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Introduction to Volume 7, Issue 1: Moving Images

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Journal

California Italian Studies, 7(1)

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Publication Date

2017

DOI

10.5070/C371037424

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Introduction to Volume 7, Issue 1

Áine O’Healy and Marguerite Waller

It is easy in the academic world to domesticate interdisciplinarity. No sooner is a productive encounter staged between or among disciplines than this new way of producing knowledge is reterritorialized. A methodology is codified, stars are born, courses are created, and the next generation of graduate students becomes obligated to prove themselves proficient in the new “field.” The “unpredictable,” as philosopher Jacques Derrida calls it, is lost. In a discussion of a distinction he says he tries to make between two different conceptualizations of the future, “*le futur*,” and “*l’avenir*” Derrida explains that he prefers the latter, which refers to an unexpected encounter with “the Other” whose coming (venir) is unforeseeable, while the former anticipates business as usual, a foreseeable program, prescriptive and scheduled.¹ There is no mutually transformative intersection, just the same tracks we are already traveling on, the same space whose coordinates we already know, extending onward into the future.

We deliberately proposed that the thematic section of Volume 7 of *California Italian Studies* attempt an interdisciplinarity that would resist programs and prescriptions, and we are delighted that contributors have responded to our call for papers about “Moving Images” in that spirit. They have written about images that move those who look at them by dissipating identities, about catachreses of gender and region that deterritorialize what we think we mean by feminism, about crossings of comedy and anxiety that torque interpretations of post-World War II recovery, about an art exhibition that subtly combines a modern curatorial look with reactionary social engineering, about a factory whose story mixes up familiar political, aesthetic, and cultural histories. The unpredictable conversations struck up in these pages resonate far beyond their immediate topics, challenging students and scholars of Italian Studies to entangle themselves and their readers in the complexities of relational thinking unbounded by nationalist or academic teleologies.

When John Champagne asks “How am I moved” by Luca Signorelli’s *Flagellation of Christ*, he finds himself impelled on a “queer unhistoricist” exploration of teleological thinking that uncovers epistemological congruencies among the texts of Giorgio Vasari, contemporary art history and Renaissance literary studies, and a certain version of LGBTQ historiography. Invoking Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s injunction to queer the very habit of definition when dealing with modern Western culture, Champagne’s “Queer Unhistoricism in a Transdisciplinary Frame: Luca Signorelli’s Male Nudes,” takes us on a rigorous journey from the contours of Signorelli’s bodies—their body language, textures, muscles, skin, hair—and his own idiosyncratic “sensuous, sexual response” to these bodies, to canonical art history’s desire to make Signorelli a stepping stone on the path to Michelangelo, even at the expense of the archival record. Over the course of Champagne’s “autocritique,” binary oppositions between affect and history, desire and data crumble, allowing a rich and strange experience of how sexuality is “historically constructed” to emerge.

Thomas Harrison follows, in “Offscreen Space: From Cinema and Sculpture to Photography, Poetry, and Narrative,” with an experiment in deploying the cinematic concept of

¹ This discussion occurs at the beginning of the film *Derrida*, directed by Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering (2002; Jane Doe Films, Inc., Los Angeles, CA).

“off screen space” transhistorically and transmedially to activate spaces between formalist close reading and contextual, historicist or cultural studies approaches to the visual arts, cinema, and literature. Beginning with Michelangelo’s *David*, Harrison leads us along an eventful itinerary toward Montale’s proposition that we read what is not seen as more ontological than the “schermo” (screen) of quotidian vision. Harrison focuses on the fluid “relations between a perceptual scene and what it excludes.” Exemplary but not meant to be comprehensive, his examples are drawn from Italian sculpture, architecture, photography, cinema, and poetry, from the fifteenth and sixteenth to the twentieth century. Harrison’s treatment of off-screen space complements Champagne’s treatment of time and creates with it a provocative relational diptych.

