonian triptych under analysis does not belong to an experience limited to a response to the pandemic emergency; rather, it takes shape as a deep and structural reflection on the relationship between cinema, opera, and history – one destined to leave a lasting mark on Italian audiovisual culture. *Bohème* and *Traviata* – far more than *Barbiere* in this sense – also indirectly evoke the pandemic (it can hardly be a coincidence that both heroines, Violetta and Mimì, die from a pulmonary illness), but they also establish a dialogue with the present, thematising issues of urgent contemporary relevance. In this context, opera emerges as a representational device capable of reflecting the anxieties of the contemporary through forms and codes inherited from the melodramatic tradition – a tradition in which subjectivity and singularity confront historical and social reality (Ceraolo 2015, 452).

This is an aspect found throughout much of Martone's cinematic work, particularly in *Noi credevamo*, arguably his most complex and layered film, rich in historical, stylistic, and narrative stratifications. In this film dedicated to the Italian Risorgimento, melodramatic echoes are evident, both in terms of historical setting and in the emotional portrayals and existential trajectories of the characters. In *Noi credevamo*, as Francesco Ceraolo notes, the tension between subjectivity and historical reality defines a "dialectical path in which melodrama does not represent the crushing of subjectivity by the determinism of objective becoming [...], but rather its opening to a true 'ontology of hope'" (2015, 452). The Risorgimento is thus portrayed as a contradictory process, marked by enthusiasm and betrayal, radical idealism and painful disillusionment – elements Martone illustrates through a mise-en-scène that rejects the frenetic pace of conventional historical cinema. Instead, he works through subtraction, allowing internal tensions within the characters to emerge more strongly than external action, relying on a fragmented, almost anti-narrative structure that evokes the complexity of historical processes in motion.

Significantly, Martone himself has described the importance of the relationship between opera and cinema in his artistic journey:

> It happened, in my case, that it was the opera director who influenced the film director and not the other way around [...]. While I was writing [*Noi credevamo*] [...] I was staging several operas by Verdi and Rossini. Opera therefore nourished me. [...] The relationship between the film and opera is not limited to the soundtrack: the dialogues, written and performed in an anti-naturalistic sense, become a kind of libretto, and the overall mise-en-scène converses with the nineteenth-century aesthetic of melodrama. (Martone 2013, XXVI–XXVII)

This recovery of the idealistic dimension of melodrama thus resonates both in Martone's cinematic direction and in his theatrical productions: it stands as a significant trace and, at the same time, as a useful tool for interpreting the connection between his work and a vision of art as experience – capable of activating critical reflection on the present through the reworking of the past. The bridge Martone constructs between opera, cinema, and modernity is undeniably rooted in this conscious reinterpretation of melodrama: from

traditional form of tragic representation to a language capable of conveying the complexity of historical becoming and suggesting the possibility of an open gaze toward the future – of cinema, of theatre, and of opera alike.

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Remediating Opera
Crossing and Encounters Between Film and Music Studies
edited by Chiara Casarin and Laura Cesaro

A 'Service Provider' for *Noi credevamo* by Mario Martone
A Conversation with Vincenzo Borghetti

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In 2010, Mario Martone's *Noi credevamo* was released in cinemas and was described as a true "viaggio dentro la storia italiana dell'Ottocento" (journey through nineteenth-century Italian history) (Martone 2010, IX). Set between the 1820s and 1860s, the film offers a critical perspective on the Italian Risorgimento, narrated through the intertwined stories of three patriots from the southern sub-region of Cilento: Domenico, Angelo, and Salvatore. *Noi credevamo* offers a different perspective from the traditional historiography of the Risorgimento, which often emphasizes the epic deeds of national 'heroes', those who liberated Italy from foreign rule, primarily from the North. In contrast, Martone adopts a 'bottom-up' (and Southern) viewpoint, focusing on three young revolutionaries' hopes, sacrifices, and delusions. Despite the film's lengthy genesis (Senici 2010, 485; Martone 2010, XV-XXII), the soundtrack was selected only a few weeks before shooting began. As Martone explained, it was conceived as "una sorta di antologia per frammenti" (a sort of anthology of fragments) (Martone 2010, LII). The film's music features many instrumental excerpts from the works of Giuseppe Verdi, Vincenzo Bellini, and Gioachino Rossini.[1]

This choice may seem almost obvious, considering Martone's extensive career as an opera stage director. Since the late 1980s, he has regularly engaged with a diverse operatic repertoire – ranging from Claudio Monteverdi to Ivan Fedele – "firmando da lì in poi un numero rimarchevole di regie liriche, sia in Italia che in ambito internazionale" (thereafter directing a remarkable number of opera productions, both in Italy and internationally)

1 On the film's soundtrack, see De Gaetano, Roberti 2013, XXVI-XXVIII; Martone 2010, LII-LIII; Senici 2010; Varon 2013; Verona 2016, 283-305.

Edizioni Ca'Foscari
The Future Contemporary 3
e-ISSN 2785-0986
ISBN [ebook] 978-88-6969-911-5
Peer review | Open access
Submitted 2025-01-22 | Accepted 2025-04-14 | Published 2025-10-22
© 2025 Casarin | 4.0
DOI 10.30687/978-88-6969-911-5/009

(Verona 2016, 283).[2] However, two specific circumstances influenced the decision to include nineteenth-century Italian opera in the film. Martone has highlighted the first one on several occasions: his attendance at a performance of Verdi's *Otello* at the Opera di Roma in December 2008.[3] The second one, which has not been addressed in either scholarly or non-scholarly literature about the film, is Martone's meeting in early 2009 with musicologists Vincenzo Borghetti and Emanuele Senici. Therefore, I intend to explore this meeting through an interview with Borghetti, conducted on 26 November 2024, which will be presented in this chapter. Beyond its novelty, the interview provides a deeper look into the creative process behind *Noi credevamo*, revealing new insights into Martone's conception and use of music, especially opera, within the film. Finally, this interview attests to a peculiar and, in many respects, unique form of collaboration within musicology.[4]

What is your relationship with the film director Mario Martone?

Emanuele and I became acquainted with Martone a couple of years before *Noi credevamo* was completed (2010). Knowing about our expertise as musicologists, Martone sought our bibliographic advice on some operas he was staging, and that marked the beginning of our relationship. In early 2009, we met in Rome and had dinner at his home, discussing the music for a film he was working on. At that time, we did not yet know it was to become *Noi credevamo*, but we would soon find out.

