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Tradition and Modernity Italian Corporate Cinema between Documentary and *Tecnofilm* (1950–1970)

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Résumé

La période entre les années 1950 et les années 1970 représente l'âge d'or du cinéma industriel italien, qui, sous l'impulsion de la reconstruction d'après-guerre et du boom économique, a commencé une vaste production de films techniques et des documentaires d'entreprise. Cet article vise 1) à offrir une description globale du cinéma d'entreprise italien à travers l'analyse de ses principaux modèles de production et de distribution ; 2) proposer un approfondissement du débat critique et théorique sur le concept de "tecnofilm" à travers une analyse textuelle des films de trois sociétés différentes : Edisonvolta, Olivetti, et Fiat.

Mots-clés : cinéma industriel ; film d'entreprise ; tecnofilm ; Olivetti ; Cinefiat.

Abstract

The period between the Fifties and the Seventies represented the golden age of Italian industrial cinema, which, under the impetus of post-war reconstruction and the economic boom, began a vast production of technical films and corporate documentaries. This article aims 1) to offer an overall description of Italian corporate cinema through the analysis of its main models of production and distribution; 2) to propose a deepening of the theoretical critical debate about the concept of tecnofilm through a textual analysis of films by three different companies: Edisonvolta, Olivetti, Fiat.

Keywords: industrial cinema; corporate films; tecnofilm; Olivetti; Cinefiat.

Introduction¹

Until a few years ago, industrial cinematography was the great absentee of Italian cinema history. Its productive activity, which began in the early twentieth century, survived until the 1980s, when the informative predominance of television and the spread of video-magnetic recording decreed its extinction (Slide, 1992, pp. IX-X).

Out of circulation and relegated to the shadow of corporate archives, it seemed destined for complete oblivion. Neglected by critics and historians, Italian industrial cinema represents a genre of cinema little studied in its own country and almost completely unknown abroad. Scarce evidence of the productivity of Italian industrial cinema resides in movies related to famous authors: directors who had made their debut in the film sections of large companies before moving to art films (like Ermanno Olmi) or well-known personalities who had made some sporadic foray into the corporate documentary (such as Michelangelo Antonioni², Joris Ivens³, Bernardo Bertolucci⁴).

1 [The Editor would like to extend her thanks to Madelaine Fava for her proofreading.]

2 In 1949, Michelangelo Antonioni (1912-2007) directed the short documentary *Sette canne, un vestito*, produced for the chemical company SNIA Viscosa (Società Nazionale Industria Applicazioni – Viscosa). The film describes the production of artificial silk from reeds grown in reclaimed marshes.

3 Joris Ivens (1898-1989), Dutch director of more than fifty documentaries exploring leftist social and political concerns, among which: *De brug* (1928), *Regen* (1929), *Borinage* (1933), *Zuiderzee* (1934), *Spanish Earth* (1937), *Pueblo en armas* (1961), *Pour le Mistral* (1965).

4 Bernardo Bertolucci (1941-2018) is a director,

It may be stated that such is the common destiny of all industrial cinema throughout the world, similarly to other forms of so-called minor or specialized cinema such as amateur cinema films, ethnographic or anthropological documentaries. These particular genres represent an unexplored visual territory that lives on the fringes of cinema and its official historiography. Yet, in the years of its greatest expansion, Italian corporate cinema as a whole reached the size of a real audiovisual industry, which produced around 30,000 titles throughout its history. A cinematography with its own studios and equipment, it gathered specialized directors and qualified technical crews. Moreover, there were distribution and rental film networks and many support activities, such as festivals, exhibitions, and specialized press.

The history of Italian industrial films between the fifties and seventies constitutes therefore a rich field of study and analysis, even very particular, as demonstrates the work carried out by Laura Clemenzi (2018) on the dialogues and linguistic texts of an odd thirty business films of that period.

screenwriter and film producer. Son of the poet Attilio Bertolucci (who was also the director of ENI's house organ "Il Gatto Selvatico") directed his first film, *La commare secca* (1961), at the age of 21 and with the subsequent *Prima della rivoluzione* (1965) he established himself as one of the most important directors of his generation. Later he became an internationally master thanks to films such as: *Il conformista* (1970), *Last Tango in Paris* (1972), *Novecento* (1976), *The Last Emperor* (1987), *The Dreamers* (2001).

The so far limited interest in this phenomenon does not solely rely on the will of scholars, but on other problematic issues as well. First of all, industrial films are ephemeral subjects: they are not designed to last for a long time, and their conservation is thus negatively affected. As with other secondary sources – magazines, documents, prints –, historians often work with fragmented materials, sometimes difficult to reach, with lacking information and incomplete data that can only be reconstructed by hypothesis. Such a condition also creates a certain imbalance. Studies focus mainly on the corporate groups that possess a rich archive documentation – Olivetti, Eni, Edison, Pirelli – while for other companies, interest is generally lower.

Secondly, it is believed that industrial cinema is a “plain” genre, less rich in stimuli than art cinema or documentaries. Italian industrial cinema is often blamed for its lack of originality and of interest in working conditions: a cinema that only seems to deal with machines and almost never with workers (Bertozzi, 2008, p. 130). Some criticisms are partly true if we look at the overall production of industrial films, especially those of the fifties, when a flat and descriptive style of directing, combined with a didactic sound commentary were still influenced by the rhetoric of the Luce and Incom newsreels⁵.

⁵ Istituto Luce (L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa) was established in 1924 on the basis of another film organization, the Sindacato Istruzione Cinematografica

Furthermore, work, as a subject of cinematographic stories, can be considered a problematic item; as Comolli warns: “*work [...] is a world only weakly enchanting, and little susceptible of being in its turn enchanted by cinema, if not in the form of a nightmare*” (Comolli, 2000, pp. 27-28⁶). To him, cinema is used to distract the audience from their job, but industrial cinema could have been used to distract the public from the fatigue of work, from its dangers, from its alienation, to propose at the end an acceptable image of the efforts which must to be endured in the name of industrial and economic development. This is a valid statement, which can easily be verified in many industrial films. It would be simplistic, however, to dismiss the entire corporate cinema as a mere propaganda expression of the industry – it would be like accusing fictional cinema of being only a mechanism of spectacular evasion. It would be equally wrong to exalt only those industrial films that bear a prestigious signature, as if they were not facing

(SIC). Istituto Luce – whose first history is linked to the Italian Fascist Party – was aimed at political propaganda and information through newsreels and documentaries shown in movie theaters [URL: [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/istituto-nazionale-l-u-c-e_\(Enciclopedia-del-Cinema\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/istituto-nazionale-l-u-c-e_(Enciclopedia-del-Cinema)/)]. Incom (Industria Nazionale CortiMetraggi) was founded in 1938 by journalist Sandro Pallavicini to produce information documentaries. Since 1946 his newsreels, called “La settimana Incom” (The Incom Week), replaced those of Istituto Luce in cinema scheduling. Up to 1965 were produced 2555 Incom newsreels [URL: [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/incom_\(Enciclopedia-del-Cinema\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/incom_(Enciclopedia-del-Cinema)/)].

⁶ All translations from Italian to English by the author.

the same communication needs as many other anonymous films.

Despite a still limited and sectoral interest, recent years have contributed to reevaluate this “sunken” cinema through the expansion of studies and the multiplication of events and public projections. Above all, the recovery of company archives had positive consequences on film restoration, digitalization and online distribution. In agreement with the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, in 2005 the Archivio Nazionale Cinema d’Impresa established an archive of corporate films that preserves about 50,000 film reels made by the major Italian companies since the early twentieth century⁷. To these initiatives we add the realization of some video anthologies on DVD including the following: *Pirelli in 35 mm.*, *Cinema Elettrico. I film dell’archivio AEM* (edited by Gianni Canova and Giulio Bursi), *Ermanno Olmi. Gli anni Edison documentari e cortometraggi* (1954-1958), the new edition of Bernardo Bertolucci’s documentary *La via del Petrolio*.

Models of production of Italian industrial cinema

The origin of Italian industrial cinema dates back to the early 1900s, when the new-born private film compa-

nies began making films commissioned by leading industrial manufacturing companies. To date, it is estimated that between 1905 and 1914 more than fifty industrial documentaries were produced (Clemenzi, 2018, p. 40). Based on Bertozzi (2008, pp. 52-52) and Clemenzi (2018, p. 40), the following scheme (p. 107) lists some of the first Italian business films.