Matthew Collins writes about a materialization of Foucault’s notion of heterotopia in his study of Adriano Olivetti’s development of the Olivetti factory and its associated workers’ housing in the town of Ivrea. In “The Formation of a Heterotopia: An Inquiry into the Intermingling of Utopic Thoughts and Concrete Activities in Olivetti’s Ivrea,” Collins argues that Olivetti’s long-term project of developing a work environment that carefully integrated the factory with both the town and the landscape and that focused on the welfare of families and workers, materializes the Foucauldian idea of a “space where things are different in ways that foster different ways of knowing.” He meticulously chronicles Olivetti’s “collection” over the years of a wide array of intellectual and architectural visionaries, whose ideas directly and indirectly contributed to the creation of a factory complex featured in a 1952 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York as “the leading corporation in the Western World in the field of design.” Notable in the context of Fascism, Olivetti did not seek consensus among those he consulted or was inspired by (including the seemingly antithetical Le Corbusier, and Frank Lloyd Wright), but realized their utopic concepts in limited, fragmented, “heterotopic” ways, offering, perhaps, another example of deeply rooted complicities veiled by superficial contestations within Western culture.

Cristelle Baskins and Silvia Bottinelli describe an unusual show mounted at the Palazzo Strozzi in 1949, in the midst of the rubble left by both the German and the Allied bombing of Florence. Conceptualized and overseen by representatives of parties from across the political spectrum, whose one uniting goal was the restoration or rebirth of the devastated city, “Lorenzo il Magnifico e le arti” consisted, for the most part of early modern “domestic” paintings created for the wedding chests (*cassoni*), headboards (*spalliere*), and birthing trays (*deschi di parto*) of elite families. Linking several canonical artists with their lesser known (and much more cheaply borrowed and insured) works, the exhibition received reviews ranging from critical to laudatory, some of which speculated about whether Lorenzo was the appropriate figure to be evoked in the aftermath of Mussolini’s regime and whether the cool, modernist neon lighting worked well with the warm Renaissance oils. Unacknowledged in the archive, though, is a strongly masculinist subtext. Baskin and Bottinelli make the incisive observation that, despite women’s accession to the vote in 1948, the political stances of all the major parties involved with the project clearly excluded women from the public sphere. One promoter, they found, even pushed to legislate the removal of wives from any extra-domestic labor. While formal beauty was understood to be socially elevating, and the framing of the show suggested that women of all classes were seen as deserving of access to harmonious and efficient domestic spaces, Baskins and Bottinelli conclude that the new social orders promoted by both left and right uniformly relegated women to the domestic sphere. Like Ivrea and the Olivetti factory, then, “Lorenzo il Magnifico e le arti,” can be seen as aesthetically reinforcing and naturalizing social divisions (class in the case of Olivetti; gender in the “Lorenzo the Magnificent and the Arts” show) even as it aspired to

democratize and disseminate art and design. This paradox resurfaces in two later essays that grapple with late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century aesthetic treatments of immigration.

Resisting domestication is literally and overtly the focus of Monica Streifer's consideration of the difference between Anna Banti's novelistic and theatrical treatments of early modern painter Artemesia Gentileschi. In "Banti Stages Artemisia Gentileschi: Intersections of Painting and Performance on the Modern Italian Stage," Streifer argues that Banti's play, *Corte Savella*, aspires to a *verismo* of vocal, visual, and physical immediacy that the *vero* of a necessarily fragmentary historical record could never achieve. Banti felt that even the narrative of her novel *Artemesia* submerged the revolutionary import of its subject's life. Theater, though, offered the means to engage audience/spectators viscerally in the response of a highly gifted, completely dedicated, revolutionary female artist to the violence of patriarchal subjugation. Filling out the picture sketched by Baskins and Bottinelli of the situation of women in Italy in the late 1940s and early 1950s (to which Banti herself was responding in both the novel and the play), Streifer emphasizes the lack of any meaningful economic, political or socio-cultural changes in the status of women in the aftermath of World War II. Despite the juridical equality of men and women written into the postwar Italian constitution, there was no reform of traditional gender roles. Challenging even leftwing neorealist aesthetics, Streifer argues, Banti foregrounds the problematics of representing the "real" of gender under the circumstances offered by a fundamentally masculinist order.