The involvement of two musicologists in the process of selecting the music for a film's soundtrack is an unusual occurrence. How did this collaboration come about, and how did you contribute to choosing the musical works featured in the movie?

2 Senici (2010), in particular, explores how Martone's experience as an opera stage director influenced the development of *Noi credevamo*. For a list of Martone's opera productions from 1989 to 2015, see Verona 2016, 283-5.

3 Martone (2010, LII-LIII) and De Gaetano, Roberti (2013, XXVII) state that the performance of *Otello* at the Opera di Roma took place in 2009. However, they were likely referring to the five performances of the opera held in December 2008 (`https://archiviostorico.operaroma.it/edizione_opera/otello-2008/`). In any case, this production played a significant role in Martone's decision to draw from the repertoire of nineteenth-century Italian opera for the film's music: "Sono andato in seguito a vedere l'*Otello* che Muti dirigeva a Roma. In teatro il suono è spazializzato, e così, quando nel terzo atto è arrivata l'aria *Dio mi potevi scagliar*, mi sono concentrato solo sull'orchestra, attratto com'ero da una musica che mi sembrava corrispondesse al senso profondo del film che volevo fare. C'era qualcosa di ripetitivo e ossessivo, che scavava dentro. Da quel momento in poi ho capito che si potevano cercare, nel repertorio operistico, dei brani orchestrali che sviluppassero questa intuizione di partenza" (I later went to see *Otello*, conducted by Muti in Rome. In the theatre, the sound is spatialized, and so, when the aria *Dio mi potevi scagliar* arrived in the third act, I focused solely on the orchestra, drawn to a music that seemed to resonate with the deep essence of the film I wanted to create. There was something repetitive and obsessive, something that dug deep. From that moment on, I realized I could search the operatic repertoire for orchestral pieces that would develop this initial intuition" (Martone 2010, LII).

4 Vincenzo Borghetti, whom I thank for his availability, is Associate Professor of Musicology and Music History at the University of Verona. His research interests are various and encompass Renaissance music, especially issues of culture, ideology, intertextuality and historiography, the presence of Renaissance music in present-day media, opera and musical theatre of early twentieth century and philology of music.

Our involvement in selecting the music for the film's soundtrack can be traced primarily to two reasons. On the one hand, our friendship with Martone undoubtedly facilitated opportunities for contact and dialogue before the film's shooting began. On the other hand, Martone relied on us professionally, as we are both experts of the operatic repertoire. Specifically, Emanuele who is an opera scholar, while I, at the time, was completing the critical edition of Rossini's *Elisabetta regina d'Inghilterra* for the Fondazione Gioachino Rossini in Pesaro. Moreover, a few years before our meeting in Rome, Mario had staged his first productions for the Rossini Opera Festival, *Matilde di Shabran* (2004) and *Torvaldo e Dorliska* (2006). Therefore, these occasions have already led Martone to work with the critical editions of Rossini's operas published by the Fondazione and to attend the Pesaro Festival, not only as a spectator. By this, I mean that Martone was already a professional accustomed to engaging with musicology (and, thus, with the material forms of research: editions, essays, monographs, etc.) and with the opera audience, including its most dedicated segment, so to speak. We served as a sort of filter for knowledge, a living bibliography, as we frequently discussed musicological literature with him.

Regarding the extent of our contribution, we were almost 'service providers', in the sense that we aimed to respond to Martone's specific requests, as he already had a clear idea of the type of music he wanted for the soundtrack. In particular, he sought pieces from nineteenth-century Italian operas, roughly contemporaneous with the historical period depicted, but without vocal parts. The only exception was the piece "Dio! Mi potevi scagliar" (Act III, Scene 3) from Verdi's *Otello*, which Martone had independently decided to include in the film's soundtrack, removing the vocal part. He asked us to suggest instrumental music, such as introductions to vocal pieces, preludes, and overtures, which he might not have considered alone. Specifically, he described the type of scene or action in the film he had in mind and asked which music might best fit that situation. For each request, Emanuele and I brainstormed between courses at dinner. All our proposals were ultimately accepted, though I only discovered it in September 2010, during the movie's première at the 67th Venice International Film Festival.

The soundtrack primarily features instrumental pieces or excerpts from works by Verdi, Rossini, and Bellini. What were the guiding principles behind these choices?

Three key considerations guided our approach to selecting the operatic excerpts. First, we aimed to establish an analogy between Martone's descriptions and the musical and dramaturgical characteristics of the operatic excerpts we suggested. For instance, for what would then become the prison scene in Montefusco in the film's third part, Emanuele proposed "Eccomi prigioniero!" (Act III, Scene 5) from Verdi's *Il Corsaro*. Similarly, to accompany a scene involving a frantic escape, I suggested the instrumental prelude to "Che intesi!... Oh annunzio!" (Act II, Scene 2) from *Elisabetta regina d'Inghilterra* by Rossini.

This piece evoked me, with its string patterns and the melodic line of the cellos, the highly agitated rhythm and the minor key, a sense of movement associated with dark and ominous emotions, which we felt was a perfect fit for the scene's atmosphere. It was not the most straightforward choice, considering the opera dates back to 1815, before the film's events. However,

since I was working on the critical edition at the time, it seemed to me that this piece, which introduces one of the most complex scenes in the entire opera, was perfect for that kind of cinematic action. Ultimately, he used the Rossini piece to accompany Angelo's nocturnal flight through the streets of the Cilento's village at the end of the film's second part.[5]

Second, our suggestions considered the availability and quality of the musical recordings that were accessible at the time. In this context, Verdi, Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti emerges as predictable yet compelling choices, as their works allowed us to propose refined yet feasible options. By this, I mean that these 'repertoire' composers boast an abundance of high-quality recordings, suitable and usable for the film. In contrast, suggesting present days lesser-known composers like, for example, Giuseppe Saverio Mercadante would have introduced considerable challenges, such as more distress to secure and deliver the orchestral scores for the chosen pieces to the Orchestra della RAI for the recording sessions. Recommending overly niche pieces would have made securing the required sheet music a more difficult task.

The third reason relates to the deep cultural entrenchment of these composers in the collective listening habits of the audience. Even if viewers couldn't identify a specific piece, they might still recognize its composer. In other words, these musical works inherently point for the audience to the historical context, political circumstances, and associated ideas tied to specific composers and operas. This music captures what Martone – and we – aimed to convey as it evokes the mid-nineteenth century and the spirit of the Italian unification movements, even on a subconscious level. Even if this music hasn't been consciously heard before, like all 'classics', it resonates as something familiar. It is deeply embedded in our culture, forming a crucial part of our collective memory.

