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Rhino / Rhinoceros: Experimental Cinema and the Migrant Condition

Shelleen Greene

Introduction

Experimental filmmaker Kevin Jerome Everson's *Rhinoceros* (*Rinoceronte*, 2013) is an imaginary staging of the last speech of Alessandro de' Medici (1510–1537), the first Duke of Florence. Because of his mixed African Italian heritage, Alessandro, sometimes referred to as *Il Moro* (the Moor), has been called the first black European head of state. The premise of *Rhinoceros*—that Alessandro de' Medici's final political performance was captured on tape for television broadcast and now exists as found object and historical document—allows the tape to operate not only as the trace of the first black European political leader, but also as the archive of earlier and forgotten moments in the history of African descent Europeans, Italian colonialism, and of revolutionary, anti-imperialist movements.¹ *Rhino* (2017), a second film by Everson about Alessandro de' Medici, interweaves the days leading up to Alessandro's assassination with interviews with African migrants in present-day Florence.

While *Rhinoceros* and *Rhino* are staged within the political milieu of sixteenth-century Florence, both films meaningfully engage histories of Italian nation-state formation, including its nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonial expansionism in north and east Africa, as well as contemporary non-Western migration to the European Union. In keeping with the anachronistic staging of Alessandro de' Medici's final, defiant communiqué, the Duke of Florence monologue in *Rhinoceros* is based upon one of the last recorded statements of Muammar Gaddafi, the former Prime Minister of Libya.² Gaddafi was killed in the city of Sirte in October 2011, where he had fled after the fall of his government during the 2011 Libyan Civil War, precipitated by what became known as the Arab Spring, the post-democratic movements that swept countries in north Africa and the Middle East toward the end of 2010. Libya's complex history with Western nation-states, including its former colonizer, Italy, animates both films, which then become a rumination on our particular and peculiar postcolonial moment. *Rhino* moves between scenes from the last days of de' Medici's life, and interviews with African men who speak of their journeys through Libya, dangerous passages across the Mediterranean Sea on precarious boats, and their current lives within Italy. While *Rhino* makes more explicit connections between Alessandro de' Medici and contemporary African migration, both *Rhinoceros* and *Rhino* explore the centuries-long presence of the African diaspora in Italy.

The titles, *Rhinoceros* and *Rhino*, provocatively evoke another “rhinoceros” that can be placed in dialogue by way of the non-linear approach to history enacted in the two films. Perhaps most directly, the films' titles refer to Albrecht Dürer's *Rhinoceros* of 1515. Dürer (1471–1528) had never seen a rhinoceros, but based his woodcut on written accounts and an artist's rendition

¹ In a recent interview published in *Film Quarterly*, Everson describes *Rhinoceros* as “a fictional sixteenth-century television show.” See Megan Ratner, “Abstraction through Representation: Interview with Kevin Jerome Everson,” *Film Quarterly* 71/3 (2018): 58–64, 63.

² See “Muammar Gaddafi Speech (22 February 2011).” YouTube video, 3:56. Posted by SLOBoe. Uploaded 23 February 2011. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69wBG6ULNzQ>

of a rhinoceros that was shipped from India to the court of Manuel I, King of Portugal.³ The rhinoceros died in 1516 en route to Pope Leo X (Giovanni di Lorenzo de' Medici, Alessandro's granduncle). However, Dürer's woodcut would eventually serve as the basis for Alessandro de' Medici's emblem, which carried the insignia in Spanish: "I Shall Not Return Without Victory."⁴ Dürer's *Rhinoceros* can serve as a starting point for examining the films as "archival documents" of Alessandro de' Medici and the controversies surrounding his African lineage.

During the same period in which Dürer produced his famed *Rhinoceros* woodcut, he also created portraits of African peoples he encountered in his journeys throughout Europe. His two drawings of African subjects, *Portrait of an African* (1508) and *Portrait of Katerina* (or *Katharina, 20 years old*) from 1521 (currently held in the Uffizi Galleries in Florence), are often read as documents to the presence of Africans in early modern Europe. However, like the *Rhinoceros* woodcut, the portraits raise questions that are explored in Everson's practice: the archive, historiography, and the indexicality of the image. Dürer completed the *Portrait of Katerina* while visiting the Netherlands between 1521 and 1522, during which time he stayed with his friend João Brandão, a commercial agent for Manuel I, King of Portugal, the owner of the ill-fated rhinoceros.⁵ Like Alessandro's mother, Simonetta da Colvecchio (Simunetta or Anna)—a north African descent servant who worked in the household of Alessandro's father, Lorenzo II de' Medici, Duke of Urbino—not much is known about Katerina. She is believed to have been a servant in Brandão's Antwerp household, and is mentioned in Dürer's diary as "[...Brandão's] negress" ("The Epiphany of the Black Magus Circa 1500," 56). Both *Katerina* and the *Portrait of Katerina* circulated within the global financial networks of Portugal, the European country that established the first routes of what eventually became the transatlantic African slave trade.

The Atlantic and Mediterranean slave trades provide the broader historical context of Alessandro de' Medici's mercurial rise and fall in the first decades of sixteenth-century Florence. As will be discussed later, the wealth of the global trades, in the form of foreign or "exotic" animals, luxury goods such as silk, sugar, ivory, and African servants and slaves, appear in the form of the blackamoors (*moretti*), the decorative statues of African servants at the Villa La Pietra, the Renaissance villa in which *Rhinoceros* was filmed. *Rhino* and *Rhinoceros* create another material trace and archive for Alessandro de' Medici, one that re-routes the histories of black Europe.

By merging the figures of de' Medici and Gaddafi in *Rhinoceros*, and weaving together the narratives of de' Medici with that of present-day African migrants in *Rhino*, the films bring together at least three related, but discontinuous histories: that of early modern Italy (specifically, of Florentine Republicanism), modern Italian colonialism (here, Italian colonial expansionism during the 1911–1912 Italo-Turkish War), and contemporary African immigration to Italy. In Everson's use of experimental film to re-enact these histories of modern Italy, I also place these two films within the tradition of Afrosurrealism. According to theorist Terri Francis, Afrosurrealism—based on playwright and poet Amiri Baraka's term "Afrosurrealist Expressionism" and theorist D. Scot Miller's manifesto—is an African diasporic aesthetic that

³ L.C. Rookmaaker, "Review of the European Perception of the African Rhinoceros," *Journal of Zoology* 265/4 (April 2005): 365–376, 365.