The film about Borsalino hats is still interesting for its narrative structure: the documentary part – filmed inside the factory to illustrate the various stages of hat making – is preceded by a short fiction that shows the birth of the company in an imaginary and adventurous key⁸. In 1911 film pioneer Luca Comerio⁹ signed what was probably the most iconic Italian industrial film of the silent era: *Le officine della Fiat*. The first testament on celluloid film of the first Fiat plant on Corso Dante in Turin. Comerio’s film represents a still improvised and sporadic relationship, grown

⁸ The prologue tells the story of a shipwrecked man on a desert island – a new Robinson Crusoe – who after hunting a rabbit accidentally discovers the properties of its fur. Eventually, back at home he treasures this discovery and exploits it by starting the production of felt hats. The film – digitally restored in 2008 by CSC Cineteca Nazionale and Archivio del Cinema di Ivrea – is available on the video platform Vimeo [URL: <https://vimeo.com/173888493/4cf9a2a8b3>].

⁹ Luca Comerio (1878-1940) was a photographer and film director. Official photographer of the Italian Royal House, he founded his film production house in 1907. The following year it became the S.A.F.F.I. (Società Anonima Fabbrica Films Italiani) and in 1909 it changed its trade name to Milano Films. Comerio left Milano Films in 1910 to found Comerio Films which closed definitively in the First post-war period.

⁷ See the dedicated playlist on YouTube [URL: <https://www.youtube.com/user/cinemaimpresatv/playlists>].

| TITLE | YEAR | PRODUCTION COMPANY |
|---|------|---------------------------------|
| <i>La fabbrica dei salami</i> (The Salami Factory) | 1905 | Ambrosio Film (Turin) |
| <i>L'industria del veleno</i> (The Poison Industry) | 1908 | Itala Film (Turin) |
| <i>L'industria della pesca</i> (The Fishing Industry) | | |
| <i>L'industria della ceramica</i> (The Pottery Industry) | | |
| <i>L'industria del burro e del formaggio</i> (The Butter and Cheese Industry) | | |
| <i>L'industria mineraria in Sardegna</i> (The Mining Industry in Sardinia) | 1910 | Cines (Rome) |
| <i>L'industria del cotone</i> (The Cotton Industry) | | |
| <i>L'industria della carta nell'isola di Liri</i> (The Paper Industry in the Island of Liri) | | |
| <i>L'industria delle candele</i> (The Candle Industry) | | |
| <i>La cartiera di Fabriano</i> (Fabriano Paper Mill) | 1908 | Saffi-Comerio |
| <i>La fabbricazione dei cappelli</i> (The Manufacture of Borsalino Hats) | 1912 | [later Milano Films] (Milan) |

within the same urban and entrepreneurial milieu. As the film critic and historian of cinema Giampiero Brunetta well described with regard to the city of Turin of those times, it was a place where the automobile pioneers and those of the cinema met every day, went to the same bars and the same circles, “*adopt[ing] the same industrial rhythms, depart[ing] to conquer the same markets*” (Brunetta, 1988, pp. 214-215)¹⁰. Even though Fiat and other companies continued to make industrial documentation films in the following years, it was

only in the second post-war period that the Italian corporate cinema took on the dimensions and the articulation of a real media structure integrated into the corporate communication system.

The Italian corporate cinema: actors and organization

The industrial push initiated by the Second post-war reconstruction and the abandonment of the “low consumption” policy in favour of an increase in consumer goods, engaged companies in the

¹⁰ Even the factory brands ended up resembling and overlapping each other. Thus, there were cars and film which bear the same name, like Itala or Aquila.

restructuring of production facilities and of information and marketing activities. In the strengthening of communication activities, the largest industrial groups immediately understood the new role that the cinematographic image played. The sporadic and uneven documentary realization of the past left room for a new concept of film production in which the cinematographic story of industry became a permanent part of corporate communication strategies. These movies started to be considered as additional products coming out of the factory assembly lines. These ephemeral films¹¹ were no longer limited, as in the past, to exclusively magnify the “physical” dimensions of industry and its manufacture. Now corporate films – like educational films – were called in to build the popular myth of the economic miracle, to celebrate the effort in modernizing public infrastructure (dams, power plants, roads, communication networks, extraction systems), and to educate citizens, for the first time in the nation’s history, to the new dimension of consumerism (Bonifazio, 2014a). In those years the big private and public corporate groups created a collective imagination in which their activities – in Italy and abroad – contributed to the conquest

of well-being for the whole country. The filmic image was given the task to spread this message to the wider public; it would show on the screens, to the Italians themselves, how the fruit of their work and their efforts was building a new and better future within the same community of ideals (Frascani, 2010, p. 60). For these reasons, the largest companies in the country, within a matter of a few years, were increasing their corporate film production by organizing it on new bases.

In this period the industrial film production was split into two organizational models. The first was the one adopted by most companies and conceived to commission documentary film to external film production companies. This was the usual practice adopted by firms such as: Alfa Romeo, Pirelli, Farmitalia, Breda, Campari, Innocenti, Falck, Azienda Elettrica Milanese (A.E.M.), Bassetti, Face Standard, Motta, Italstrade, La Prealpina, Techint (Mosconi, 1991, p. 79). In many cases, these were small or medium-sized companies, who approached cinema occasionally, often without a real “*planning strategy for reasons of opportunity [...] or for the improvised way with which some entrepreneurs or managers face this experience*” (Mosconi, 1991, p. 80). In these cases, the production was quite reduced, sometimes limited to a single film. Narrative subjects were very often circumscribed to the display of products or installations, or to the representation of the whole company and its developments. The case of big com-

¹¹ Ephemeral film is a term introduced in 1982 by the American archivist and filmmaker Rick Prelinger. A definition – or an anti-definition, according to the author – borrowed from antiquarian booksellers who call “ephemera” all those documents intended for short-term and limited consumption: magazines, brochures, advertisements, etc. In this sense, sponsored films and corporate films can also be called ephemerals.

panies was different: despite the absence of a true film policy, they were able to finance a more substantial film activity.

The second model, on the contrary, was based on the establishment of in-house film unit and was at the heart of the development of a renewed industrial cinematography system: a model imported from the United States where it had been in use long before. In the summer of 1913, Henry Ford wanted to film the production at the Highland Park plant. In April 1914 he commissioned Ambrose B. Jewett – the head of advertising operations – to set up a “moving picture department”, the first in the history of United States industry. In addition to corporate films, the Ford Motion Picture Department produced two popular newsreel series for several years: Ford Animated Weekly (1914-1921) and Ford Educational Weekly (1916-1925) as well as fifty titles made in three years (1920-1923) for the Ford Educational Library (Slide, 1992, p. 3; Stewart, 2011, pp. 1-3).

Later, in the fifties, the example of Henry Ford inspired several large Italian companies which set up their own film units integrating them into their existing advertising and propaganda departments. *“In their post-war organizational reorganization, the most important Italian business groups maintained a strong internal control of communication and advertising activities”* (Vinti, 2007, p. 21). In those years, this corporate setting conflicted with the new communication

strategies that American marketing and advertising agencies were spreading in Europe (De Iulio & Vinti, 2009).

In this climate of renewal, Montecatini chemical company and Olivetti were the first two Italian firms to establish their respective cinema departments in 1951. Gruppo Cinema Montecatini was put under the direction of Giovanni Cecchinato, a director hired by the company in 1948 as technical propagandist. Montecatini Cinema Group was able to supply all phases of filmmaking with the exception of film printing and sound dubbing; these two stages were performed by private technical laboratories. At first his production was directed towards the rural public: agricultural technique films, educational films on botany and agronomy, territorial information films. Later on, films were also made for a wider audience: technical and scientific research documentaries, promotional films on products or company group’s activities. Montecatini had already produced 118 20-minute short films in 1959, with an average of 15 per year (Mosconi, 1991, pp. 69-71).