On several occasions, Martone has stated that *Noi credevamo* underwent a rather lengthy genesis, mentioning that five years (2003-08) passed from the initial ideas to the beginning of shooting (Senici 2010, 485; Martone 2010, XV-XXII). When did your involvement occur in the making of the film, and what did you know about it?

We became involved during the final phases of the film's development, likely just before the start of shooting, when Martone already had an evident general vision of the whole film. Nevertheless, during the meeting in Rome, neither Emanuele nor I saw any material related to the film; we knew only few things about its plot and the main characters. We truly had no precise idea what story Martone wanted to tell or what would happen in the film. He would describe specific scenes to us, but in very general terms, solely to identify a musical piece suitable for that part of the narrative.

In 2010, Martone had already gained extensive experience as opera stage director, having engaged extensively with this repertoire. In the conversations you had, what was his initial idea regarding the use of opera in the film?

5 The same piece by Rossini also underscores the rite of affiliation to Giovine Italia, which involves the three main characters, Domenico, Angelo, and Salvatore.

Yes, Martone was (and still is) a stage director deeply familiar with opera. From the late 1990s onward, he became increasingly in demand as a director by both Italian and international opera houses. His operatic productions are truly opera-centric, where music occupies a central position and is not treated as an element to be 'tolerated'. Martone possesses the ability to engage with the operatic form of theatre genuinely. Nevertheless, in his collaboration with us, he was always very flexible. His only request was that the instrumental pieces should be drawn from the Italian operatic repertoire of the first half of the nineteenth century, as he did not want the film's soundtrack to deviate too far, in a modern sense, from the 'sound' of that historical period.

Emanuele and I tried to give him suggestions that were not overly predictable, and thus we embraced our role as 'musicologists'. In other words, we sought to propose pieces that had the merit, so to speak, of being relatively unknown, adding a particular interest to a scene. At least, that was how I interpreted and responded to Martone's requests. During a film, I enjoy hearing music that, especially in key narrative moments, has an emotional impact, surprises me, and, at the same time, is hard to identify. From my perspective, music should also stimulate questions in the audience, such as, 'What piece is this?' or 'Where did they find this music?'. Therefore, in my work with Martone, I tried to offer a bit of myself as both a musicologist and a spectator.

That said, the soundtrack ultimately included other pieces beyond those suggested by Emanuele and me. For example, Ludwig van Beethoven's *Sonata per pianoforte* Op. 90, a fragment of Domenico Scarlatti's *Sonata K 101*, and compositions by the German sound designer Hubert Westkemper, which could be described as sound installations. Martone also discussed some of the music featured in the film with Roberto Abbado, who additionally conducted the Orchestra Sinfonica della Rai di Torino in recording the soundtrack.

The soundtrack reveals a strong predominance of Verdi's operas. Why do you think this almost exclusive choice was made?

It's primarily because both Emanuele and I suggested mostly Verdi's pieces. At that time, and for that historical context of the film, this solution seemed us the most natural. Like others human beings, musicologists are shaped also by the present and operate within a specific historical and cultural framework. Thus, in 2009, when discussing the Risorgimento, the first Italian composer who came us to mind – rightly or wrongly – was Verdi, despite all the ambiguities and challenges in considering him a Risorgimento composer.

Moreover, Verdi is perhaps one of the most generous authors of instrumental music in his operas, and of music that reflects the atmosphere of the scenes Martone wanted to comment with music. Indeed, Verdi's operas abound in preludes and instrumental interludes with these characteristics. Conversely, Rossini's music would have been less suitable for the kind of narrative being depicted on screen. There are, of course, exceptions, as shown by the excerpt from *Elisabetta*.

The soundtrack, characterized by the minimal presence of vocal elements, feels remarkably cohesive. Even when the music isn't composed by Verdi, it doesn't come across as 'other' compared to the established norm of the

soundtrack. What 'tone' do the selected fragments, both individually and collectively, lend to the movie?
The music amplifies the dark tone and underlying note of bitterness conveyed by the images and narrative as a whole. In this sense, one specific scene remains deeply etched in my memory. It occurs at the beginning of the final part when the now-adult Countess of Belgiojoso (played by Anna Bonaiuto) states "L'albero è stato piantato, con delle radici malate, ma è stato piantato" (The tree has been planted, with sick roots, but it has been planted). These words express a profound sense of dissatisfaction with the outcomes of that era, a recognition that unity was achieved but in a way that diverged significantly from the original expectations. The concept of a 'deviated' project is, after all, inherent in the title *Noi credevamo*. This pervasive sense of general disappointment runs throughout the film, serving as a leitmotif that brings coherence to the narrative. In our musical suggestions, Emanuele and I were guided toward this tone by the sparse remarks Martone made about the film, as well as by the descriptions of specific scenes for which he sought our advice.

After watching the film, did you have the opportunity to speak with Martone as a sort of epilogue to this collaboration?

Only I had the chance to watch the film's full version at the Venice Festival in 2010. It's challenging for me to completely detach myself from *Noi credevamo* and evaluate it impartially, as it's the only film in which I have had a role, even if a small one, and I feel a strong connection to it.

I enjoyed so much the film in its full version, experiencing it with deep emotional involvement, since I knew almost nothing about the storyline beforehand. At the end of the screening in Venice, I briefly spoke with Martone and congratulated him on the final result, which I was pleased with. I was particularly impressed by how he skilfully integrated music into the narrative, a result not at all a foregone conclusion.

In my view, even in engaging films with beautiful music, the soundtrack can sometimes feel unnecessary or overwhelming after just a few minutes. However, one of the most fascinating aspects of *Noi credevamo* is how music is used to further the narrative. This approach is akin to what happens in opera, where a grand aria occurs 'at the right moment', meaning when it is most dramatically justified.

The same principle applies in Martone's film: music doesn't simply appear in pathetic or dramatic moments; instead, there are intense moments accompanied solely by silence and gazes, while music emerges in other instances. These are the moments when the audience's desire is fully satisfied, as the music ignites a powerful emotional response without overwhelming the viewer for too long. The music then disappears, only to resurface with renewed passion and intensity, maintaining the audience's engagement. In essence, Martone carefully measured the presence of music, akin to using a dropper. His extensive theatre experience and exceptional flexibility enabled him to create a soundtrack that felt nuanced and original.