⁴ Catherine Fletcher, *The Black Prince of Florence: The Spectacular Life and Treacherous World of Alessandro de' Medici* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 17.

⁵ Joseph Leo Koerner, "The Epiphany of the Black Magus Circa 1500," in *The Image of the Black in Western Art from the "Age of Discovery" to the Age of Abolition": Artists of the Renaissance and Baroque*. Edited by David Bindman, Henry Louis Gates (Jr.), and Karen C.C. Dalton (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 56.

uses anachronism, mysticism, the grotesque, and the fantastic to both comment upon the lingering impact of Western imperialism and to create narratives of future liberation. Reading *Rhinoceros* and *Rhino* through an Afrosurrealist imaginary places into question the limits of the documentary realist mode to narrate, visualize, and perform history or the historical moment.

In order to explore the ways in which the films collapse these various points of Italian modern history, we can begin in 2009, when Gaddafi made his first state visit to Italy. The legacy of Italian colonialism in Libya, from the 1911–12 Italo-Turkish War (then Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan) to the subsequent thirty-year period of Libyan colonial resistance, is made present throughout this state visit. In one photograph of this historic visit, Gaddafi, dressed in his full military regalia, stands to the right of Berlusconi. On Gaddafi's chest is a black and white image of Omar al-Mukhtar (1858–1931), the Libyan resistance fighter who became the icon of Libyan anti-colonial struggle after his capture and execution by Italian forces led by Marshal Pietro Badoglio (viceroy of Italian East Africa) and Marshal Rodolfo Graziani.⁶ In the image, al-Mukhtar is in chains, surrounded by Italian soldiers who variously smile and pose for the camera. In this moment, Gaddafi captures the global media spotlight, a deft and defiant use of political propaganda on the enemy's territory. The 1931 black and white image of the captured Omar al-Mukhtar opens a window to the past. However, in light of Gaddafi's post-Cold War alignments with former Western colonial powers, his gesture towards the legacy of Omar al-Mukhtar and anti-colonial struggle lacks political conviction.

In 2004, Italy and Libya began the first stages of what eventually became the Italian-Libyan friendship treaty of 2008. In the same year the agreement was reached, Italy offered Libya the sum of five billion dollars to amend past colonial aggressions. Along with allowing Italian energy companies greater access to Libyan oil resources, the agreement also made provisions for Libya to aid Italy in stemming the arrival of undocumented migrants to Europe through Italy, allowing Italy to return undocumented migrants to Libya and then to their countries of origin. To further solidify the new alliance and postcolonial future between Italy and Libya, Gaddafi named August 30 “Libyan-Italian Friendship Day.”⁷ In less than four years, the post-democratic revolutions of the Arab Spring would end Gaddafi's forty-two-year dictatorship and result in his death.

The 1969 Revolution began with greater hopes, in another geopolitical constellation. The first wave of post-World War II decolonization was complete, as well as the global division between the “First” world former imperial powers and “Third” world former colonies. Comprised of mostly young military officers, the 1969 Revolution overthrew the Libyan monarchy (then led by King Idris I (1959–1969)), perceived as aligned with the former European imperial powers.⁸ Led by Gaddafi, the 1969 coup also drew heavily on the colonial legacy with Italy, the anti-colonial struggle, and the symbolic figure of Omar al-Mukhtar. Gaddafi crafted an image as the inheritor of the struggle against European imperialism, creating an “Islamic socialism” to challenge Western capitalism. Dirk Vandewalle writes: “Since 1969, Qadhafi's revolution has contained a strong element of anti-Western rhetoric that resonated strongly with the Middle East and North Africa, a region in the throes of Arab nationalism at the time. In Libya, the reaction against the West among the young revolutionaries was, in part, based on Libya's

⁶ Nicola Labanca, “Italian Colonial Internment,” in *Italian Colonialism*, ed. Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 27–36, 31.

⁷ Anonymous, “Cooperation and Trade: Libya: Italy Agrees Compensation,” *Africa Research Bulletin* 16 August–15 September 2008 (New York: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.)

⁸ Dirk Vandewalle, ed., *Libya Since 1969: Qadhafi's Revolution Revisited* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 9.

historical memory of the Italian colonial period. But it also encompassed a much broader resentment against the role Qadhafi would describe as imperialist.”⁹

In the case of Italy and Libya, putting an “end” to the colonial past, and the highly mediatized spectacle of the 2009 Berlusconi-Gaddafi meeting, masked the economic and political expediencies sought by both nations, including Italy’s desire to extend its oil interests in Libya and stem the flow of non-Western European migrants making their way to southern Italy.

In surveying the various histories that inform our understanding of *Rhinoceros* and *Rhino*, I explore the extent to which formal and narrative experimentation can offer a revisionist, transhistorical framework for understanding contemporary African migration to Italy, one that posits related, but discontinuous, histories of Italian colonialism in Libya and the African presence in Italy’s early modern era. *Rhinoceros* and *Rhino* offer nuanced reflections upon media, modern Italian history, Italian-Libyan relations, and African immigration to Italy by evoking radical Black politics and Third World anti-imperialist struggle of the late 1960s. I contend that in their use of the experimental mode, *Rhinoceros* and *Rhino* offer a revised historiography of Italian modern state formation by way of the “archive” of the African diaspora in Italy.

Rhinoceros

Rhinoceros takes us back to December 1536, what would have been approximately one month before the duke’s assassination at the age of 26 in January 1537 by his cousin Lorenzino (Lorenzaccio) de’ Medici. Five years earlier, his uncle, Pope Clement VII (Giulio de’ Medici), installed Alessandro as hereditary duke of Florence, thereby ending the Republic that was established after the sack of Rome in 1527 by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. In a recent history of Alessandro de’ Medici, *The Black Prince of Florence: The Spectacular Life and Treacherous World of Alessandro de’ Medici*, Catherine Fletcher provides an account of Alessandro’s death: the young duke, known for his amorous nature, was lured to the home of Caterina de’ Ginori (or in some accounts, Laudomia de’ Medici, Lorenzino’s sister). There, Alessandro was ambushed by Lorenzino and his accomplice Piero di Gioannabbate (Scoronconcolo) and stabbed to death.¹⁰

Fletcher writes: “It was the misfortune of Alessandro de’ Medici to be assassinated twice: first with a sword, then with a pen. Thanks to Lorenzino, and to the many enemies of the Medici family, Alessandro has gone down in history as a tyrant” (5). Indeed, in his historical accounts, Alessandro is characterized as a womanizer and a despot who suppressed Florentine Republicanism. However, Alessandro had already been invoked as a testament to the existence of black Africans in Renaissance Italy—not as servants, but as members of the most illustrious families like the Medici.¹¹ Arturo Schomburg, the historian and political activist whose collection served as the basis of the New York Public Library’s Center for Research in Black Culture, wrote the essay “Alessandro, First Duke of Florence: The Negro Medici” for *The Crisis* magazine in 1931, just prior to the Italo-Ethiopian War of 1933–36. The essay writes Alessandro’s blackness into the chronicles of the Medici family: “You will have noticed among the Bronzino’s remarkable paintings one labeled ‘Alessandro, 1531–1537.’ Look at it again,

⁹ Vandewalle, *Libya Since 1969*, 34.