The first filmic experiences inside Olivetti were conducted by Aristide Bosio and his collaborators within the photographers and zincographers office. When the company decided to create an internal cinema unit, Bosio’s team became its first film crew. The Sezione Cinema (cinema section) was part of the Olivetti’s Communication Sector, a complex organization divided into

two large units and several specialized offices. The film production depended on the Direzione Propaganda e Stampa (Propaganda and Press Direction) directed by journalist Ignazio Weiss, but also cooperated directly with the Ufficio Stampa – the press office headed at the time by the writer and poet Libero Bigiaretti (1905-1993) – and with the Ufficio Letterario (Literary office, lead by the writer and poet Franco Fortini¹²). The Cinema Section completed the ambitious cultural program of Adriano Olivetti, the enlightened industrialist who wanted to promote a humanistic and cultural renaissance. In this sense Olivetti's cinema would try to create “works that go beyond the promotional purpose of the industrial film to affirm a renewed awareness of man” (Bertozzi, 2008, p. 139). From the cinematographic point of view, the highest example of this cultural tension is represented by the series of *Critofilm d'Arte* (Art Critofilms) directed by Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti and produced by Olivetti, between 1954 and 1964, for the SeleArte Cinematografica series¹³. Although these documentaries

are outside the specific field of industrial cinema, it is worth mentioning them as witnesses of the uniqueness and modernity of Olivetti's audiovisual thought.

In 1952, it was the turn of Fiat to create Cinefiat, under the initiative of Gino Pestelli – director of the Press and Propaganda Department. Not just a cinema unit, but a real production company, Cinefiat owned the largest private film studios in Italy after Cinecittà¹⁴ and was one of the few film units to shoot in 35mm. film format. The international dimension of the company committed Cinefiat to the dubbing of films in 19 languages – including Esperanto¹⁵ – and to the establishment of a wide distribution chain. In some ways it is as if Fiat had brought back to the city some of that film industry that had animated Turin during the Belle Époque¹⁶.

(Bellotto, 1992, p. 65). The company also put its technical know-how at the director's service to solve shooting problems, as in the case of the “vertical camera” designed expressly for Ragghianti by the engineer-cameraman Carlo Ventimiglia (Bertozzi, 2008, p. 137). Further information is available on the Ragghianti Foundation website [URL: <https://www.fondazioneragghianti.it/>].

¹⁴ See [URL: https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2001/11/27/lo-realizzera-la-euphon-il-piu-grande.to_005lo.html].

¹⁵ In this regard, in the documentary *Cinefiat Presenta* (Castelletto, 2012) Osvaldo Marini (Cinefiat film editor) tells a curious anecdote: the film versions in Esperanto were translated and dubbed by a Fiat engineer who was also an avid expert in this language, a further demonstration of the use of resources within the company.

¹⁶ An era in which “before Hollywood Torino is probably the first Mecca of cinema” (Brunetta, 1988, p. 215).

¹² Franco Fortini (Franco Lattes) (1917-1994) was a writer, poet essayist, editor for the political journals *Il Politecnico* and *Quaderni Piacentini*.

¹³ Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti (1910-1987) was an art historian and critic, director of art magazines *Critica d'arte* (1935, in collaboration with Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli), *SeleArte* (1952-1965), *Criterio* (1957-1958). For Olivetti, Ragghianti took care of two complementary initiatives: the SeleArte magazine, and the serie of eighteen *Critofilms* created for SeleArte Cinematografica (produced by the Olivetti Company between 1954 and 1964). Ragghianti's *Critofilms* differ from classic art documentaries because they propose a new type of critical analysis through the cinematographic image

In 1954 the time had come for the electric company Edisonvolta which, through the work of the young Ermanno Olmi (1931-2018), founded Servizio Cinema, changing its name to Sezione Cinema Edisonvolta the following year. The same year, Carlo Erba pharmaceutical industry also founded its own Centro di Cinematografia, assigning it to the physician Mario Scolari. Under his leadership the company's film activity would become a reference point for medical and scientific cinematography.

ENI's film activity comes last. The Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi (ENI) was established in February 1953 and directed by Enrico Mattei (1906-1962) until his death. It was a Government company born from the experience of the Agenzia Generale Italiana Petroli (AGIP), the fascist national oil company founded in 1926 and renewed by Mattei in the late 1940s, when he was its extraordinary commissioner. From a cinematographic point of view, there is a line of continuity between the two companies. Beginning in 1950, the first documentaries were made for AGIP and later for ENI, for a total of about ten titles¹⁷. In this phase, filmic production was employed by Servizio Pub-

blicità (advertising service, directed by Dario Accivile) and then by the Servizio Relazioni con la Stampa (director Tito di Stefano). Between 1956 and 1957 the company probed the audiovisual market to evaluate the opportunity to resort to external production companies, or to create its own film sector (Frescani, 2011, p. 45). Eventually, the second option was considered best, and in 1958, Eni set up an autonomous Ufficio Cinema led by the journalist and film critic Pasquale Ojetti. For ENI – as in the Olivetti case – the Cinematography Centre was part of Enrico Mattei's industrial vision, “*absolutely aware of how much it was necessary to combine in the same strategic horizon scientific-industrial culture, political culture and humanistic culture*” (Latini, 2011, p. IX). Mattei “*wanted documentaries to strongly emphasize the prospects of well-being that the company was able to create and bring to depressed areas*” (Frescani, 2010, p. 42). In ENI's films, the company's activities and products were represented as “*indispensable means for the development and progress of society*” (Ivi, p. 57), especially in view of an industrial development of southern Italy (Bonifazio, 2014b, p. 331) and subsequently of a new economic policy for Third World countries.

The choice of big company groups to integrate film communication within the corporate organization satisfied different needs. First, it allowed a more efficient management of economic resources. Secondly, the company could directly control film direction and production activities,

¹⁷ Amongst which we mention: *3000 metri sotto il suolo*, Giulio Briani, 1950, with the cooperation of Centro Studi di Lodi; *Le ricerche del metano e del petrolio*, Virginio Sabel, 1951, with the cooperation of Centro Nazionale delle Ricerche (CNR); *Pozzo 18 profondità 1650* (Carlo Capriata, supervised by Alessandro Blasetti, 1955); *Arterie d'acciaio*, Edmondo Cancellieri, 1956; *I prigionieri del sottosuolo*, Ubaldo Magnaghi, 1956; *Una fiammella si è accesa*, Enzo Trovatelli, 1957.

given that the technical staff employed in film production was inside the company and was part of the company workforce. Finally, it allowed better coordination between the cinematographic activities and the other operations of communication and corporate identity conducted by the various press offices, or advertising and public relations offices.

The figure of the “*regista-funzionario*” (film director-functionary) according to the definition of Cecchinato (1971, pp. 45-46) corresponds to the same concepts of functionality and integration; in fact he is a filmmaker who grew up within the company and has a deep knowledge of the technical and productive topics he will film. Furthermore, being part of the company, he knows its organizational logic. Entrusting the direction of the cinematographic units inside corporate roles – be they directors, journalists or film critics – also meant creating a very precise filmic style that over time would characterize, to the point of distinguishing, the entire corporate audiovisual language.

The existence of an internal film section did not stop industries from using private production or employing directors independent of the company. A typical ENI practice was to buy documentaries or commission them from production companies such as the Documento Film or Vette Filmitalia – both owned by Giorgio Patara (Frescani, 2010, pp. 73-81). Even more significant was the recourse to famous directors, such as the French documentary filmmaker Gilbert Bovay

who made several quality films for ENI¹⁸ (Latini, 2011), or like the most famous cases of Joris Ivens and Bernardo Bertolucci. The Dutch master directed *L'Italia non è un paese povero* (1960), born as a television documentary, on the chances of economic and social progress linked to the natural gas deposits discovered by ENI in the Padana Valley and in Lucania. To its realization – it is worth remembering – the young Tinto Brass¹⁹, Valentino Orsini²⁰, Paolo and Vittorio Taviani²¹ col-

18 For ENI, Bovay directed: *Oduroh* (1964), *Da palma a Gela* (1965), *Gli uomini del petrolio* (1965), *La valle delle balene* (1965) and the trilogy: *Africa: nascita di un continente* (1968). He was one of the first directors of Télévision Suisse Romande. Author of the program *Continent sans visa* (1959-1969) together with Claude Goretta, François Bardet, Jean-Claude Diserens, Jean Jacques Lagrange. It was precisely for this program that he directed the report *Mort d'un Condottiere Enrico Mattei*. His documentary work in the sixties includes: *Harlem sur Seine* (1962), *Folies* (1962), *He* (1965), *Le reflux de la Vague* (1968), *J'ai... Je prends...* (1969). Bovay died in 1987.