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Remediating Opera
Crossing and Encounters Between Film and Music Studies
edited by Chiara Casarin and Laura Cesaro

Film Music in the Levi Family Salon

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Abstract One of the lesser-known yet highly significant editorial formats of film music is that of the so-called "miniature scores," which became part of a lasting editorial tradition in the post-World War II era. Designed for domestic performance, these materials played a key role in popularizing the themes of famous films among broad audiences. This article examines the phenomenon by focusing on its presence within the musical life of Palazzo Giustinian Lolin in Venice, the residence of Ugo and Olga Levi.

Keywords Film music. Charlie Chaplin. Musical salon. David Raksin. Levi.

Palazzo Giustinian Lolin, the residence of the Levi family and the current seat of the musical foundation bearing their name, in the early decades of the twentieth century, appeared to Venice as a place where music was constantly present. "The most musical of Venetian salons" during those years hosted concert evenings, various types of gatherings, even after performances at the Teatro La Fenice, and a precious library born from Ugo Levi's love for music, which led him to acquire valuable volumes and scores. In fact, he nurtured a passion for collecting sheet music, which gave rise to "a rich musical library [...] that [made] Palazzo Giustinian Lolin a center for high-level music studies" (Zorzi 2012, 214). These books were used during musical evenings, in the spirit of *Hausmusik*, where he would present his guests with music of all kinds, ranging from operatic transcriptions to chamber music and symphonic reductions.[1]

In such a context, it is surprising to note the presence of film music, evidenced by a series of 'small scores'[2] (piccoli spartiti) still preserved

1 A first description of these materials can be found in Calabretto 2011 (11-12). Their bibliographic description, instead, appears on pages 122-43. Throughout the volume, there are references to the musical life of the Levi household salon and, in particular, to the presence of Gabriele d'Annunzio, who enlivened the soirées held at the residence.

2 We use the term 'score' in the sense of "a composition for voice(s) or solo instrument(s) and orchestra, in which the orchestra is reduced to a keyboard instrument" (`https://norme.iccu.sbn.it/index.php?title=Guida_musica/Appendici/Appendice_VII`). Given their size, we have defined them as 'small scores'.

Edizioni Ca'Foscari
The Future Contemporary 3
e-ISSN 2785-0986
ISBN [ebook] 978-88-6969-911-5
Peer review | Open access
Submitted 2025-02-10 | Accepted 2025-05-05 | Published 2025-10-22
© 2025 Calabretto | 4.0
DOI 10.30687/978-88-6969-911-5/010

in the Gianni Milner Library of the Foundation. These scores, a clear testimony to the popularity of film music in the post-World War I and II years, are very particular documents. They consist of piano reductions of well-known themes from film soundtracks or equally famous songs that have immortalized the history of cinema. They were intended for domestic use, with the piano typically serving as a substitute for the orchestra or as an accompaniment for the solo voice, and sometimes for the violin or another instrument, following the most common and appropriate form for this kind of operation. Published in small booklets, usually four pages – the cover, two pages with the music, and the final page with an announcement of upcoming releases – they were sold in record stores, instrument shops, and music stores at affordable prices. As Elena Mosconi writes,

> l'aspetto seriale della loro produzione e le finalità commerciali cui erano destinati si evincono dal tipo di carta su cui venivano stampati: fogli di poco valore e fragili – ora ingialliti dal tempo – frutto di una strategia di vendita che doveva colpire nell'immediato, con immagini a colori sgargianti, potenziali acquirenti nelle vetrine dei negozi musicali, ma certamente non concepiti per sopravvivere a lungo. (Mosconi 2012, 19)

> the serial nature of their production and the commercial purposes for which they were intended is evident from the type of paper on which they were printed: low-quality and fragile sheets – now yellowed with age – the result of a sales strategy aimed at immediately capturing the attention of potential buyers in music shop windows with brightly colored images, but certainly not conceived to endure over time.

In this way, they were accessible to amateur musicians who played this music for pleasure and entertainment. We like to imagine Ugo Levi at the piano, recalling a cinematic vision and reliving film sequences by playing themes and motifs that had accompanied Hollywood movies, masterpieces of Italian cinema, and of various European schools. In this way, he 'internalized' the emotions of the movie theatre and had the opportunity to share them with his friends who frequented his salon.

This unique circulation of film music in private homes, not only of an aristocratic family but also of the less wealthy classes, is a phenomenon of great interest and has long been dismissed by studies on film soundtracks. However, in recent years, we are witnessing a progressive rediscovery and enhancement of these materials – posters, postcards, photos, and various types of memorabilia – which the *New Cinema History* has accredited as "vehicles for the most fleeting remnants of the film experience, an indirect survival often questioned in its epidermic evidence of data content (stories, texts, images, formal evidence, descriptions)" (Dotto, Mariani 2020, 68). These small scores, very similar in format to those of the song industry, which likewise flourished during those years, are in fact precious documents that lend themselves to an analysis of the forms of film dissemination that, in our view, can be understood within the changes that have affected film theory and history since the 1970s. These changes, as Simone Dotto and Andrea Mariani well point out, have brought to light "three fundamental fields of investigation: the phenomenology of film, the cinema of attractions, and studies on audience and spectatorship" (63). A series of situations have led to the redefinition of the relationship between the public and the cinema

screen, which is no longer limited to mere viewing and deconstruction of the film but rather involves a series of relationships concerning the circulation of the same films in a myriad of materials such as postcards, various objects, images of movie stars, and musical scores. These are the so-called *ephemera* that cinema scholars have recently begun to examine with research projects and publications, redeeming them from their presumed marginality.[3]

This broadening of perspectives is particularly needed for the study of film music. It must not be forgotten that this genre of music, thanks to the success and popularity a film could have gained among wide segments of the public, then and still today through different means and methods, continuously became part of new contexts and situations unrelated to its original function. The intended recipients of these 'musical sheets' were, precisely, amateur musicians and small dance or variety orchestras that mediated film music for the audiences they performed for. The themes of a film score are also used in symphonic and theatrical settings, today even in advertisements and TV jingles, and can even be used as background music for parties and gatherings in various public squares, accompanied by clarinets and brass instruments in brass bands. They could also take the form of a symphonic suite, as was the case with much film music composed by academically trained composers like Ildebrando Pizzetti, or be a generic compilation presented in concert halls and theatres. Film music could lend its themes to theatrical works,[4] stage music, or ballets.