Elena Ferrante's explosively unorthodox treatment of the maternal subject and the difficult birth of new female subjects from the toxic swamp of patriarchal legacies take center stage in Katrin Wehling-Giorgi's discussion of violence, mutilation, and the maternal in several of Ferrante's novels. Wehling-Giorgi's close readings of Ferrante's complex depictions of motherhood in *L'amore molesto*, *La figlia oscura*, and the "Neapolitan novels" suggest that Ferrante approaches the unrepresentable story of gender in late twentieth-century Italy by relentlessly visibilizing the monstrousness of the socially and religiously constructed stereotype of the nurturing, self-abnegating, and asexual female parent. Drawing upon Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection and Adriana Cavarero's discussion of horrorism, she foregrounds Ferrante's visceral evocations of the repulsion, fear, and profound connection felt by daughters in relation to their culturally mutilated mothers. In *L'amore molesto*, Wehling-Giorgi argues, Ferrante's female narrator actively renegotiates the positions of both looking and being seen (as Streifer argues that Anna Banti does in *Corte Savella*), thereby abjecting, not the mother, but patriarchal conceptualizations of the female body. Ferrante abjects in order to rewrite the history of female submission in a patriarchally oriented society.

Cinema is, of course, central to any consideration of moving images in the Italian context. Federico Pacchioni and Alan O'Leary both approach questions of Italian film scholarship from innovative angles, casting new light on well-trodden pathways of the critical literature. Pacchioni's essay deals specifically with the metacinematic aspects of the use of puppetry in early Italian films, highlighting the relationship between early cinematic practices on the one hand, and puppetry, magic lantern shows, and other popular forms of proto-animation on the other. As scholars have previously observed, cinema, at its inception, intersected with the aesthetic conventions and social spaces of popular entertainment and spectacle. Rejecting the commonly held notion that the advent of cinema eventually replaced or even destroyed these earlier modes of popular entertainment, Pacchioni shows how the intermediation of film and puppetry both increased the expressive power of the new medium and heightened the prestige of earlier forms of spectacle, offering as examples not only Italy's first animated film *La guerra e il*

sogno di Momi (1917), but also the most prestigious dramatic features of the era, including *L'inferno* (1911) and *Cabiria* (1913).

With its provocatively Bazinian title, O'Leary's "What is Italian Cinema?" is concerned with the history and reception of Italian films over a broader arc of time. Focusing specifically on what he perceives as a limited understanding of Italian Cinema as a category of study in the English-speaking academy, O'Leary claims that Anglophone scholarship has been excessively invested in valorizing Italy's realist and auteurist traditions, eclipsing the richness and variety of the many different kinds of films produced in Italy and enjoyed by Italian audiences. Examining the contents of three edited companions to Italian cinema—two recently published and one forthcoming—in order to highlight the preoccupations of contemporary Anglophone specialists in the field, his article functions as a call for innovative methodologies and a broader, more nuanced understanding of what might constitute its object of study.