19 Tinto Brass (1933) is a director and screenwriter. He is considered the master of Italian erotic cinema. He worked in the late Fifties as archivist at the Cinémathèque of Paris, making contact with the Nouvelle Vague environment. Before he became director, he worked as assistant for Roberto Rossellini and Joris Ivens. Among his films: *Chi lavora è perduto* (1963), *Il disco volante* (1964), *Salon Kitty* (1975), *Caligola* (1979), *La chiave* (1983), *Miranda* (1985).

20 Valentino Orsini (1926-2001), director, screenwriter and teacher at the Experimental Centre of Cinematography in Rome. He was a politically committed author, distinguished for his rigorous non-conformism. Among his films: *Un uomo da bruciare* (1962), *I dannati della terra* (1969), *L'amante dell'Orsa Maggiore* (1971), *Uomini e no* (1980).

21 Paolo (1931) and Vittorio Taviani (1929-2018) brothers and film directors, debuted with the film *I sovversivi* (1967) and achieved success with *Sotto il segno dello Scorpione* (1969). Their cinema is distinguished by themes of historical and political

laborated, proving that industrial cinema constituted a training ground for the new generation of directors. In 1967, Bernardo Bertolucci produced *La via del petrolio*, a “documentary of poetry” divided into three episodes following the journey of oil from its extraction in Iran to the harbor of Genoa, and from there through an oil pipeline to the German refinery in Ingolstadt in Bavaria.

The destiny of the various in-house film sections would follow on the one hand the parable of industrial cinema; on the other hand, it would be linked to the events of their own company. An exemplary case was that of the Edison-volta Cinema Section. In 1961, Ermanno Olmi signed his last film for the electric company, *Un metro lungo cinque*, to pass definitively to the art cinema. In 1962 the nationalization of electricity concentrated all production and distribution in the hands of the Ente Nazionale Energia Elettrica (ENEL, the national electricity authority), forcing Edison-volta to a corporate restructuring. In December 1966, the Edison Company acquired Montecatini becoming Montecatini-Edison, then Montedison in 1970. In this restructuring process, Edison’s Sezione Cinema merged with the Montecatini Gruppo Cinematografico, but its film production began to record a significant drop (Mosconi, 1991, p. 71). Even

the Carlo Erba Centro di Cinematografia ceased to exist following its entry in 1971 into the Montedison group. In other cases, cinematographic sections would last longer, as for Olivetti and Cinefiat, extending their existence until the threshold of the nineties, although their film production had practically ceased in the 1980s. For Cinefiat the decline began in the mid-seventies due to the transformation of Fiat into a holding company. Its structure was dismantled, and its staff redistributed within the new companies of the Turinese group.

Distribution channels

By definition, industrial films are not primarily intended for distribution in movie theatres. They are mainly made to travel within alternative circuits and be screened in front of specific audiences. Though distribution in cinemas is not excluded, it cannot be considered as a rule.

Spaces, audiences and distribution channels depend largely on the particular function of the film. A documentary like *La grammatica del fresatore – Le operazioni di lavoro (The Grammar of the Miller, 1960*, a Cinefiat production with the collaboration of Scuola Centrale Allievi “Giovanni Agnelli”²²) had as

commitment. Among his films: *San Michele aveva un gallo* (1972), *Allosanfàn* (1974), *Padre padrone* (1977, Palme d’or at Cannes festival), *La notte di san Lorenzo* (1982), *Kaos* (1984), *Good Morning Babilona* (1987).

²² Professional school wished by the founder of Fiat – Senator Giovanni Agnelli (1866-1945) – in order to train skilled workers and technicians. The first location of the school was in the Lingotto plant; after the Second World War it was transferred to the historic Fiat workshop in *Corso Dante*, the same filmed by Comerio in 1911.

primary recipients workers and students of technical schools and it would be difficult for it to get out of the classrooms. On the contrary, *L'Italia vista dal cielo*, a series of fourteen sponsored films produced by Esso Italiana²³ and signed by the documentary filmmaker Folco Quilici²⁴ addressed a popular and undifferentiated audience, so much so that it is still broadcast on television today. A first distinction, therefore, can be made regarding the film, which can be internal, if composed for a corporate or specialist audience, or external. Some documentation films can address both audiences, while others remain confined to the sectors to which they belong, such as strictly scientific documentaries. Generally speaking, industrial films were screened inside the company, especially in education and updating courses, or during other related activities: conventions of sellers, distributors, affiliates. Other related environments were corporate associations: villages for employees, branches, agencies, company representation offices. Outside the factory another alternative distribution system operated, usually based on schools, local in-

stitutions, cultural societies, associations, parish cinemas. In all these cases, the diffusion was direct, that is agreed between producers and users. Alternatively, there was also an indirect diffusion, through an organization which acted as an intermediary such as the Servizio Cinematografico of Confindustria (Bellotto, 1994, p. 76).

In addition to this general distribution system, many companies set up their own projection circuit, generally intended for direct consumers or employees. In Turin, Fiat organised the “*mattinate Cinefiat*” morning shows for the employees’ families with film screenings combined with documentaries or feature films produced by Cinefiat. Also, in Fiat stores in Rome, Turin and Milan, screenings frequently took place (Torchio, 2003, p. 138). Montecatini, on the other hand, had developed the Centro Mobile di Propaganda Agraria. Provided with vans equipped for cinema projections, this “mobile centre” was able to organize day and night screenings directly in the countryside, bypassing the limits of theaters. According to the company’s intentions, these shows based on educational films had to represent a moment of dialogue with the growers on the problems of daily life (Michieletto, 2018, p. 5). It is estimated that between the 1950s and the 1960s, Montecatini’s films on agricultural chemicals were seen by about 2 million spectators through 20,000 annual screenings (Alberti, 1962, p. 180). The company Carlo Erba also used vans equipped for projection at the agricultural exhibitions of short veterinary informational

23 Lorenzo Cantini (Esso Italian Public Relations Department) proposed to Quilici to create the Italian version of the homologous French series *La France vue du ciel*, sponsored by Esso-France (Caputi, 2000, pp. 65-68)

24 Folco Quilici (1930-2018) was a documentary director, photographer and essayist. His production can be divided into three strands: the relationship between man and the sea, the theme of culture, documentaries for television. Among his films: *Sesto Continente* (1954), *Ultimo Paradiso* (1956), *Alla scoperta dell’Africa* (1964-65), *India* (1966), *Islam* (1968-69), *Oceano* (1971), *Fratello mare* (1974), *Alba dell’uomo* (1975), *Festa Barocca* (1983), *Cacciatori di navi* (1991).

films. Furthermore, this pharmaceutical company had organized an efficient projection circuit for groups of doctors, schools, medical congresses, while diffusion abroad was entrusted to representatives and associated companies. The capillarity of this system was also favoured by the high scientific level of the subjects of the films and by the dubbing in various languages (French, English, Spanish and Portuguese) (Mosconi, 1991, p. 77).

Different, however, were the roads that industrial films had to travel to land in cinema theatres or on television. In order to be admitted to theatrical screenings, industrial films should not have a clearly promotional or advertising character, but somehow, they had to be comparable to documentaries. Furthermore, starting from the second post-war period the Italian State had enacted laws to regulate and financially support the documentary industry. The decree law 678 of 1945 designated to documentaries 3% of the gross collection of the shows. The 1949 “Cinema law” established quality awards for Italian films divided into feature films and short films. The law n. 1213 of November 1965 reduced the quality premiums to only 120 per year, divided into quotas of 10, 7 and 5 million Lire²⁵. The awards were subject to SIAE control (the company that manages copyright in Italy) and should be programmed in at least 500 cinemas. According to the prize system,

Olmi’s documentary *Un metro lungo cinque* (1961) won the government award and was combined in the cinema with the feature film by Vittorio Caprioli *Leoni al sole* (Gonzalez, 2017, p. 23). The mechanism was therefore quite complicated and limiting. Even so, quality rewards were tempting to anyone.

By a tacit agreement between producers, distributors and exhibitors, documentaries were eliminated from cinema programming, but through the filling out of fake scheduling reports they seemed regularly screened (Bertozzi, 2008, p. 125). Due to the absence of controls, several cinema exhibitors could easily replace documentaries with advertising films, so they fraudulently obtained government incentives and accumulated income from private companies. In this way it is not possible to reconstruct exactly the distribution and impact of corporate films within the cinema circuit.