These small scores display well-defined characteristics:

> le dimensioni vanno da 24 × 17 centimetri fino al più ampio formato di 33 × 24 […]. La copertina è a colori forti e riassume in una o più immagini il riferimento al film da cui la canzone è tratta […]. Le tinte sono quasi sempre brillanti […]. Oltre al disegno e alle immagini, la copertina riporta un numero cospicuo di scritte che assolvono a svariati compiti informative.

> their dimensions range from 24 × 17 centimeters to the larger format of 33 × 24 […]. The cover features bold colors and summarizes the reference

3 "A first wave of interest in ephemera emerged in the 1970s, driven by Maurice Rickards, founder of the Ephemera Society: the experience highlighted, on one hand, the difficulty of cataloging 'ephemeral' materials in archival and bibliographic terms, and on the other, emphasized their importance as sources for social, cultural, and economic studies. It was during this phase that the now-classic definition of ephemera as 'fragmentary and transient documents of everyday life' (Un primo fuoco di interesse verso gli *ephemera* si accende negli anni Settanta per impulso di Maurice Rickards, fondatore dell'*Ephemera Society*: l'esperienza da una parte evidenzia la difficoltà di catalogare i materiali 'effimeri' sul piano archivistico e biblioteconomico, dall'altra ne sottolinea la rilevanza quali fonti per gli studi sociali, culturali ed economici. È in questa fase che viene prodotta la definizione ormai classica degli *ephemera* come "documenti frammentari e transitori della vita di ogni giorno") (Rickards 1977, 7) was produced, a term that came to be associated with manuscripts (such as diaries, agendas, or scrapbooks), 'non-publishing' prints (tickets, flyers, postcards), and advertising materials (advertising ephemera), eventually extending to include non-paper forms of broader material culture (commemorative objects). Immediately, some thorny issues emerged, such as the heterogeneity of ephemeral documents, their relation to the dimension of time and their connection to the space of the everyday, the difficulty of retrieval, the heterogeneity of corpora, and the archival status of ephemera as cult materials (Young 2003, 17)" (Comand, Martin, Vitella 2024, 1).

4 Significant in this regard is the representation of Napoli milionaria by Eduardo De Filippo, which was staged with pieces by Nino Rota taken from the homonymous film, along with a pot-pourri of his most famous film music from the 1960s.

> to the film from which the song is taken […] through one or more images. The hues are almost always vivid […]. In addition to the illustration and images, the cover includes a considerable amount of text serving various informational purposes. (Mosconi 2012, 21)

The most widely used films, of course, were those most popular with the public, so their music was also known to the masses. It is no surprise, then, that at the Levi house, the music of Charlie Chaplin circulated, as evidenced by three scores from Luci della ribalta (*Limelight*, 1952), each exemplary: one for piano and solo voice of his most famous theme, Eternamente, a pot-pourri of its three famous songs (Sardine Song, Spring Song, Animal Trainer), and a rhapsody featuring the most famous themes from the original score. Published by Accordo, these scores circulated with the approval of the famous Curci Editions of Milan, who guaranteed this type of production.

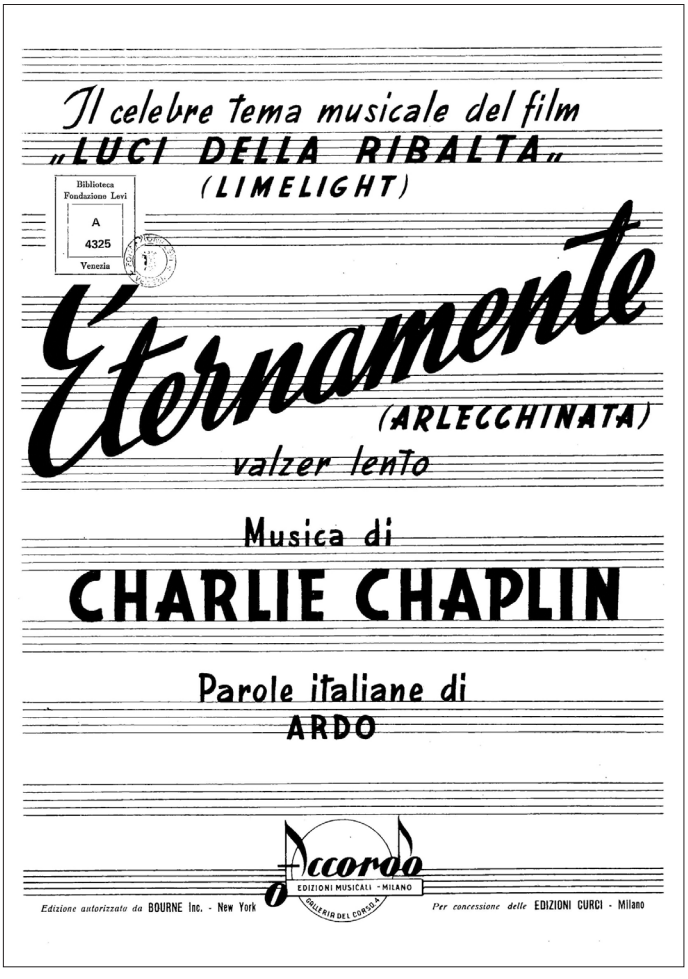

Figure 1 Chaplin, C. (1952). *Eternamente. Valzer lento. Parole italiane di Ardo*. Milano: Accordo – Edizioni Musicali

Their graphic design was very refined, and the cover featured the well-known and iconic image of Chaplin.