¹⁰ Fletcher, *The Black Prince of Florence*, 2–5.

¹¹ French author Alexandre Dumas (1802–1870), who himself was of African descent (by way of his father’s mother), wrote a novel about Alessandro de’ Medici’s assassination at the hands of his cousin Lorenzino, titled *Una notte a Firenze sotto Alessandro de’ Medici*, published in 1861.

carefully, and you will be drawn closer by the fact it is unlike those other white men and rose-colored, fair women scattered in those magnificent halls among tombs of their ducal heads. Do not for a moment think that this is the picture of a menial, an efficient porter or a pleasant waiter. Make no such a mistake! It is the picture of the mulatto Duke.”¹²

Rhinoceros is attentive to the ways in which its subject, “Alessandro de’ Medici,” has been constructed discursively over time, in legal, financial, literary, and visual texts. I suggest the film’s attention to the discursivity of race in the historical narratives of Alessandro de’ Medici is similar to Arturo Schomburg’s revision of the “tyrannicide narrative” that dominated much of Alessandro’s biography since his assassination. As Stephanie Jed argues in her study of Alessandro de’ Medici’s historiography, Lorenzino’s “new Brutus” narrative, and particularly “its representation in humanist historiography are problematic for the modern reader interested in issues of social and political change.”¹³ Not only does the narrative propose a universal “people” (without differences of race, class or gender), but the narrative is later deployed during the Fascist era, in films such as Guido Brignone’s *Lorenzino de’ Medici* (1935), in which Lorenzino is represented as a Fascist man of action, who “convert[s] his culture into effective political action” (36).

Thus, Alessandro’s tumultuous and short life is a point of departure for *Rhinoceros*, which addresses broader questions regarding historiography and film aesthetics. As theorist Michael Gillespie argues, Everson’s practice challenges the reflective expectations of Black art. Gillespie writes: “Everson’s work enacts a sense of art in the terms of Blackness. Blackness represents the way of distinguishing the ‘Black’ of the social category of race from the ‘Black’ of Black visual and expressive culture. It is a critical term for how the idea of race as discourse in art practice does not mean that this art must have a social application, be bound by the continued ‘burden of representation,’ or that art function as an unmediated and indexical tie to the Black lifeworld.”¹⁴

Hence, *Rhinoceros* as the staging of a sixteenth-century television broadcast is attentive to the question of historiography, as well as the role of mediation in identity construction. *Rhinoceros* and *Rhino* were originally conceived to bring together early modern Italy with twentieth-century U.S. television, specifically by reference to African American actor Gail Fisher (1935–2000), who would stand in for Alessandro’s mother of African descent, Simonetta. Fisher is best known for her role as Peggy Fair on the 1970s television drama *Mannix* (CBS, 1967–1975). She was also one of the first African American actors to hold a regular series position on a primetime television program, and the first to win both an Emmy and a Golden Globe Award. The resulting second film *Rhino* (2017) serves as prequel to *Rhinoceros*, depicting the final days of the prince via correspondence to his wife, Princess Margaret of Parma, daughter of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, interspersed with interviews with African migrants living in Florence. Here, transnational telecommunications (in the form of television) become another vehicle for African diaspora identity formation, as part of what Arjun Appadurai has referred to as “mediascape” or the movement of print, electronic and digital images “across national boundaries.”¹⁵

¹² Schomburg quoted in Fletcher, *The Black Prince of Florence*, 258–259.

¹³ Stephanie Jed, *Wings for our Courage: Gender, Erudition, and Republican Thought* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2011), 26.

¹⁴ Michael B. Gillespie, “To Do Better: Notes on the Work of Kevin Jerome Everson,” in *Broad Daylight and Other Times: Selected Works of Kevin Jerome Everson*, ed. Video Data Bank in association with Picture Palace Pictures and Trich Arts (Chicago: School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2011), 58–74, 67.

¹⁵ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 45–46.

As mentioned prior, *Rhinoceros* draws upon a videotaped communiqué by Gaddafi dated February 22, 2011. While the film is set in the sixteenth century, Alessandro appears in a contemporary black suit and tie, speaking into a microphone while being videotaped, proclaiming his rights as head of state, and declaring to his people that he will triumph and rule Florence again. As Gillespie argues, found footage in Everson's films are more than "discarded reportage of an incident," but a "historiographic trace" that "provides for a reactivation and defamiliarization of the everyday as a moment of reflection on the writing of history."¹⁶ *Rhinoceros* transposes parts of Gaddafi's speech, almost word for word, substituting the city-state of Florence for the country of Libya. At the end of the speech, the camera zooms out, revealing a balcony with Alessandro positioned under a large archway with two attendants on either side. In a self-reflexive series of jump cuts, we see Alessandro embracing his attendants, as cameras move in and out of focus capturing the slow dismantlement of stage and political performance.

Rather than using the archival materials towards documentary realism, *Rhinoceros* is "fake." In using found footage, as in the February 2011 communiqué of Muammar Gaddafi, *Rhinoceros* does not seek to make overt commentary or employ an essay format; rather, Everson states that in his work, he is "looking for form, I'm looking for performance, and how it was made."¹⁷ For Terri Francis, what is at stake for this kind of counterfeiting and subversion of realist aesthetics is the ability to use imagination to construct alternate histories, histories that may not only empower black subjects, but also reveal "truths" that may not be evident in dominant discourses. Francis writes of Everson's films: "Kevin's engagement with history and memory can be considered a form of fiction, of storytelling, of storying. Where black reality is 'constantly contested' Kevin's work does mark an escape route in the imagination—not as mere distraction from oppression but as a derailing of it" (185).