Television programming was also complex, but for other reasons. Even Radiotelevisione Italiana (Rai), faithful to its public service mandate, prohibited the transmission of corporate promotional films. Moreover, it tried to avoid those arguments that could create frictions with the government, the parties, the trade unions or the Catholic Church. In this way few industrial films were able to pass the scrutiny of the censorship and supervision commissions. Olmi succeeded once again in 1956 with the short film *Il pensionato*, co-produced by the Sezione Cinema of Edisonvolta and Rai, and

²⁵ Corresponding to a current value fluctuating between 10 and 20 thousand euros.

broadcast within the television program *Tempo libero*. It should be noted that in this film, with the exception of the Edisonvolta logo in the opening credits, there is no other reference to the company. On the contrary, the story of Ivens' documentary for ENI, as already mentioned, was troubled by a series of vicissitudes. The agreement between ENI and Rai for the broadcasting of *L'Italia non è un paese povero* seemed to be an exchange of favors between two public companies. But in the end the film was censored. Rai executives did not like the crude images of southern poverty, which denounced a state of pauperism still far from being defeated. Thus, this documentary was broadcast on television in a reduced and mutilated release, with a new title: *Frammenti di un film di Joris Ivens* (Bertozzi, 2008, p. 144; Frescani, 2010, pp. 81-91).

To complete this framework on distribution, we must finally remember the contribution given by institutions and festivals. The activities promoted by Confindustria were joined by those of the various Chambers of Commerce that organized film screenings and exhibitions abroad in collaboration with consulates and other organizations such as the Istituto Nazionale per il Commercio Estero (ICE). Other subjects active abroad were cultural institutes such as the Italian Cultural Institute in Spain between 1950 and 1970. In Europe there was also the Comitato Europeo per lo Sviluppo Economico e Sociale (CEPES), which in the 1950s formed the Comitato per il Progresso Educativo (CPE) to establish "film

courses" created in collaboration with large companies for vocational training; as it did with Montecatini for the realization of an agricultural course in eleven filmed lessons (Michieletto, 2018, p. 2; Mosconi, 1991, p. 71). At a national level, the distribution of industrial films was also supported by other institutions such as Unione Nazionale Autori e Cine-tecnici (UNAC), Centro Studi Cinema e Lavoro (Marinucci, 1971, p. 102), Centro Milanese Supporti Audiovisivi and above all Servizi Assistenza Film Industriali (SAFI), which in the 1960s offered a service similar to that already used in the United States with the film library system. SAFI comprised a cinema circuit made up of parish halls, cineforums, associations and schools available to large industrial companies. After each screening questionnaires were distributed and then returned to the companies for audience profiling activities. Distribution was free. The exhibitor paid nothing for the rental of the film because maintenance and exploitation costs were borne by the participating industries.

Finally, festivals and exhibitions were the most specialized and professional circulation area for industrial films. The Festival del Cinema of Venezia – which hosted scientific films in minor exhibitions – in 1950 established Mostra del film scientifico e documentario. In 1957 the Festival del documentario industriale e artigiano di Monza²⁶ was

²⁶ The festival was born from the will of Luigi Scotti, councillor of the Municipality of Monza, and Walter

launched, which in 1959 became the Festival Europeo del documentario industriale e artigiano, dedicating a section to European industrial films. In 1962, it expanded its dimension and became the Festival Internazionale del documentario industriale e artigiano to cease its activity in 1964²⁷. In competition with the Monza Festival, Confindustria in 1960 organized the first edition of the Rassegna Nazionale del film Industriale, a traveling event that up until to 1971 was hosted every year in a different city. Between 1960 and 1963 in Milan the Mostra internazionale del film scientifico took place, promoted by the Centro di cinematografia scientifica of Politecnico di Milano. This was an extremely specialized initiative which, in the context of industrial cinema, occupied a secondary position²⁸. In 1961, two other sectoral initiatives were added. The birth in Milan of the Mercato Internazionale del Film e del Documentario (MIFED) and the establishment of Unione Nazionale Cinematografia Specializzata, a sector

of ANICA²⁹ brought together producers of industrial films, topical and animated short films.

The theoretical debate on *tecnofilm*

The great development of Italian industrial cinema between 1950 and 1965 is accompanied by theoretical reflections on the identity, forms and objectives of business films. A relatively new topic for Italy, which in comparison with the other industrialized countries highlighted the precariousness of the approach “*without precise guidelines on the ways to go, in a climate of improvisation and adventure*” (Gozzi, 1971, p. 22). In this way, the critical contributions, made by experts inside and outside companies would take the dimension of critical debate which, however, would not exceed its professional boundaries while remaining hosted in exhibitions, festival and specialist magazines such as *Primi Piani*, *Film Industriale*, *Film Special*, *Cinematografie Specializzate*. A debate difficult to reconstruct, made up of fragmentary contributions, isolated interventions within the reference events, which were rarely collected and ordered within a publication. Despite this, it was a debate characterized by “*a substantial homogeneity and concordance – even temporal – a symptom of a reflection not separated from the*

Alberti, curator of the Cineteca Italiana in Milan

²⁷ Despite its international success, the Monza Festival ended after a few editions. To the main causes – the competition of Confindustria Festival and the complexity of economic and political situations – Elena Mosconi adds the promoters themselves, who “*as early as [...] they had been able to grasp and channel the potential of industrial cinema, with the same timing they warn – more or less consciously – the impending crisis*” (Mosconi, 1991, p. 88).

²⁸ The exhibition selected and hosted exclusively didactic, research and documentation films. There has been no more news on the initiative since 1963 (Mosconi, 1991, p. 89).

²⁹ Associazione Nazionale Industrie Cinematografiche Audiovisive e Multimediali.

practice, indeed directly inspired by it" (Mosconi, 1991, p. 64).

Before entering into the merits of the voices and topics of this discussion over industrial film, a general premise involving the most recent historical studies seems necessary. To date – despite the fair number of specialists' analysis that have appeared in recent years – a univocal and perfectly shared definition of what an industrial film is seems to be still far away. The responsibility for this is to be found first of all in the nature of this particular cinematographic genre that continually escapes the classifications of traditional cinema. Corporate movies are based on communication needs that are different from those of fiction films or purely documentary cinema, although they share most of the same narrative and grammatical features. Their relationship with the public is functional rather than artistic. Their history is linked to the events of the companies that commissioned them and the economic environment in which they were produced and used. In this way the description of the most characteristic features of industrial films, and the exposition of their main functions, change significantly based on the analytical and historical perspectives with which the subject is intended to be addressed. Without diving into a discussion that would risk going beyond the main objectives of our study, it is possible to highlight the diversity of terminological and critical approaches by comparing even just three of the most recent definitions of industrial cinema.

The Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film edited by Ian Aitken summarizes the entire topic in a few lines, stating that “*industrial films are promotional films designed to sell or promote a company or industry, or they may be intended as in house training employees. Industries and individual companies frequently finance such films*” (Aitken, 2005, pp. 624-625).

The analogous entry written by Serafino Murri for the *Treccani Cinema Encyclopedia* reads:

By industrial documentary film (or technical-industrial film), we mean a form of documentation and information internal to the world of work, production and technology, realized with cinematographic means, animated by professional objectives and destined to a diffusion circuit different from the commercial one. Commissioned by related industries and government bodies, with well-defined goals ranging from celebration to education and sector advertising, the industrial film has the task of describing manufacturing processes, providing reports and presentations of projects and productive activities, estimates of market, and sometimes to update the professional figures technically and conceptually³⁰.

Although the description made by Murri offers us a more articulated and complex image of the phenomenon, in both cases it is a question of summary definitions, built on the identification of

30 [URL: [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/industriale_\(Enciclopedia-del-Cinema\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/industriale_(Enciclopedia-del-Cinema))]

the main communication functions that characterize corporate films. In the fundamental text *Films that Work*, Hediger and Vonderau propose a different analytical approach that identifies three founding functions in industrial cinema: *Record*, *Rhetoric*, *Rationalisation*. According to these principles, corporate films are transformed into an effective and persuasive business tool able to: constitute the institutional memory and the history of the company (Record); build the business image in order to create social cohesion and to stimulate cooperation (Rhetoric); and document the activities driven by technological innovation and rationalize the stages of development and production through research films or scientific ones (Rationalisation) (Hediger & Vonderau, 2009, pp. 35-50). Furthermore, the use of these three foundational categories makes it possible to overcome the concept belonging to a cinematographic genre, to bring industrial cinema back to its corporate dimension; as the two authors state in a subsequent passage:

In fact, we would argue that the industrial film is not a genre in the accepted sense of the term at all. Rather, it is a strategically weak and parasitic form [...] in the sense it can assume the appearance of other, more stable genres and formats and pass as a scientific film, an educational film, or a documentary for specific strategic reasons. To the media historian, the common trait of all the shapes and forms that the industrial film can assume lies in their organizational purpose (Hediger & Vonderau, 2008, p. 46).