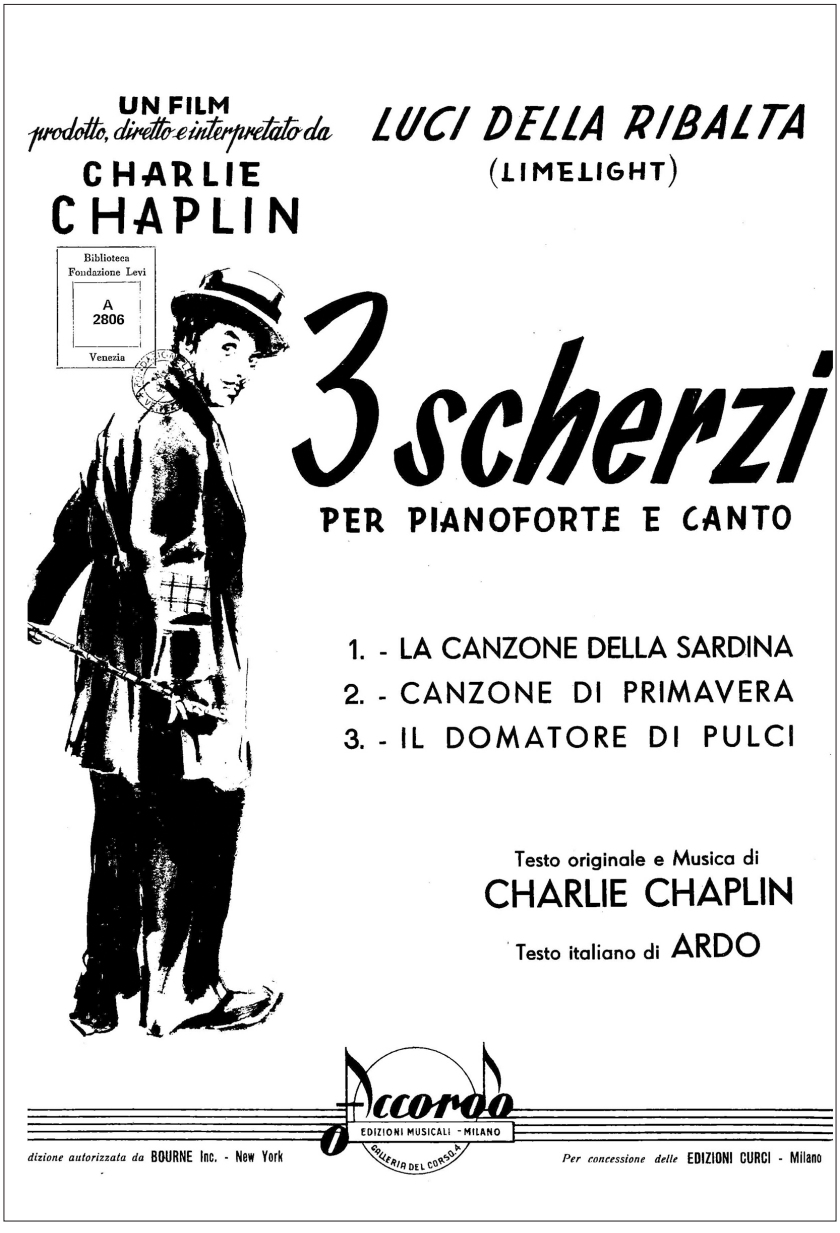

Figure 2 Chaplin, C. (1952). *Luci della ribalta (Limelight). Tre Scherzi per pianoforte e canto*. Milano: Edizioni Musicali

David Raksin, one of Chaplin's musicians, will thus arrive at Palazzo Giustinian Lolin. Raksin was called to Hollywood in 1936 to collaborate on the production of Modern Times and soon became one of the leading figures in American film

music.[5] He gifts Ugo Levi a score for an ensemble of horns, percussion, and double bass, Morning Revisited, which carries a unique dedication: "Per Ugo Levi con affetto di un musicista ad un altro. David Raksin. Los Angeles 1961".

Figure 3
David Raksin, *Morning Revisited. Dedication to Ugo Levi*

At this point, after clarifying the widespread nature of such initiatives and their importance, it is necessary to address the purely musical issues they entail. "What has changed in the transition to the concert hall, and what remains unaltered?" asks Frank Lehman about the transition of film music from the cinema to the concert hall. Michelangelo Antonioni succinctly answered this question, commenting on the record and concert ventures to which film music was subjected: "As long as music can be detached from the film to be recorded on a disc that has its own autonomous validity, then I must say that music is no longer music for the cinema" (fino a quando però la musica può essere scissa dal film per essere incisa in un disco che abbia una sua validità autonoma, allora devo dire che quella musica non è musica per il cinema) (Antonioni 1994, 42). This is an irrefutable statement – the music for film only makes sense when applied to moving images – but it overlooks how the cinematic experience must be considered from other aspects that are not solely linked to the viewing of a film in a theatre.

Lehman continues with these words:

> Where are there excisions, interpolations, and expansions, and how do they impact the formal argument of the piece? What will a listener who is familiar with the original movie notice for the first time (this could include freshly arranged or composed material, but also passages that were previously drowned out in the film mix)? Answering these and similar questions helps situate the work with respect to its filmic sources and provides a method for reconstructing the practical choices made by a composer and/or arranger. (Lehman 2018, 14).[6]

5 "Charlie would come in with these musical ideas and we would work on them together, because he didn't read or write music. It's a total mistake for people to assume that he did nothing. He had ideas. He would say, 'No, I think we should go up here, or we should go down there' […]. But he had fired me after a week and a half because he was not used to having anybody oppose him. And I was just saying, 'Listen, Charlie, I think we can do better than this'. Eventually, he hired me back on my own terms" (David Raksin in Cook 2004, 29).

6 I thank Angelina Zhivova for bringing this quotation to my attention.

The manner in which Chaplin's music was performed at the Levi house is telling. On one hand, we have the piano transcription, which inevitably impoverishes the original score; on the other, the reduction for voice and piano of its most famous theme, which brings that very theme into a formal universe highly appreciated and practiced in the early twentieth-century *Salonmusik*. Lastly, a suite rhapsodically reinterprets the themes of the original score. Thus, film music undergoes a process of reduction, or one might even say impoverishment, in order to conform to the standards that would render it accessible for enjoyment in the salon by a broad audience of music and cinema enthusiasts.

In the Levi family's library, we also find a series of themes from other famous films, such as Exodus by Otto Preminger (1960), with music by Ernst Gold. The main theme, based on two distinct melodic ideas that reappear throughout the film, won the Academy Award and became a bestseller, a testament to how Gold captured the spirit of the times by following the usual clichés of film music. We also find the two themes from The Third Man by Carol Reed (*The Third Man*, 1949), featuring Orson Welles and Alida Valli, whose main theme, performed on the zither by Anton Karas, becomes a signature tune of the film. Both primary themes from this score, Harry Lime Theme and Mozart's Coffee House Waltz, achieved remarkable success on record, radio, and even in dance halls. It is therefore logical that they were published by Milan's Music Union, which at the time was located in the Galleria del Corso in the city.

Lastly, there is a small section dedicated to children's music with *Songs of Snow White*. In this case, the Suvini Zerboni editions created a small booklet with drawings and key moments from the dialogues of the film's characters, bringing the musical fairy tale to life for children through its most famous themes, such as *One Day My Prince Will Come*, *Heigh-Ho*, *Someday*, and *Whistle While You Work*, a delicate foxtrot sung and… whistled by generations of children.