The articles by Robert Rushing and Dan Paul are each concerned with configurations of mobility in Italian cinema at different historical moments, probing the symbolic function of these images, particularly from the perspective of gender and sexuality, self-preservation, or self-definition. Rushing's article, "Planes, Trains, Automobiles, Bicycles, Spaceships, and an Elephant: Images of Movement from Neorealism to the *commedia all'italiana*" investigates the distinctive range of "moving images" that characterize Italian comedy in the 1950s and 1960s. In this repertoire of images, the prominence of the automobile is particularly striking. For Rushing, the car functions in the films of the era not only as a potent reference to the unprecedented movement of people within Italy's geographic boundaries in the decades following World War II, but also as an emblem of the upward social mobility made possible by the onset of the so-called economic miracle. Additionally, it was an image known to elicit a strong emotional response from its audiences. Scholarship on the *commedia* has long recognized the importance of the automobile to the genre, but Rushing's article goes further than merely acknowledging this fact. Despite its ubiquity, the car is not the only mode of transportation highlighted in the cinema of the period. Indeed, there is an abundance of other vehicles, faster or slower, more glamorous or more modest, more futuristic or more traditional. Comparing the symbolic weight of the different kinds of mobility visualized in neorealist cinema with those presented in the comedies of the 1950s and 1960s, Rushing shows how these "moving images" are at each historical moment invested with Italian fears and hopes vis-à-vis prosperity and modernization, including, in particular, the imagined threat to men constituted by shifting gender arrangements. Far from perceiving any straightforward "romance" between Italians and the automobile during the boom years, as has been typically suggested, Rushing shows that the deployment of the car in the *commedia* elicits a cluster of complicated emotions, including anxiety and anguish vis-à-vis the changing hierarchies of power brought on by rapid change.

Focusing on a surge of male-centered teen films that flourished in Italy at the beginning of the 21st century, Dan Paul's article "Marking Their Territory: Male Adolescence Abroad in Recent Italian Teen Film" identifies a particular subgroup of cinematic narratives involving Italian adolescents who, in the course of vacationing outside Italy's borders, appear to embrace a process of self-transformation and maturation. Using as case studies Giovanni Veronesi's *Che ne sarà di noi* (2004), Francesca Archibugi's *Lezioni di volo* (2007), Francesco Falaschi's *Last Minute Marocco* (2007), and Luigi Cecinelli's *Niente può fermarci* (2013), Paul shows how distance from the home country enables the young male protagonists to cast off adolescence and attain heterosexual maturity. Traveling in the company of male friends, these teenage characters shore up their masculinity through the fulfillment of heterosexual desire, the simultaneous

affirmation of homosocial bonds, and the eventual assertion of female-free spaces. The celebration of heterosexual coupling that constitutes the “happy ending” in many traditional teen films is, in fact, pointedly absent from these narratives, where it is replaced by the consolidation of male bonds that eventually enable the young protagonists to come to terms with the tensions experienced within their families of origin. Movement beyond Italy in these films is thus construed, conservatively, as the path on which Italian youths cross the threshold into manhood in order to return to Italy maturely and serenely as fully-fledged exemplars of heteronormative masculinity.

Thomas Peterson’s contribution, “*Quando si ama qualcuno lo si ama per qualcun altro*’: Francesca Comencini’s Retelling of Svevo’s *Zeno*,” contrasts radically with these cinematic and gender tropes. Adapted from two chapters of Italo Svevo’s *La coscienza di Zeno*, Comencini’s film, *Le parole di mio padre* (2001), becomes a deeply personal response not only to Svevo, but also to her famous father, *commedia all’italiana* director, Luigi Comencini. The two families profiled in the film are both, though differently, filled with patriarchal, oedipal tensions, and the elusive and doubt-filled heterosexual love that finally emerges from the film’s complex web of frustrations, accidents, artistic aspirations, and gender politics is anything but serene. (Not coincidentally, the two chapters that Comencini adapts are “La morte di mio padre” and “La storia del mio matrimonio.”) But Peterson shares Harrison’s interest in off-screen spaces, calling attention to Francesca Comencini’s use of negative spaces of silence and darkness, asynchronous montage, and a generally oblique, non-discursive film language to suspend the rigid structures of realist representation and patriarchal masculinity. The originality of Comencini’s film language, particularly her deft explorations of the capacity of cinema to offer alternative logics and temporalities to those of heteronormative bourgeois existence, implicitly critiques the illusions of movement offered in the films discussed by Paul and by Avi Valladares and anticipates the more Derridean treatments of encounters with Others that Rhiannon Welch explores.