Themes addressed by today's historiography echo to a certain extent the discussions that animated the Italian debate in the sixties and seventies. Even then they tried to define the film material based on the contexts of function and use, especially with the aim of "*legitimizing the use of cinema for industrial purposes*" (Mosconi, 1991, p. 65). In other words, the possibility of recognizing in the film, besides its artistic value, also those qualities of linguistic universality, of visual concreteness that makes it a suitable medium both for technical information and for social communication.

The first attempts to define industrial cinema were born within festivals and specialized exhibitions. In these cases, the aims were practical, even before being theoretical; the organizers needed to establish categories to select and order the heterogeneity of the films being programmed, in addition to the awarding criteria in the event of a competition. A very precise example is found in the regulation of the first edition of the aforementioned national review of Industrial Film, which divides the films into seven distinct categories by type:

- Films on industrial topics (economic, social, technical, scientific) of general interest – undifferentiated audience.
- Films presenting a particular interest in a material, a project, an industrial product – undifferentiated audience.
- Films that do not have a specific information purpose, such as those of the previous categories, contribute

to the prestige of an industrial sector or a company non – differentiated audience.

- Films on particular materials, projects or industrial products – specialized audience.
- Films for the training of managers or workers (e.g. management methods, measures to increase production, rationalization and automation, human relations of the company, vocational guidance and training) – industrial audience.
- Films on accident prevention, occupational diseases, occupational hygiene, rehabilitation, social corporate initiatives industrial audience (Falchero, 2000, p. 157).

From the list we can immediately notice the absence of advertising films for promotion and sales, a category generally excluded from all reviews, along with purely tourist, agricultural and medical films (Bellotto, 1994, p. 76). The need to clearly separate the business film from commercial promotion aimed at specific consumer targets is clearly underlined by a note issued by the Sezione Cinema Industriale of Confindustria, which in describing the industrial film warns that it has as its purpose “*the presentation in an educational or promotion (but not advertising) of a product or an economic-productive activity*” (Bellotto, 1994, p. 40).

In addition to festival regulations, even in the common practice between companies and communication professionals there was a need for typological

classifications in order to create a reference system for producers, directors and audience (Mosconi, 1991, p. 65). Consequently, in the specialists’ debate, we are witnessing a taxonomic proliferation that distinguishes in: documentation films, public relations films, educational and research films (scientific and/or applied to the industry), social service films, technical-industrial films, institutional films, sponsored film (Bellotto, 1994, p. 22; Latini, 2011, p. XIII). In an attempt to find a descriptive formula that can mediate between the absolute generality of the term “industrial film” and the redundant functional classifications we have just seen, the cinema historian Mario Verdone proposes the concept of “*tecnofilm*”:

The technical-industrial film, or *tecnofilm*, is a technical documentary, which provides information on work activities, illustrates industrial processes, studies production activities in detail, professionally guides apprentices, workers and specialized workers. It should not be, by its nature, a documentary to be presented to the general public, during a screening for entertainment, because it is strictly professional; however, it performs, with its own audience, a precise task, which has its function and its usefulness in the world of work. However, there are films [...] that manage to combine documentation with the theatrical display, and sometimes, with visual poetry. On the other hand, the film director, if he wants to grab the attention of a wider audience, cannot give up dramatization (Verdone, 1961, p. 27).

Years later – within the collective book *Cinema e industria. Ricerche e tes-*

timonianze sul film industriale (1971), Verdone himself takes up the theme of *tecnofilm* to go even further, comparing the industrial film to a real form of non-fiction, an authentic “*producer of culture, for the modern man who no longer lives closed in himself, but wants to know the progress, the resources, the research, the achievements, the labors of all his fellows*” (Verdone, 1971, p. 164). By intertwining information, teaching, attraction, corporate cinema not only plays a role in documentation, but also expands its mission “*which is of a moral nature, since the tecnofilm is also used for the moral construction of man*” (*ibid.*). Verdone’s speech also testifies to how the theoretical debate – especially since the mid-1960s – has shifted its focus to another level of discussion. In the first phase the attention was focused above all on the taxonomy of the functions and on the identification of various types of public. Now the interest turns to more complex and profound issues such as: the ethical responsibility of corporate communication, the technological exasperation of narration, the figure of the worker and in general of human work.

To summarize the evolution of these topics, we will rely on the interventions contained in *Cinema e Industria*. This collection prepared by the Direzione Centrale per i Rapporti Esterni della Confederazione Generale dell’Industria offers a double advantage: on the one hand, the chance to compare reflections and interventions in a single text that are usually scattered on various sources, which are

not always available; on the other hand, the fact that it was published in 1971, giving us an image of the debate during its full maturity. Following these traces, it can be observed that close to the position of Verdone we also find Giovanni Cecchinato and the film producer Franco Cristaldi. The former sees quality industrial cinema as a possible alternative to fiction increasingly oriented towards pure entertainment and escape from reality. Industrial film, on the contrary, should call the viewer to a real vision of things, through the representation of real objects, processes, human and work conditions, in other words: educate, inform, know each other (Cecchinato, 1971, p. 47). To the latter author, it is important to establish a cultural policy so that in business cinema “*the suspicion that a dialectical relationship between industry, its themes and problems, and the common man*” is insinuated (Cristaldi, 1971, p. 55). According to Domenico De Gregorio³¹, the attempt to define precise filmic categories is a false problem, given that “*it is not possible to establish as many categories as there are infinite topics that can be illustrated with the cinematographic medium*”. A good industrial film can also be used for needs other than those for which it was made. More than belonging to a specific category, its main gift is the “*clarity of intentions*”, that is to say a precise delimitation of the objective to be achieved (De Gregorio, 1971, pp. 57-59).

³¹ At the time Inspector General of the Ministry of Tourism and Entertainment.

Other authors focus more on the problems of film language and on the difficult role of the director, who must succeed in mediating the pragmatic needs of the industry with the need for a precise audiovisual representation and at the same time engaging. In this sense, Attilio Giovannini³² claims to the corporate cinema the merit of having contributed – together with other so-called “utilitarian” film genres – to the evolution of the cinematographic language. A merit that too often is recognised only in the feature cinema (Giovannini, 1971, pp. 69-70).

A further element of discussion concerns the tendency of many *tecnofilms* to exclusively enhance the technical and technological aspects of industrial work, such as documentaries, even while well-made and accurate, that illustrate powerful machinery, complex production cycles, vast assembly lines, but where the worker figure is reduced to an accessory of the machine, even when he does not disappear completely from the film shots. Bringing the image of man back to the center of the *tecnofilm* is what Pasquale Ojetti³³ suggests when he states that “*industrial cinema must have the courage to observe a little less the ‘portentous machines’ and a little more the men, especially the relationships between men living in industry*” (Ojetti, 1971, pp. 129-130). But the author goes further and hopes that there is also the will to face

the responsibilities that the industry has towards society.

From an internal point of view within the company – but on an ideologically distant position – is the thought of Oddone Camerana³⁴, who considers the natural limits of industrial cinema as real prohibitions on which directors should never infringe. In this perspective the authentic corporate film cannot be critical, because its validity must be guaranteed by the credibility of the subject at the base of its story (a product, a service or the company itself). It cannot be free or anarchist. It cannot be topical, because its level of information must be deeper and less ephemeral. It cannot be psychological, because the dimension of psychology is not part of its narrative subjects. The only exception could be the psychology of the worker, but in this case – the author asks – would it still be an industrial film? The central role of the company is reaffirmed very clearly here. At the origin of every industrial film there is the precise will of a client who establishes the information objectives, identifies the relevant public and selects the distribution channels. The result will always be a ‘*film d’ordine*’ (an order film) (Camerana, 1971, p. 44) where artistic creation and direction – while telling in a suggestive manner – must respect the values of the client and adapt to the communicative choices determined *a priori*.

³² Professor at Università Cattolica of Milan.

³³ Journalist, at the time responsible for the ENI Group’s film activity.

³⁴ At the time editor at FIAT Direzione Pubblicità e Immagine, later in 1976 he will become its manager.