Thus, the film is not a documentary, but uses "reality as a device."¹⁸ In other words, the film should "look like" an actuality, or as though an actual event was filmed, then lost, then rediscovered and now exists as a unique historical document. As Emmanuel Burdeau writes of Everson's work, "[t]he documentary effect functions identically whether the found footage is real or simulated."¹⁹

The use of the documentary effect towards conveying the various histories of the African diaspora can be found in another film from the same period, *Sugarcoated Arsenic* (2014). *Sugarcoated Arsenic* is a black and white, 16 mm film based on the life of Dr. Vivian Gordon (1934–1995), the first African American woman to be awarded a Ph.D. at the University of Virginia (in Sociology), and director of the University of Virginia's Black Studies program from 1975 to 1980. The title comes from a 1984 recorded speech, in which Gordon refers to "new forms of racism" that emerged in the post-Civil Rights, post-Black Power eras as "sugarcoated arsenic...just as easy to swallow, but kills you just as dead."²⁰ (*Swarthmore Phoenix*, 2017).²¹

¹⁶ Gillespie, "To Do Better," 69.

¹⁷ Terri Francis, "Close-Up: Afrosurrealism: Of the Ludic, the Blues, and the Counterfeit: An Interview with Kevin Jerome Everson, Experimental Filmmaker," *Black Camera* 5/1 (Fall 2013): 184–208, 202.

¹⁸ Everson as quoted in Gillespie, "To Do Better," 63.

¹⁹ Emmanuel Burdeau, "Undeclared—Notes on KJE's films," in *Broad Daylight and Other Times: Selected Works of Kevin Jerome Everson*, ed. Video Data Bank in association with Picture Palace Pictures and Trich Arts (Chicago: School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2011), 16–25, 17.

²⁰ Carlos Almeida. "'Sugarcoated Arsenic' Doesn't Sugarcoat its Material." *Swarthmore Phoenix*, (February 9, 2017). <https://swarthmorephoenix.com/2017/02/09/sugarcoated-arsenic-doesnt-sugarcoat-its-material/> (accessed February 7, 2019).

We see Gordon throughout the documentary immersed within the life of the university, interacting with students, while her voiceover speech conveys a critical assessment of the concept of historical “progress” as it pertains to black liberation within educational institutions. *Sugarcoated Arsenic* ends with a night protest by black students who chant: “Revolution has come. Black Power!” (Everson, *Sugarcoated Arsenic*, 2014). As in *Rhinoceros*, *Sugarcoated Arsenic* uses the 1984 speech as grounds for a reflection upon mediated performance, but more significantly, on the imaginative reconstruction of the various histories of the African diaspora.



Fig. 1. Alessandro de' Medici (performed by Justin Randolph Thompson) speaks to the Florentine people. *Rhinoceros*, 2013, directed by Kevin Jerome Everson.

The Alessandro of *Rhinoceros* is an odd mixture of composure and rambling confusion. For the majority of his speech, we look “up” at him, posturing and gesturing during an approximately six-minute speech. Through the use of found footage, *Rhinoceros* suggests parallels between Alessandro’s struggle against Florentine republicanism and Gaddafi’s struggle against insurgents during the Libyan Civil War. There are other connections that can be made between Gaddafi and de’ Medici: both were viewed as authoritarian rulers who suppressed forms of representative government, both were subject to calls to end their rule by factions within and exiles from outside the state, both were assassinated. After the end of the speech, the camera zooms out and we realize that Alessandro is not speaking to the “people of Florence,” but to the camera.

Here, *Rhinoceros* touches upon the role of mass media in political propaganda, connecting the figure of de’ Medici to not only Gaddafi, but to other political leaders, such as Benito Mussolini, Prime Minister of Italy and leader of the National Fascist Party from 1922 to 1943, and former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, all of whom harnessed the power of the media

²¹ The film is based upon Gordon’s documented speeches and writings, but also inspired by black British filmmaker Horace Ové’s *Baldwin’s Nigger* (1968), a documentary on speeches given by novelist James Baldwin and entertainer Dick Gregory about the Black American experience to a group of black British students in London. See *Swarthmore Phoenix*, 2017.

towards authoritarian ends. Indeed, the final jump cuts and the unedited movements after the speech allow *Rhinoceros* to comment upon the construction of filmed or televised political speeches, which usually seek to hide or mask any unscripted material. In particular, *Rhinoceros*, in its black and white images, its representation of the lone political figure behind the microphone, and the low camera angle used for the speech, is reminiscent of Mussolini's rhetorical spectacles. Unlike Mussolini's filmed sound speeches, where we see him gesticulating in front of large cheering crowds, *Rhinoceros* is deliberate in the absence of any audience for Prince Alessandro. In this sense, *Rhinoceros* evokes yet another "rhinoceros"—Eugène Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* (1958), an absurdist play in which a young clerk, Bèrenger, watches members of his small town gradually transform into rhinoceroses. Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* is a critique of authoritarianism, particularly in the form of Nazism and Fascism, and the mindless allegiance of its followers.²² From these provocative links between the three leaders, separated by over five centuries, Everson constructs an alternate reality in keeping with the Afrosurrealist imaginary.



Fig. 2. Alessandro de' Medici ends his speech to the Florentine people.
Rhinoceros, 2013, directed by Kevin Jerome Everson.

While not an aesthetic movement, Afrosurrealism borrows from the early- to mid-twentieth-century avant-garde and specifically surrealism. As Terri Francis relates, in the manifestos of André Breton, surrealism was defined as a “[non]-genre specific aesthetic project of fusing life and art, dream and reality, conscious and unconscious experience.”²³ While Amiri Baraka introduced the term “Afrosurreal Expressionism” in a 1988 essay on African American author Henry Dumas, D. Scot Miller and historian Robin D. G. Kelley link contemporary Afrosurrealist

²² See Matei Calinescu, “Ionesco and Rhinoceros: Personal and Political Backgrounds,” in *East European Politics and Societies* 9/3 (Fall 1995): 394. I thank Professor Vivian Sobchack for this insightful connection to Ionesco's play.