The onset of mass immigration to Italy at the end of the twentieth century has prompted multiple efforts by artists and filmmakers to engage with the nation’s encounter with its others, past and present. There is already a substantial archive of scholarly work devoted to films about migration, and Valladares’s essay aligns with this strain in the critical literature. Using the label “Italian Cinema of Immigration” to describe a cluster of films made in Italy from the early 1990s to the middle of the first decade of the new millennium, Valladares analyzes the implications of a trope that has generally been taken for granted in cinematic representations of Italian immigration—that is, the tendency to equate Italy’s contemporary immigrants with Southern Italian emigrants of the past. Valladares argues that this recurring analogy, articulated in several prominent films centered on narratives of migration, is a distortion that belies the facts of history. In other words, it is a form of misremembering based on erasures that are so ingrained in Italian culture as to go unnoticed, while feeding on long standing discriminatory hierarchies between the North and the South.

Rhiannon Welch’s article, “Anachronism, Displacement, Trace: ‘Scarred Images’ and the Postcolonial Time Lag,” looks at a more varied body of artistic projects that resonate with the explicit or implicit racial hierarchies underpinning contemporary Italian encounters with migrants and the historical trajectories implicated in the process. Her analysis aligns *End of Dreams*, a recent installation by Danish sculptor and video artist Nikolaj Larsen, with two documentaries from an earlier era—by Pier Paolo Pasolini (1970) and Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi (1986), respectively—and with Dagmawi Yimer’s experimental video *Asmat* (2015), all of which engage with the representation and reception of racialized alterities

from the colonial period to the global present. Welch powerfully demonstrates how this heterogeneous body of work highlights the imperfections of memory, the “scarring,” disfigurement, or willful forgetting that accompany the passage of time, as well as the inevitable incompleteness of any memorializing project. What these diverse artistic projects have in common is at least some level of self-awareness at the metanarrative level, implying a recognition of their own inability to repair the wounds of colonial (and neocolonial) oppression and their limited capacity to see and represent the other.

Though this collection of essays is eclectic, several preoccupations emerge with great insistence: the resilience of patriarchal gender arrangements that isolate and constrain; the cultural promise and resistances to it of Italy’s relatively recent encounter with mass immigration; the urgency of loosening the hold of social identities anchored by categories of gender, race, region, and nation; the transformative light shed on earlier cultural productions by unconventional historiographies. These stories about encountering new worlds, suspending the rigidities of old ones, and accepting the doubts and fragilities accompanying both movements, cannot, axiomatically, become canonical. They take place in unrecuperable spaces, which, nevertheless, oxygenate our more quotidian social, cultural, and political projects. In the second issue of this volume, contributors continue, in this spirit, to offer access to new energies, intersections, and trajectories.

We would like to thank all those who helped bring *Moving Images* to fruition, including our contributors, expert outside readers, funders, and particularly our resourceful managing editor, Leslie Elwell. Thanks also to our copy editors, S.C. Kaplan, Marina Romani, and Timothy Wardell, and to the technological staff at the University of California’s eScholarship and California Digital Library, which host and archive *California Italian Studies*. For financial support we gratefully acknowledge contributions from the following campuses of the University of California system: UC Berkeley, UC Los Angeles, UC Davis, UC Riverside, UC San Diego, and UC Santa Cruz.

Finally, we give special thanks to graphic artist Luca Serasini, whose work was featured in Dagmawi Yimer’s experimental video *Asmat*, for generously allowing us to use an image from his unfinished graphic novel *#migrantes* as our cover art.

Filmography

Derrida, Dir. Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering, 2002, Jane Doe Films Inc. (Released on DVD by Zeitgeist Video, 2003. Currently available through Amazon Video and iTunes.)