From this mosaic of reflections, a common trait emerges: the heartfelt need to claim the linguistic autonomy of the industrial film – the *tecnofilm* – against fiction cinema, documentary and above all advertising. The idea of an original cinematographic formula, which starting from the needs of the company could become true social communication. In this way the industrial film would be freed from the prejudice that wants to consider it always as a factory product “*but the rehabilitation takes place in the name of a mystifying principle, the objectivity of information*” (Mosconi, 1991, p. 67).

The attention with which we try – at least in theory – to define the various boundaries of audiovisual communication for industry seems to be an attitude typical of Italian culture. In the specialized American literature (De Witt, 1968; Burder, 1973; Klein, 1976), for example, corporate documentary and sponsored films are considered almost on the same level. Both are part of a very distant brand image strategy and communication culture. The differences, if anything, are dictated by reasons of production and direction.

In real practice, however, even in Italy these boundaries were much more nuanced, especially if the company produced consumer goods. Many industrial films reveal a particularly strong promotional message with respect to exclusively technical or scientific topics. Often the sixty or ninety-second

advertising shorts intended for movie theaters were made by recycling and re-editing the most spectacular scenes of documentation films. From the separation between theoretical thought and film production, the first signs of an imminent crisis were already felt, the feeling of having missed the main objectives. The theoretical debate failed to really influence the structure of industrial cinema, to modify its characters. Perhaps the efforts of Italian authors were also conditioned by other reasons, such as the need to confront the political and art documentary, which in those years showed a critical force against industry and the condition of work; the search for a balance between industrial production and intellectual work; or more simply the will, for some, to remove from the *tecnofilm* the propagandistic legacy of documentaries and newsreels made during the Fascist era³⁵. The strenuous search for a stable and shared definition of industrial cinema, the attempts to justify one’s reason for being, have for us today an almost exclusively historical value. The opinions expressed and the formulas proposed, rather than helping us to reveal the nature of such a particular film genre, implicitly reveal us what the various corporate philosophies were, what were the aims with which they intended to

³⁵ Bertozzi underlines how documentary cinema in the 1950s (and consequently also the industrial one, we add) has also represented a sort of “purgatory” in which directors too compromised with the Fascist regime – like Romolo Marcellini or Alessandro Blasetti – could become recycled again (Bertozzi, 2008, p. 124).

use cinema and how to bend it, as an aluminum plate under a press, to give it a unique shape and above all, one recognizable by the public. Sustaining an exclusively technical cinema or endorsing the need for cultural dissemination also meant expressing one's own corporate vision, making explicit the communication strategy that presides over every industrial film.

Three exemplary cases

After describing the production and distribution structures, let us analyze certain films of three paradigmatic firms in the field of corporate cinema – Edison, Olivetti, Fiat – in order to highlight their main narrative and stylistic features.

Edisonvolta

As a director of industrial films, Olmi was immediately noted for some works that were appreciated for their original style and documentary sensitivity by personalities like Rossellini. According to the historian Brunetta, “*Olmi found himself reproducing in a small way the experience of the British documentarism of the Thirties, of the General Post Office of John Grierson*” (Brunetta, 1993, p. 200).

His first documentaries reflect the main activities that Edisonvolta was carrying out at the end of the fifties in

the north of Italy: dams, power plants, hydraulic basins, high voltage electric networks. Olmi's films document all these activities starting with the movie *La pattuglia di Passo San Giacomo* (1954), which follows the activities of a team of maintenance workers engaged in restoring the power line in the Alta Val Formazza. In the following film *La mia valle* (1955), the main character is the watchman of a power plant built by Edisonvolta in the valley where he was born. The story follows the watchman's memories as he describes daily life in the past and its improvement with the arrival of electricity. The construction of the power plant provided employment to the inhabitants; its construction has not distorted the landscape of the valley, nor has it damaged or replaced in some way the traditional farming activities. *Manon finestra 2* (1956) deals with mining activities for the excavation of tunnels that will serve the hydroelectric plants in Val di Fumo, at the foot of Mount Adamello. Pier Paolo Pasolini wrote the commentary on the film. Its title refers to the codename of one of the entrances to the excavations – called “window”, *finestra* in Italian – the tunnel in which the workers in eight-hour shifts per team, dig the rock and blast it with explosive charges. The following is the most celebrated of Olmi's industrial documentaries, *Tre fili fino a Milano* (1958). The film describes the work of a team of workers in Val Daone (Trentino Region) assembling of trusses of an electric line that once finished will bring its high voltage energy to the city of Milan.

In all the four films, Olmi operates in an almost identical context both for the high mountain environments and for the work activities that, if viewed altogether, describe a whole range of related operations: excavation works, building of the plant, construction of the power line and its maintenance. The difference is given by the way in which Olmi approaches these issues, observing the most common aspects of the work: the workers' actions and the rarefied flow of time, that has nothing to do with the mechanical rhythms of the factory. In these films, every temptation to excessively dramatize situations is banned, and even less so to make the workers' effort epic. Even the small accident that causes the power line interruption and marks the start of the story of *La pattuglia di Passo San Giacomo*, is told without excessive emphasis. The typical emphasis voice over is reduced by Olmi to a minimum. The director is more interested in restoring other dimensions: the sounds of nature, the workers' voices, the noises of manual labour and machinery. Even the silence, especially that of the peasants, who seem to observe, without judging, the sudden appearance of technological progress into their valleys. This soundscape will be more accentuated in the film *Manon finestra 2* where the musical soundtrack disappears, leaving only the sounds of nature, machinery, wind and explosions inside the mines.

To the images of the technological and industrial effort – which raises dams, digs mines and that brings electricity to the most remote places – Olmi alternates

images of worker humanity. Close-ups of faces marked by fatigue; gestures stiffened by the cold. The voices that spread popular songs through the valleys, or that on the contrary exhaust themselves in very short, almost incomprehensible, dialectal dialogues. But in this continuous balance between stasis and progress, between metropolis and peasant world, Olmi's industrial cinema with its humanity and its expressive freedom never departs from the corporate philosophy and faith in technological progress (Falchero, 2000, p. 156).

Olivetti

The first film made by Olivetti is from 1949: *Un millesimo di millimetro*, directed by the documentarist Virgilio Sabel, with a commentary written by the engineer and poet Leonardo Sinisgalli. The following year two more films were produced: *Il martelletto* directed by Aristide Bosio and *Incontro con la Olivetti* directed by Giorgio Ferroni with a commentary by Franco Fortini. They precede the establishment of the Cinematographic Section in 1951, anticipating two fundamental items of the subsequent film production: technological pedagogy and the representation of a harmonious community.

This last category contains films dedicated to the environment and working conditions. In *Incontro con la Olivetti*, the company organization and factory production are explored, but the social and cultural services offered by the Ivrea plant are illustrated with equal care. Indeed, the

kindergarten, the pediatric canteen, the pupils' school, the playground, the library are shown even before the assembly lines. The film depicts a modern factory model in a way which renews the industrial film archetype of the *Sortie d'usine*³⁶, showing what is usually not seen: the worker returning home (Bertozzi, 2000, p. 48) “where rest is the right measure of the work done” as Fortini’s commentary states.

Other films linger on the same themes. *L'infermeria di fabbrica* (Bosio, 1951) depicts the company’s internal health service, and is accompanied by an interesting reflection on the risks and causes of injuries caused by the stress conditions of the worker. *Una fabbrica e il suo ambiente* (Gandin, 1957) deals with the relationship between the Canavese territory and the social responsibilities that Olivetti is taking at that time, in conjunction with the political commitment of the Movimento di Comunità. Even *Sud come Nord* (Risi, 1955) is directly influenced by the social inspirations of Comunità. In this case, moved to the south, in the new factory in Pozzuoli designed by Luigi Cosenza to allow workers to come into contact with nature, the Oli-

vetti factory shapes its form in respect of the landscape, trying to “concretely indicate the way for the economic and social welding between the north and the south of Italy”³⁷.