²³ Aruna D'Souza and Mary Ann Caws as quoted by Terri Francis in “Introduction: The No-Theory Chant of Afrosurrealism,” *Black Camera* 5/1 (Fall 2013): 97. See Note 3.

expression not only to European surrealism but also the mid-century Negritude movement.²⁴ Francis, citing Kelley, notes in particular Martinique poet and theorist Aime Cesaire, specifically his education in Paris and friendship with Andre Breton, to conclude that “while black philosophers and artists are not always or prominently linked to surrealism today, historically the actual surrealist community embraced and even sought out such figures.”²⁵

According to Kelley, the European surrealists were already politicized, citing the Paris Surrealism Group stand against French colonialism as early as 1925, and asserting that “the revolts of the colonial world and its struggles for cultural autonomy animated surrealists as much as reading Freud or Marx.”²⁶ Kelley argues that Negritude theorists such as Cesaire, Etienne Léro and René Menil, found affinity between African diasporic cultures (jazz music) and surrealism, finding correspondence between surrealism and what he terms the “marvelous” of the “radical black imagination” (158). Above all, Kelley argues that the embrace of the surrealist aesthetic by the Negritude movement was a challenge to the limits of socialist (and social) realist aesthetics prominent in the Marxist tradition. He writes: “...surrealism is night to Marxism’s day: It breaks the chains of social realism and rationality, turning to poetry as a revolutionary mode of thought and practice. In many ways surrealism has real affinities with aspects of Afrodiasporic vernacular cultures, including an embrace of magic, spirituality, and the ecstatic—elements Marxism has never been able to deal with effectively” (192). Here, a contemporary Afrosurrealism finds precedence in both the European avant-garde and also to a moment in pan-African, specifically Francophone, anti-colonial struggle. By way of Baraka, Afrosurrealism is also connected to the Black Arts Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, another significant moment in the creation of African diasporic cultural politics.

Read through the Afrosurrealist imaginary, *Rhinoceros* and *Rhino* allow for a novel approach to constructing the history of the African diaspora in Italy, especially through the figure of Alessandro de’ Medici. For instance, Everson indirectly addresses the historical controversy surrounding Alessandro’s racial identity. While some uncertainty surrounds Alessandro’s paternity, he is generally recognized to be of North African descent on his mother’s side. As mentioned previously, his mother, known variously as Simonetta, Simunetta da Colvecchio or Anna, was most likely a servant or freed slave in the Medici household outside of Rome during the Medicis’ period of exile after they were expelled from Florence in 1494 under Piero di Lorenzo de’ Medici (the Unfortunate).²⁷ Alessandro is believed to have been born in 1510, and from contemporary accounts, his father is believed to have been Lorenzo di Piero de’ Medici, Duke of Urbino and son of Piero the Unfortunate (1492–1519). However, historians have also speculated that Alessandro may have been the son of Cardinal Giulio di Giuliano de’ Medici, later Pope Clement VII (1478–1534), due to Clement’s favor in selecting Alessandro as the first Duke of Florence over his other illegitimately born heir, Ippolito de’ Medici.²⁸

²⁴ Amiri Baraka. “Henry Dumas: Afro-Surreal Expressionist,” *Black American Literature Forum* 22/2, Henry Dumas Issue (Summer, 1988): 164–166.

²⁵ Terri Francis, “Close-Up: Afrosurrealism: Introduction: The No-Theory Chant of Afrosurrealism” 5/1 (Fall 2013): 99.

²⁶ Robin D.G. Kelley. *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 2002), 160.

²⁷ Fletcher, *The Black Prince of Florence*, 308. Also see Francesco Benedetti, *La madre del Moro: indizio per indizio, la ricostruzione della misteriosa vicenda umana della bella contadina sabina, Simonetta, madre di Alessandro de’ Medici, primo duca di Firenze* (Pescara: Nova Italica, 1995), 23.

²⁸ John Brackett, “Race and Rulership: Alessandro de’ Medici, first Medici duke of Florence, 1529–1537,” in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, eds. T.F. Earle and K.J.P. Lowe (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 303–325, 304–305.

While the majority of contemporary accounts of Alessandro's brief life do not discuss his racial identity in great detail (John Brackett cites one 1647 account by historian Scipione Ammirato that refers to Alessandro as having "brown skin, fat lips and curly hair"), most evidence of his African ancestry are from portraits, notably by Jacopo Pontormo (1534–35), Giorgio Vasari (1534), the ateliers of Agnolo Bronzino (c. 1553–65) and Girolamo Macchietti (1585) ("Race and Rulership," 310–16). In these portraits, Alessandro appears with light brown skin, textured hair, and full lips—physical characteristics that have been referred to as "African" or at least visibly distinct from the representation of ostensibly "white" European subjects.

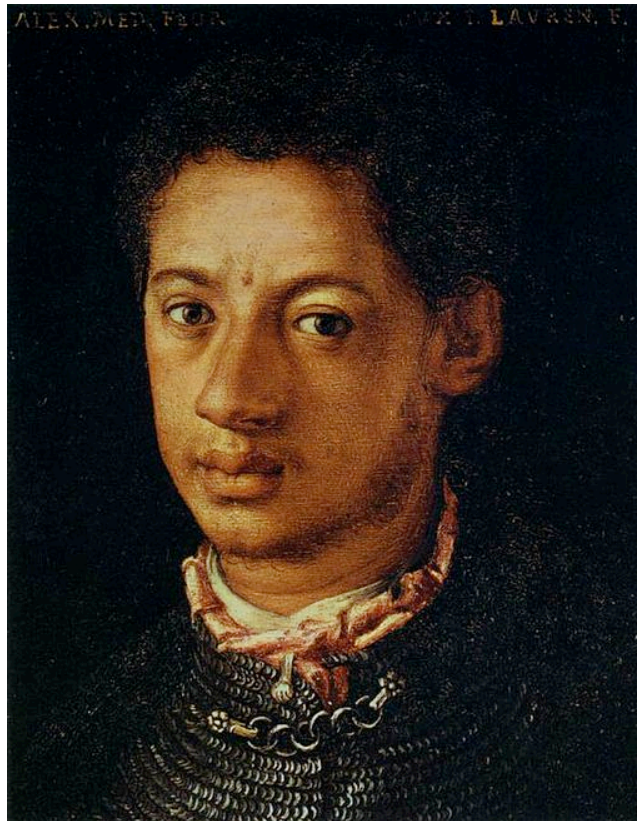


Fig. 3. *Alessandro de' Medici* (1555–1565). Attributed to Agnolo Bronzino (1503–1572)

Historians, including Brackett and Fletcher, argue that at least in early modern Italy, "race" or, more specifically, "blackness," did not have the negative connotations it came to have by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In her book, Fletcher devotes an entire afterword to a discussion of the current debates regarding Alessandro's ethnicity. While providing information regarding the presence of black Africans in Europe, Fletcher summarizes what other scholars, including Brackett, have concluded regarding Alessandro's African heritage. During his life, Alessandro was more politically vulnerable to attacks regarding the low economic and social status of his birth mother than her race. Reviewing contemporary accounts of Alessandro de' Medici, Brackett concludes: "For Alessandro's contemporaries, there seems to have been no connection made in their writings between blackness and his character... Despite the existence of a generalized but also occasional denigration of black Africans in Italian society based on skin colour...racism did not exist intellectually in the same way that it does today" ("Race and Rulership, 325).