Figure 4 *The Songs of Snow White.* Milan, Suvini Zerboni, 1938

Moreover, the sheet music, published by Suvini Zerboni, was released in 1938. The film (Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, 1937) premiered in Italian cinemas in the same year, so the musical publication served to promote the distribution of the film, much like the records containing the themes of movie soundtracks still do today.

These records, during the same period, similarly filled the windows of stores and were purchased by the same audience that played the sheet music. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the discographic production of film music had reached impressive figures: Hundreds of kilograms of vinyl are dedicated weekly to soundtracks", we read in a cinema magazine: "now both good and mediocre records are published, the ones worth saving and even those that, after all, could be lost without too many regrets" (Quintali di vinile sono settimanalmente dedicati alle colonne sonore – troviamo scritto in una rivista cinematografica -: si pubblica ormai il buono ed il mediocre, i documenti discografici che vale la pena di salvare e anche quelli che, dopotutto, si potrebbe perdere senza troppi rimpianti) ("Dischi" 1961, 256).

Also, in the library of the Levi Foundation, we find several records containing themes and motifs from famous film soundtracks within the

Grimani collection. These are LPs from well-known record labels such as Columbia, Philips, Victor, and Cetra, which, like the sheet music, can be categorized into specific types. On one hand, there are records with the soundtracks of famous films – such as White Christmas by Michael Curtiz (1954), A Streetcar Named Desire by Elia Kazan (1951), Pia de' Tolomei by Esodo Pratelli (1941), and many others; on the other, there are records with thematic compilations, which feature a large prevalence of songs, and in some cases, jazz music, which the Italian public had come to know and love. A large portion of the production naturally focused on American repertoires, particularly jazz, which had literally invaded the musical life of Italy and Europe and which the public had experienced in cinemas as well. "These pieces of overseas origin all sound terrifyingly alike […]. It is now the traditional style, and it seems that dance music can no longer be conceived outside of this type", (Queste musichette di stampo oltreoceanico si somigliano tutte spaventosamente […]. È il tipo tradizionale, ormai, e sembra non si possa più concepire il ballo e il ballabile fuor da questo tipo) wrote Tibaldi (1937a) in Cinema, which, in those years, published a weekly column, "Dischi di Film", in which the latest discographic-cinematic releases were introduced. This column not only mirrored the music for films of the time but also highlighted the ways in which it was 'consumed domestically'. The words with which Tibaldi almost always accompanied his reviews – "a good record suitable for dancing" – already suggest how these records were listened to: "We are in the peak season", writes Tibaldi in December 1937,

> and while the new releases fill the cinemas, record companies are launching the latest film records. You don't always have an orchestra at hand, and it's quite pleasant to dance to the tunes you've heard during the screenings. We recommend some excellent records for this purpose.
>
> (Siamo in piena stagione e mentre nelle sale dei cinematografiche si avvicendano le nuove produzioni, le case di dischi lanciano gli ultimi dischi di film. Non si ha sempre a disposizione un'orchestra ed è assai carino ballare al ritmo delle melodie che si sono udite durante le proiezioni. Vi segnaliamo alcuni ottimi dischi allo scopo) (Tibaldi, 1937b).

These words reflect a phenomenon experienced by Italian musical culture between the 1920s and 1930s, when these repertoires filled the traditional gathering and leisure places of society. It remains a peculiar circumstance that these repertoires circulated through their use in the cinematic realm. Beginning with the tango, which arrived in Europe at the turn of the century, Italy became acquainted with the foxtrot, the Charleston, the rumba, and other dance tunes. The years immediately following the Great War marked the full and definitive establishment of jazz, which was a subject of controversy for the fascist regime, determined to ban this 'Negroid music'. Film music, of course, had been subject to these types of restrictions, and its records could not fail to reflect and promote the most successful motifs of this genre. The records in the Grimani collection also testify to this situation and contain many soundtracks performed by Artie Shaw, Paul Whiteman, and other famous musicians from the early postwar years. These records therefore reflect an interesting mode of consumption of film music during the first decades after World War II, when the soundtracks of famous films were listened to on the stereo systems of many households, a testament to

the popularity these themes and songs had achieved in Italian society at the time.

The sheet music and records of cinematic music, which we have analysed starting from the library of one of the most prominent Venetian musical institutions, reflect a specific historical moment in film music and its impact on society around the years of the Second World War. As we have seen, these seemingly insignificant or secondary materials are actually quite important for capturing a moment in the continuous transformations of film music and for understanding the ways in which both music and cinema spread beyond traditional circuits.

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Coda

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As any proper music piece, [1] albeit *remediated* in the form of a book, this reflection ends with a *coda* that aims at recapping the main points proposed throughout, as well as at drawing a few conclusions. Firstly, the essays collected in this volume shall be seen as the symptom of a broader and increasing interest in the exchanges and productive connections between film and opera. This is most definitely not a new area of inquiry but the editors, alongside all the contributors, propose new readings that offer fresh insights and open up debate on the basis of an innovative framework. More specifically, coupling film studies and musicology has allowed for the articulation of a multilayered view, whereby remediation processes complement each other onto various levels: the model that guided the structure of this book, besides offering a counter play amongst texts in each section as illustrated in the introduction, has been designed in a three-fold fashion, so as to focus on three aspects that can be used a lens to look at the processes at stake. At a *medium level*, the flow from one expressive for to another entails a reconfiguration that doesn't simply translates opera into a film (or new media artefacts) but rather intervenes critically in the features of the film or the opera pièce, creating room to nest musical/performative elements in the former or, in turn, cinematic elements in the latter. At a more *linguistic level*, the filmic grammar as well as the operatic structure allow for another set of intermedial exchanges, which allow to identify parallels between sequences and acts, camera movements and refrains or arias, etc. In this sense the centrality of the actors' body on set and that of the singers' performance on stage offer interesting materials to observe. If on the one hand taking advantage, for example, of the editing allows for a well thought through framing of actors and their evocative gestures on screen, on the other an exacerbated gesturality fills the cuts on the film strip with an original sense of owning and inhabiting of the scene typical of live spectacle. Finally, at a *semantic level* the essays gathered in this volume show how remediation elicits a deep reflection impacting on the wider cultural context

1 Whilst this text was conceived jointly by the authors, Miriam De Rosa wrote paragraphs 1 and 4, and Vincenzina C. Ottomano wrote paragraphs 2 and 3.