On the industrial production side, Olivetti’s films are structured around the nature of its products: typewriters, calculators, teletypewriters. Objects whose complexity is difficult to show and to explain to a popular audience. Starting from these limits, Aristide Bosio creates a series of films that stand out for their clarity of exposition and for the intense use of animated drawings. For example, the Tetractys mechanical calculator, is the main character in two films: *N 6 M401* (1962) and *Quattro operazioni a macchina* (1965), where the animations reveal the logical and mechanical processes with which the machines perform the calculation operations. Bosio’s *tecnofilms* strip machines to reveal their internal aesthetics, what the user will never see, but they also tell the work of the designer, of the one who has the task of dressing the machine technology. *La forma di una macchina per ufficio* (1959) is a film still dedicated to Tetractys, but this time it focuses on the designer Marcello Nizzoli. We see him while sketching the first forms of the body, then discussing with the technical designer Natale Cappellaro in front of the first wooden mock-up. At that time Olivetti is one of the few companies that gives particular emphasis to the figures of the designer and the architect and not

³⁶ *Sortie d'usine* was the first short film made by the Lumière brothers with their invention: the “cinématographe”. In April 1895 the two brothers filmed the workers leaving the Lumière factory located in Montplaisir, on the outskirts of Lyon. Of this first version of the film, no celluloid copies survived, but the Lumière later made different versions of the same film – four according to the Catalogue Lumière [URL: <https://catalogue-lumiere.com/series/les-sorties-dusine/>] shot in a period between May 1895 and February 1897.

³⁷ From the film voice over.

only to that of the engineer. And it is also the only national company to translate the American school's audiovisual lesson into its *tecnofilms*. Aristide Bosio's style can be compared to that of Charles and Ray Eames, Saul Bass or to some serial productions such as those made by Jam Handy Organization.

To conclude, we can affirm that the Olivetti film production, especially in this first period of activity, represents a fairly rare case of cultural production integrated in business communication. The *tecnofilm* concept is combined with a linguistic experimentation that makes use of collaborations of relief – an example being all of the graphics designed by Giovanni Pintori and the soundtrack created by Luciano Berio for the film *Elea classe 9000* – within a rigorous and interdisciplinary coordinated image system. Speaking of “Olivetti cinema” and “Olivetti style” does not mean defining a specific genre or a specific expressive language but, in a broader way, a cultural relationship with one's own time (Bellotto, 1994, pp. 39, 41).

Fiat

If Olmi's cinema at Edisonvolta looks to the documentary, while Bosio's cinema for Olivetti is part of the *tecnofilm* genre, the hallmark of Cinefiat's cinema seems to be that of grandeur – an industrial cinema that wants to be spectacular and international. Faced with a wide range of cinematographic

subjects³⁸, Cinefiat sought to standardize its filmic style through the use of recurring narrative formulas. In this way its films remained highly recognizable despite telling of very different products. With the exclusion of advertising commercials, personnel training films and institutional documentaries, a good part of the Cinefiat films seem to fall into a category included between technical and promotional documentaries. For the most popular products, such as cars, the films were set in fascinating and exotic locations, such as the African desert or the Arctic Circle. In other cases, spectacular scenes were made, such as the launch of the new Fiat 124 Sedan (1966) which is literally parachuted by an Italian Air Force aircraft. The same scene, isolated from the rest of the film, would then become an advertising short.

With such a wide, but at the same time homogeneous, film production, it is difficult to find unique and paradigmatic examples. It is more effective to outline what are the constants in terms of content and form. One of the most frequent cases is the checks on materials as can be seen in two films directed by Victor De Sanctis: *F4CB Acciaio su misura* (1966)

³⁸ The activities that Cinefiat had to document or promote were numerous and belonged to the most varied sectors of the Turin company. Sectors also very different from each other and with varied publics that often overlapped. Between the fifties and sixties, Fiat's industrial production included: motor vehicles, industrial vehicles and tractors, military vehicles, large engines, aeronautical constructions (Fiat Aeritalia) and for some years also electrical appliances such as frigidaire and washing machines.

and *Tolleranza zero* (1961) both show stress tests performed on steel samples. In the first, *F4CB*, the dramatic characterization mostly involves the visual plane. The foundry is resumed as if it were the forge of a modern Vulcan god, with slices of light pouring down from above while the scientific laboratories are closer to the imagery of the science fiction film. *Tolleranza zero* describes the activities of Centro Stile (the Car Design Department) and those of Research and Control Department. This film shows more realistic images than *F4CB*, but the sound commentary is much more dramatic.

When the story passes in review the test of physical resistance of materials, the voice over recites “*if they had a soul, if they could talk, the metals would say that we are torturers capable of the most horrible tortures*”. At the end the same voice sums up the Fiat’s concept of quality with this kind of emphasis: “*our dream of zero tolerance reflects the myth of absolute perfection. The ideal to which man is getting closer without ever being able to reach*”.

The dramatization takes place at the exact opposite to the clarity of the Olivetti’s films. Cinefiat films tend to show aspects of science and technology without explaining them properly. Only the concept of mechanical precision, namely zero tolerance, is shared with Olivetti. This is a cinema of information, assertive and pragmatic, which tends to give answers, to provide data, and to

draw a solid and reassuring image of the company and its work.

As Camerana affirmed, this is also an “*order cinema*” that performs very specific tasks and that cannot be diverted from them. The Cinefiat film is conceived as an industrial artifact made in series, which implies the adoption of similar formulas for various films, such as the three-act narrative scheme. For instance, *Grandi Motori Fiat* (D’Eramo, 1963) opens with a historical prologue on the evolution of naval propulsion from the Egyptians to the diesel engine. The center part is a review of the large marine motors built by Fiat. The ending – which conceptually is connected with the prologue – shows the various types of ships equipped with these engines. Another recurring formula is the use of an ideal-typical character – often little more than an extra – who has the function of giving a face to the film voice over: the naval officer in *La nave delle mille auto* (De Sanctis, 1953), the maintenance technician of *Cingoli per l’industria* (De Sanctis, 1963), the Dutch journalist of *Accanto al lavoro Fiat. Ricognizione tra le opere sociali della Fiat* (Solaro, 1962). In other films, the story is reduced to a flat, technical list. *Alcune applicazioni dell’automatismo alla Fiat* (Canzio, 1955) reviews the new automated machinery like a catalog. Only at the end, the sound commentary abandons the cold technical description and asks itself: what will be the destiny of the worker? A little hesitation, but the voice over immediately reassures: “*it can be well affirmed that the automation not*

only will not create insoluble problems but will give rise to new opportunities for useful work”, even though no precision is given about such opportunities.

All these films were produced during the years of the “*possible hegemony*”, from 1955 to 1962, when “*the [Fiat] Direction finally has the monopoly of power and discipline in the factory, and almost the monopoly of propaganda*” (Torchio, 2003, p. 142). In the mid-1960s, a climate of renewal began to appear. Collaborations with the militant directors of the left wing were increasing, the so-called Cinefiat’s Rive gauche: Valentino Orsini, Massimo Mida, Ansano Giannarelli, Ennio Lorenzini. This generation of directors would lead to a change in the structure of industrial films. *Appunti per l’auto di domani* (Mida 1965), and *Progetto n. 128* (Orsini, 1969) represent two stages of renewal. The car is no longer an object of veneration, but a subject under observation. Its design must be guided by its own public. Scientific research must be an eye on the world. Aesthetics and design must deal with new artistic and popular expressions, such as comics and graphics – a new concept of shared design, of critical production. However, despite the linguistic experiments, this last phase of Cinefiat production appears as the result of a compromise between the political demands of the 1970s and the tradition of the institutional film communication.

Conclusion

Called to give a definition of industrial cinema, the film historian Thomas Elsaesser compared it to the phenomenon of “*Medienverbund*”: “*A network of competing, but also mutually interdependent and complementary media and media practices, focused on a specific location, a professional association, or even a national or state initiative*” (Elsaesser, 2009, p. 22). These words, rather than a definition, seem a suggestion to broaden the themes of research and have them talk to each other. The history of Italian industrial cinema seems to confirm the phenomenon described by Elsaesser and suggests a whole series of topics still to be analyzed in depth, such as: the relations with political institutions, the role of *tecnofilm* inside corporate identity; the contribution of industrial film in the post-war imagery, the audiovisual rhetoric from the “economic boom” of the sixties to the crisis of the seventies. In this way the vision of industrial cinema as “*a parasitic form*” (Hediger & Vonderau, 2009, p. 46) becomes a positive perspective with which to observe the phenomenon. The impossibility to crystallize these films in a definitive form – documentary, commercial, *tecnofilm* – gives us the opportunity to use them as connecting elements between different areas. Film and media subjects that can contribute to the historical deepening of the twentieth century. After more than a century of images-movement, this strange fossil called industrial film appears as one of the most vivid subjects of study.

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