Much more telling is Brackett's distinction between early modern and modern Europe, the rise of the European nation-state, and the use of race to separate groups of people and assign innate moral and intellectual qualities to skin color. Attempting to explain why Alessandro's race did not receive more contemporary commentary, Brackett writes, "Perhaps it was due to the absence of 'nations' in the modern sense that 'civilized' behavior was conceived of as open to those with the desire, talent and will to acquire it, rather than enclosed by the artificial political boundaries of European nation-states, which conferred civilization automatically on their inhabitants" (317).

However, race consciousness and racism did exist in medieval and early modern Italy. As Steven Epstein argues in his study of language and slavery in Italy, "[r]acism became another powerful means to justify slavery in the Middle Ages precisely because it helped to excuse practices that occasionally raised ethical worries in the most calloused souls."²⁹ While the meanings of "race" and "ethnicity" changed over time, Epstein argues that pre-modern conceptions of racial difference used to sustain slavery continued to influence Italy in its modern era, as well as our contemporary period of Mediterranean migration. Indeed, political scientist Cedric Robinson, in his groundbreaking critique of Western Marxist thought, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, argues that "racialism" or the "legitimation and corroboration of social organization as natural by reference to the 'racial' components of its elements,"³⁰ had its foundations in feudal Europe (with forms of "internal" racialization such as with Jewish people and the Roma), and eventually led to the modern system of "racial capitalism," characterized by the rise of Western European nation-states, Western imperialism, and plantation slavery.³¹

It is in the nexus of early modern Italy, modern Italian nation-state formation, and modern Italian colonialism that *Rhinoceros* makes its nuanced commentary. In a way, *Rhinoceros* gestures toward what Miguel Mellino, taking his cue from Dipesh Chakrabarty, refers to as "de-provincializing Italy," or a consideration of the role of "race and racialization" in the "foundation of the Italian modern nation."³² Citing Robinson and Paul Gilroy among others, Mellino argues that in order to understand Italy as a postcolonial nation, we must revise an insular "Western narrative of 'capitalist modernity'" for a broader consideration of Italy's participation in "'colonial capitalist modernity and 'racial capitalism' (Robinson)—to stress the constitutive overlap of race and class in the historical development of modern world capitalism" (86). Thus, in its allusion to Dürer's *Rhinoceros* and his etchings of black African subjects in early modern Europe, *Rhinoceros* places the Duke Alessandro within the broader networks of global commerce, and of the Atlantic and Mediterranean slave trades in which the Italian city-states took part. *Rhinoceros*' alternate, non-linear history of Italian-African relations links the geopolitics of sixteenth-century Florence to liberal and Fascist-era colonialism, and the early twenty-first-century period of Italian-Libyan postcolonial relations.

Rhinoceros also references "colonial capitalist modernity" by drawing upon the artistic and architectural legacies of sixteenth-century Florence ("De-Provincializing Italy," 86). *Rhinoceros*

²⁹ Steven Epstein, *Speaking of Slavery: Color, Ethnicity, and Human Bondage in Italy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 2.

³⁰ Cedric Robinson. "Introduction," in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* [1983] (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 2.

³¹ Kelley, "Forward," in Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism*, xiii.

³² Miguel Mellino, "De-Provincializing Italy: Notes on Race, Racialization, and Italy's Coloniality," in *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*, ed. Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 83–99, 88.

was filmed at the Villa la Pietra, an estate once owned by art collectors Arthur Acton (1873–1953), a British art collector, and his wife Hortense Mitchell Acton (1871–1962), an American socialite from a wealthy Chicago banking family. For centuries, Villa la Pietra was home to noble Florentine families, including the Sassetti (1460–1545), whose patriarch, Francesco Sassetti, was acquainted with Alessandro’s uncle, Lorenzo de’ Medici the Magnificent.³³ The Actons resided in La Pietra from 1903, and were the center of an active Florentine expatriate community in the first half of the twentieth century. After Hortense Acton’s death, her son, Sir Harold Acton, managed the residence until his death in 1994, after which the La Pietra estate and collections were bequeathed to New York University. Among the over 5,500 artworks in the Acton Collection are a number of blackamoors (*moretti*), decorative statues that depict black African servants, several of which are shown toward the end of the film. In this instance, the *mise en scene* directs us once again to the presence of black Africans in early modern Europe (“The Voice of Silent Servants,” 227–28).

According to Adrienne Childs, the blackamoor is a “ubiquitous” figure with “an admittedly nebulous designation that conflates the notion of an Arab or Muslim with that of a black African, and is shrouded with a sense of exoticism.”³⁴ Childs distinguishes the word “Moor,” a term used to describe Arabs and North Africans, from the term “blackamoor,” used to describe “anonymous blacks, particularly from European art and literature, well into the nineteenth century” (160).

Not only do the Acton blackamoors speak to the presence of Africans in early modern Italy, but they return us to post-unification Italy and its colonial conquests in north and east Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Actons began collecting their works in the beginning of the twentieth century, a time when Italy was involved in the Italo-Turkish War (1911–1912), which would lead to Italy’s over forty-year brutal colonial occupation of Libya. However, due to both its late national unification and entrance into the “scramble for Africa,” Italy was known as the “least” of the European empires, a label reinforced by its catastrophic defeat in 1896 at the hands of Ethiopian forces under Menelik II (1844–1913) and Empress Taytu Betul (1851–1918) in the first Italo-Ethiopian War. Italy’s victory in the Italo-Turkish War led the way for what became, under the Fascist regime, the Italian North and East African Empire.