Edizioni Ca'Foscari
The Future Contemporary 3
e-ISSN 2785-0986
ISBN [ebook] 978-88-6969-911-5
Open access
Submitted 2025-10-21 | Published 2025-10-22
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DOI 10.30687/978-88-6969-911-5/011

of the operas and films selected as case studies, shedding light on the ability to operate appropriation and re-appropriation processes across time. Such a model, which shall be mapped against the three parts of the volume – each with its own film and music pair (Elena Mosconi and Chiara Casarin, Giorgio Biancorosso and Laura Cesaro, Matteo Giuggioli and Lorenzo Rossi) – serves as a contribution to the rich literature on the relationship between film studies and musicology, in a way that takes critical advantage of the complex overlapping territories between the two. It taps into the specific area of intermediality and adopts the classic concept of remediation not as a linear mechanism but rather trying to highlight its prismatic nature.

A brief survey of the main publications from the past fifteen years reveals that the dialogue between opera and cinema – both in musicology and in film studies – can no longer be regarded as a marginal field of research. The urgency to reconsider operatic works in relation to new cinematic and media configurations aligns with recent methodological approaches that investigate opera's cultural influence beyond the historical and geographical contexts that originally shaped its production and reception. On top of that, technical boundaries traditionally associated with the genre shall also be considered, and they represent a key element to be related to moving image forms, too. What emerges is a highly diversified landscape that confronts the challenge of relocating opera within the new spaces created by the advent (and subsequent morphing dynamics) of cinema, television, and, more recently, digital imaging experiences. Recent scholarship tends to focus on specific composers,[2] stylistic or genre borrowings in Italian cinema (Targa 2011; Baymann 2014), or, again, distinct forms of remediation – ranging from the film opera to the live-streaming of performances at opera houses, including hybrid phenomena such as operas conceived for DVD, television, or digital platforms and social media.[3] The theoretical and methodological framework that takes shape in these studies could, however, be fruitfully extended to less canonical composers or to filmographies that mark crucial historical transitions.

Following this trajectory, the present volume aims to propose an innovative approach in at least two respects. First, as rehearsed, it brings together scholars from both musicology and film studies, but it does so challenging them to transcend the disciplinary boundaries: the three-fold model mentioned above offers room for experiment to embrace the two perspectives at once, so as to enrich current research on remediation as well as on the role of opera within the mediascape of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Secondly, the two interviews interspersed across the volume demonstrate how our understanding of remediation processes is nourished not only by scholarly inquiry but also by the living practice of opera and cinema – each of them being continually reshaped by such research. These dialogues offer multiple vantage points: from a 'state of the art' overview of remediation theory – not limited to nineteenth-century melodrama but extended to the vocal experiments of contemporary musical

2 See in particular Giuggioli 2011; Vincent 2014; Miceli 2014; Verona 2016; Giuggioli 2019; Marchelli 2021; Sala 2024.

3 See in particular Senici 2009; Esse 2010; Girardi 2015; Senici 2019; Cenciarelli 2021; Mantica 2022; Chapple 2006; Dixon 2007; Balzola 2011; Vazzaz 2012; Galla 2020; Pernice 2023. Amongst the most recent studies around the connection between film and opera, please refer to the ongoing research by Giulia Carluccio and Stefania Rimini: Carluccio 2024.

theatre, as in the conversation with Michal Grover-Friedlander – to the first-hand testimony of a musicologist, Vincenzo Borghetti, who collaborated with director Mario Martone as consultant for the musical choices in his reinterpretations of the Risorgimento and of opera's role within it. In a kind of *contrappunto*, the voices of Roberto Chiesi and Roberto Calabretto, in the closing section of the volume, further the discussion toward questions of production, preservation, and reconstruction, exploring seemingly distant yet conceptually related case studies: Pasolini's *Medea* and the *miniature scores* from the Venice-based collection of the Levi family. Despite their diversity, both underscore the necessity of a holistic vision for the analysis of remediation phenomena understood within their broader cultural context.

The kaleidoscopic landscape outlined by these contributions animates a volume which invites the readers to understand remediation not merely as a technical or aesthetic process, but as an interpretative act, capable of redefining both the operatic and the cinematic experience. In this sense, the encounter between opera and cinema does not crystallise in an artwork – be it a film or a music piece – resulting once for all from a convergence process, but rather produces an open and dynamic field of cultural negotiation, whose meanings continue to evolve. This has historically been the case of 'video-theatre' back in the 1980s[4] and it is now the case of live cinema where new technologies are employed to remediate both film and performance in a complex spectacle combining recorded and live media in a unique whole. It is the case of *Living Cabiria*,[5] produced in the frame of the same PNRR-funded project that allowed to develop this very research and conducted by the research team based at the Universities of Turin and Catania. This project implicitly moved from a process of remediation of the filmic text with the aim of elaborating innovative strategies able to combine multiple arts, including music and new media that consequently mobilise musicological and media studies scholarly traditions which are bridged together seamlessly. From operatic to filmic, then, up to video, digital image and new media configurations, the rich intermedia tapestry that is sketched is a threshold that asks to be crossed over and over again, venturing towards yet new expressive forms.

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4 On video-theatre, please see at least Malvezzi 2015; Monteverdi 2012; Del Gaudio 2021.

5 Please refer to https://www.fondazionechanges.org/progetti/il-contributo-dellesperienza-digitale-nelle-strategie-di-valorizzazione-del-bene-culturale-intangibile-il-progetto-living-cabiria/#pll_switcher.

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The Future Contemporary

1. Franco, Susanne; Giannachi, Gabriella (eds) (2017). *Moving Spaces. Enacting Dance, Performance, and the Digital in the Museum*.

2. Guaraldo, Emiliano (ed.) (2023). *Building Common Ground. Ecological Art Practices and Human-Nonhuman Knowledges*.

This volume explores the intersection of moving images and music, analysing the fascinating remediation mechanisms between these two artistic languages. In particular, it embraces the approach to temporality by offering a journey across different periods and artistic productions. The aim is to highlight the creative possibilities that emerge from the observation of recurring elements in cinema and music over time. Moving from cutting-edge archival research focused mainly on Italian cinema and opera, the essays gathered in this volume address various levels of remediation occurring across media, genres, and semantics. Together, they propose a novel perspective on the often-overlooked connections between these two fields of cultural and artistic production. Pairing texts from musicology and film studies, the rich reflection resulting from this book offers an innovative critical toolkit that looks back at historical opera and film productions to gain access to the roots of contemporary musical and cinematic representations.

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