Even before its status as the belated Western European imperial power, Italy was seen as one of the “souths” of Europe. By the late nineteenth century, Italy, especially its rural south, was part of the European “Grand Tour” and conceived of as an oriental space within Europe. As Giorgio Bertellini argues, Italy was viewed through the *picturesque*, an aesthetic that “Northern European elites most often adopted to render their cultural experience of Mediterranean Europe, which it translated into imaginative and comforting views of distant landscapes and exotic characters.”³⁵ As American and British expatriates, Arthur and Hortense Acton collected orientalist art in keeping with the European bohemian communities of the turn of the twentieth century. Their collection includes *chinoiserie*, as well as works from the medieval period, which, at the beginning of the twentieth century, they would have acquired at low cost. The presence of

³³ Elyn Toscano, “The Voice of Silent Servants: Villa La Pietra’s Blackamoors in Context,” in *ReSignifications: European Blackamoors, Africana Readings*, ed. Awam Amkpa (Rome: Postcard SRL, 2017), 25–34, 28–29.

³⁴ Adrienne Childs, “Sugar Boxes and Blackamoors: Ornamental Blackness in Early Meissen Porcelain,” in *The Cultural Aesthetics of Eighteenth-Century Porcelain*, ed. Alden Cavanaugh and Michael E. Yonan (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), 160.

³⁵ Giorgio Bertellini. *Italy in Early American Cinema: Race, Landscape, and the Picturesque* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), 4.

the blackamoor not only signals the exoticization of Italy by northern Europeans and Americans at the turn of the century, but also the nascent beginnings of Italy's modern colonial expansionism. Material culture speaks to these multiple histories of conquest. Childs writes, "Ornamental blackamoors inject the presence of the black body in to the domestic interior and bring with them the attendant racist ideologies and practices that necessarily inform the creation of such objects. Shrouded in Oriental costumes or exotic adornment that mask the horrific inhumanity of the Atlantic slave trade, black bodies perform a decorative servitude that mimics their role as household servants in Europe and slaves in the Americas, and mitigates the harsh realities of slavery. This brand of imagery is particularly effective because the ostensibly innocuous ornamentation insidiously normalizes and even promotes racist ideologies and practices."³⁶

More than backdrop or decorative *mise en scene*, the blackamoor in *Rhinoceros* speaks to the legacies of the transatlantic, Mediterranean, and sub-Saharan Arab slave trades, as well as the commoditization of black bodies, both during the slave trade and after. The blackamoors at the Villa la Pietra mark both the first period of global capitalism and the late imperial period of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The last lines spoken by Everson's Alessandro de' Medici, "Revolution! Revolution!" can be read as ironic in light of post-Cold War global politics. Indeed, it was a 2011 revolution that led to the downfall of the former revolutionary Muammar Gaddafi. However, *Rhinoceros* can be read as a film about the "archives" of Black Italy, which concerns Everson's ongoing practice, described as: "an avant-garde practice constituted by concerns for the aesthetics of form, Black visual and expressive cultures, and historiography."³⁷

Rhino

Rhino begins at some point prior to the rhetorical performance in *Rhinoceros*. Filmed in color and running at around 22 minutes, the film begins with Alessandro speaking in voiceover, reading a letter to his wife, Margaret of Parma, who has fled to Spain during the duke's attempt to consolidate his power in Florence. Alessandro, sailing on the Arno River, slowly emerges from a dark tunnel into the daylight. Filmed at a low angle, we see the Alessandro of *Rhinoceros*, imposing and authoritative, albeit somewhat softened by the words he speaks to his wife, and the contrast between his resilient stance and the impending threats to his dukedom.

The film then cuts to a scene of three young African men, in an outdoor, pastoral space. Two of the young men, hands locked on each others' shoulders, look attentively at a video on a smartphone. We see Alessandro again, this time in the claustrophobic space of an elevator lift with his attendants. They gather on an outdoor balcony to discuss the threats to Alessandro's power posed by his two cousins, Ippolito and Lorenzino. At night, in a busy city street, a young African man is filmed in close up, speaking about his journey to Italy. The film continues to cross-cut between these two storylines, culminating with Alessandro's assassination. *Rhino* ends with scenes of a wedding party in front of the Florence Cathedral, the display of one of Alessandro's medallions, and an African man singing in Italian to an African melody.

³⁶ Childs, "Sugar Boxes and Blackamoors," 174.

³⁷ Gillespie, "To Do Better," 58.



Fig. 4. Alessandro de' Medici on the Arno River, Florence. *Rhino*, 2017, directed by Kevin Jerome Everson.



Fig. 5. Young African men in the countryside. *Rhino*, 2017, directed by Kevin Jerome Everson.

In *Rhino*, we return to questions regarding film aesthetics, the archive, and historiography. If *Rhinoceros* and *Rhino* are about, among other things, the archive of the African presence in Italy, Everson's work concerns the aesthetic rendering of the materiality, labor and physical presence that constitute these histories. In filming *Rhino*, Everson remarks, "In *Rhino*, it's just like you're just catching this crazy conversation of these politicians. Everything in it is about movement, mobility...I'm trying to find the film as I go along. The single takes I used in *Rhino* are all about the long duration and then the collision of [scenes]."³⁸

Everson speaks of "movement" and "collision" in the formal construction of the film, and this dynamism arguably extends to the use of interior and exterior spaces, where we see the claustrophobic and furtive meetings between Alessandro and his attendants, or African men in the "open" spaces of the city piazzas, the Arno river, and the surrounding countryside. Both dramas (Alessandro de' Medici's final days and African migration) are rendered within the landscape of Florence, set against the Florence Cathedral, the Medici Palace, and the Medici

³⁸ Everson quoted in Ratner, "Abstraction through Representation," 62.

Chapel. As Gillespie argues, Everson's films "...[dissuade] being received in the ontological terms of a Black (w)hole. It provides an opportunity to consider Blackness and the formal processing of craft, which is its avant-garde inflection, in terms incommensurate with merely sociology."³⁹

A similar emphasis on materiality, labor, and the physical presence can be found in Everson's *Sportello Quattro* (*Counter Four*, 2003), a short film that follows the daily activities of Joseph Bayorha, an African man who works as a clerk in an immigration office in Rome. *Sportello Quattro* uses Joseph's quotidian activities, his labors, to speak to the global migration patterns that have transformed Italy into a "destination" country over the past four decades. The presence and integration of migrant communities within Rome is made evident through repetition, both through physical movement throughout the urban space, now marked by migrant cultures, and through the document stamp that appears throughout the film, signifying the state institutions that delimit legal residency and citizenship status. In this sense, *Sportello Quattro* speaks to the becoming "black Italy," as part of a broader Black Europe. Rather than make assumptions about black subjectivities in the geopolitical entity called "Europe," *Sportello Quattro* explores how black Italian identities are "shaped by localities, prevailing understandings and subjectivities, themselves reflecting the particular histories of nations and cities."⁴⁰

In *Rhino*, repetition and physical presence are paramount in the recorded interviews with the young African men newly arrived in Italy. The film moves away from the iconography of wrecked ships on beaches, overflowing boats, sea rescues, and drowning, opting for serene images of the Arno river. Indeed, the interviews in *Rhino* were shot within the city limits and countryside of Florence. As we listen to the African men's stories, we realize that they are survivors of perilous journeys and boating disasters. The stories are told in various languages (English, French, Italian) and the youths hail from different parts of the continent. Often shot in close-up, with the director or another interlocutor speaking off screen, the interviews focus on the *afterlife* of the migration-event, or rather upon the lives of those who survived and are now in the process of becoming (African) Italian.

This process is demonstrated through the physical presence of the survivor, but also through repetition and the use of multiple languages. Speaking of contemporary Italian cinema of migration, Derek Duncan suggests "translanguaging" as a mode of cultural and spatial fluidity that moves beyond bilingualism to "encompass any form of semiotic activity including physical gesture and other bodily practices."⁴¹ As the African men move between Florentine centers and peripheries, and among multiple languages they are "translanguaging space"—a process in which "their linguistic repertoires sever the defining link between territory and language fundamental to European constructions of identity" ("Translanguaging," 206). In one interview, the speaker announces in French that he is from Guinean Conakry and recites his narrative, saying: "I came but I did not know that I would arrive; but everything was written before I was born." In the space of a jump cut, the speaker switches to Italian and repeats the same phrase. Another Somali youth in the process of learning Italian speaks in English in order to share his migration story, beginning with the murder of his father and two brothers, of being imprisoned in Sudan, of hard labor, beatings, of crossing the Mediterranean. He speaks of an Italy of few employment

³⁹ Gillespie, "To Do Better," 68.

⁴⁰ Stephen Small. "Introduction: The Empire Strikes Back," in *Black Europe and the African Diaspora*. Edited by Darlene Clark Hine, Tricia Danielle Keaton and Stephen Small (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), xxvi.

⁴¹ Derek Duncan, "Translanguaging: Claudio Giovannesi's Postcolonial Practices," *Transnational Cinemas* 7/2 (2016): 196–209, 201.

opportunities and difficulties normalizing residency.

These narratives speak not only of death and marginalization, but also of future possibilities. *Rhino* and *Rhinoceros* are a revisionist historiographic text, which offers not only an alternate reading of Alessandro de' Medici, but also of the pasts, presents, and futures of the African presence in Italy. After the duke's death is announced in the streets of Florence with the repeating phrase, "Long Live the Duke!" we see an image of the Medici Chapel at the Basilica of San Lorenzo. Notably, this interpretation of Alessandro's assassination does not identify his murderer as Lorenzino, nor is he led to his death by the promise of an amorous encounter. Instead, we see the tomb of Lorenzo II de' Medici, Duke of Urbino (Alessandro's father), with the monumental statues of *Dawn* and *Dusk*, which were among the chapel sculptures completed by Michelangelo between 1520 and 1534. Alessandro's remains are buried in the chapel, but the image also directs us to another link in the history of the African and non-Western presence in Italy, that of Cosmas and Damian, patron saints of the Medici family who hailed from Arabia (modern day Syria).⁴²



Fig. 6. A wedding celebration at the Florence Cathedral. *Rhino*, 2017, directed by Kevin Jerome Everson.

Rhino then transitions to a wedding scene in front of the Florence Cathedral. A group of young African men and women move around the space, greeting each other, laughing, and taking pictures. As we see images of the bride and her ladies in waiting, Alessandro returns in voiceover, speaking to his wife Margaret, saying that he will have a portrait made of her for his palace. However, the joyous scene could also refer to Alessandro's mother, Simonetta, or Alessandro's daughter, Giulia de' Medici (1535–1588). Alessandro de' Medici is survived by his descendants, but also by African Italians, those in Italy for multiple generations, but also the newly arrived who survived what is referred to as the "Mediterranean Holocaust." As theorist S.A. Smythe

⁴² Saints Cosmas and Damian are known for performing the "Miracle of the Black Leg," in which they transplant an Ethiopian's leg onto a white male amputee. The "Miracle of the Black Leg" is depicted in numerous paintings from the Renaissance period. The provocative links among interracial limb transplantation and the "harvesting" of black bodies are beyond the scope of this present article. See, among others, Carmen Fracchia, "Spanish Depictions of the Miracle of the Black Leg," in *One Leg in the Grave Revisited: The Miracle of the Transplantation of the Black Leg by the Saints Cosmas and Damian*, ed. Kees W. Zimmermann (Groningen: Barkhuis, 2013), 79–91.

suggests, the Black Mediterranean, rather than simply a “site of loss,” should be conceived of as a “variegated site of black knowledge production, Black resistance and possibilities of new consciousness.”⁴³ The scene of a wedding celebration after tremendous loss—by sea or in history—speaks to the ways in which *Rhino* engages “Black imaginative practices” (“The Black Mediterranean and the Politics of Imagination,” 9).

These temporal and spatial (dis)continuities are made evident in the final scenes, in which an African man holds a gold medallion bearing the image of Alessandro de’ Medici, which serves as another link to Alessandro’s legacy and as a bridge between two periods of the African diaspora in Italy. Soon, another man begins to sing verses in an imperfect, “becoming” Italian with an African melody: “When I was with you, mamma, I didn’t know I’d miss you. When I was with you, mamma, I didn’t understand your importance ...I love you, I love you always. Now I’m far away... but with my heart, I’m close to you...I remember when I was a child, you protected me against all bad things, especially in difficult times...”

In this paper, I’ve argued that through his experimental cinema, Kevin Jerome Everson directs viewers towards the archive of the African presence in Italy and a new historiography of Italian modern nation-state formation. An avant-garde cinema can enact paradigm shifts in our understanding of Western modernity and European nation-state formation that can subsequently transform perceptions of African migration to Europe. In their subversive use of the archive, deployment of the fake and the counterfeit, and disruption of linear chronologies, *Rhinoceros* and *Rhino* posit race, and more specifically, blackness, as a formative aspect of Italian modernity.

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