

THE ART OF “SPEAKING SILENTLY”: THE DEBATE AROUND CINEMA AND PANTOMIME IN THE 1910s AND 1920s

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Introduction

The issue of the relationship between cinema and pantomime needs to be located within the emerging and often confused critical and theoretical debate born in the birth and childhood of cinema. The main characters within this debate, as is well known, are critics, playwrights, intellectuals, polygraphs, and educated men of various cultural and social extractions who contributed to this discussion initially in newspapers and then in specialized journals. Over the years, this wealth of publications would considerably increase the variety of arguments appearing in the first books devoted to cinema. Often these contributions are solicited from the outside: an intellectual is called upon, urged to break a cautious silence and contribute to the controversy around the artistic status of cinema. Other times, other people might freely express their opinion motivated by the desire to spread a personal point of view on the new expressive medium, its development, and its aesthetic potential: in both cases, such reflections hardly produced organic, accomplished, and definitive thinking. Nevertheless, this debate is full of prophecies, forecasts, tentative definitions, aesthetic projects most of which would not be accomplished either because they proved unviable, because of the difficulty of realizing them, because of the different direction that cinema will undertake as a commercial medium, and finally – as we will see – because of the overwhelming predominance of sound.

Within the multiplicity of possible directions, I have chosen to privilege theories of cinema in relationship to pantomime: an expressive form perhaps less noble or credited among the major arts, but whose various genres link successfully with cinema's; an expressive form, furthermore, that, like cinema, has been defined as “silent theater.” An analysis of these prophecies, disseminated here and there in various contributions, reveal the presence of some basic recurrent themes, especially within the Italian debate: the problem of analogies and differences between the two media, the issue of modernity, attention to the actor's gestures, and the theorization of sound. I will try to establish how and why a variety of theories, even those predominantly focused on production,¹ will prove unsuccessful. Finally, I will mention an issue that would deserve to be more fully addressed elsewhere and which will be only touched on here: the hypothesis that the major influence of pantomime on cinema was exercised at the level of production rather than at the theoretical level, and that this production was deeply influenced by specific national artistic traditions.

At this point I would like to examine the main tenets of the theoretical discourse from the point of view of the periodization suggested by Alberto Boschi, who divides

early film theory in three phases: the first phase (from the end of the Nineteenth to the beginning of the Twentieth Century) is characterized by the predominance of reflections on technical aspects and by the issue of the reproductive power of the medium; in the second (stretching from 1910 to 1915), emphasis is given to the consideration of the status of cinema as an art; finally, in the third (1915-early '20s) and "moving from the comparison between cinema and the other arts, the pioneers of theoretical discourse began to outline the specific traits of the new medium, thus preparing the terrain for the classical debate."² While mindful of the extreme fluidity³ of this distinction, it can be claimed from the outset that, simultaneously with these phases, also the interpretation of the relationship between cinema and pantomime acquire a different form and depth, transforming from a simple pretext for a linguistic analogy (immediate, because neither medium implies the use of words) to an increasingly deep inquiry into the possibility of establishing foundational approaches to their aesthetics.

Another preliminary question concerns the definition of pantomime: the long history of this art and its multiple expressions – from the Roman pantomime to the *commedia dell'arte*, from the "white" pantomime to the English one, from the choreo-drama to the Russian ballets – evoke a variety of meanings that make it difficult to retrieve a univocal and direct idea of the term.⁴ Similar to the theater-cinema debate, reference is made to the media's structural elements, namely, to the silent dramatic representation, where mimic movements and dance, sometimes with musical accompaniment and narrative comment, express action. Drawing on this shared meaning of pantomime it is possible to inquire into its similarities with cinema.

Analogies

In a 1918 article, having been asked an opinion about cinema as an art, the renowned critic Silvio D'Amico provocatively claims that the "cinematograph doesn't exist", since it is nothing other than the most ancient form of expression, "a silent representation realized only with gestures: and its name is *pantomime!*"⁵ This tardy claim gives an idea of the tight network of exchanges between cinema and pantomime.

References to the analogy between the two expressive forms are widely spread, especially in the early 1900s, as Alain Carou believes.⁶ The analogy is also functional, as it were: its aim is to institute relationships between cinema and the traditional established arts sin hopes that cinema too would be acknowledged as one of them. Or, alternatively, as in the case reported above, to deny its specificity.

A typical example of analogy evoked in order to elevate cinema's artistic status is the syllogism proposed by Roberto Bracco, playwright and author of numerous subjects at the roots of the famous realistic strand of Italian cinema. He advocates the link between pantomime and cinema with the following argument: since cinema is pantomime, and "pantomime has never been denied the title of Art [...] the cinematograph can also be art."⁷ The explicit objective of this statement is to build the foundation for the understanding of cinema as an art.

Where conditions allow it, the analogy is expressed through a history of the pantomime, from its Greek origins to the present. This is the case in the work of two interesting authors, Pietro Gariazzo and Anton Giulio Bragaglia. With *The Silent Theater*, the former, screenwriter and manager of a production company, anticipates by ten

years Anton Giulio Bragaglia, supporter of Photodynamism, innovator in cinema and theater, and whose interest for the pantomime is expressed both theoretically, in works such as *Evolution of Mime* and *The Sound Film*,⁸ and practically in works such as *La Fantasimina*, (realized with Sebastiano Arturo Luciani), *The Knights' Dance (Il Balletto dei Cavalieri)*, *The Gipsies (Gli zingari)*, *Epileptic Cabaret* (with Marinetti), staged at the Theater of the Independents.

Gariazzo and Bragaglia lead the way into a journey through centuries-long history of pantomime by drawing frequent comparisons with its contemporary situation and the cinema. Usually, this is a way to address some questions related to film aesthetics, and identify, in the classical ideal of pantomime, a model for it.

An interesting example is the famous argument between French reformer Noverre and Italian choreographer Angiolini, which Bragaglia presents chauvinistically. Among the many reasons for this controversy, Bragaglia gives particular emphasis to their disagreement about the usage of intertitles, prologues, or spoken comments. After a detailed presentation of their different positions he concludes:

in agreement with Angiolini we also think that a film or a ballet that "is not understood without recurring to the program is a ill-conceived and ill-executed work; that a program that says what the art of pantomime cannot explain is a ridiculous work; that it serves nothing other than as an evident proof of the ignorance of those who cannot see how far the art of gestures can reach."⁹

Bragaglia expresses his ideal of cinematic purity by invoking the reflection of the 1700 Florentine choreographer. Anytime he sees cinema being plagued by uncertainties, possibilities for different developments, Bragaglia chooses the solution that guarantees the highest degree of faithfulness to the art of pantomime, which he regards as cinema's origin and destiny.

As a result, his reasoning creates a peculiar short circuit whereby the pantomime represents at the same time the beginning and the end of the artistic accomplishments of cinema: returning to pantomime is a necessary condition if animated photography is to be acknowledged among the arts.¹⁰ Thus, the *a priori* limitations imposed to the development of cinema become quite clear: this aesthetics of equivalencies runs the risk of placing cinema in a state of constant subordination to pantomime as its model.

However, there is another latent issue, which Bragaglia's words bring to the surface: the analogy between cinema and pantomime rests – besides what has been said so far – on some sort of intrinsic "weakness" that they share and that consists in the tendency of both to contaminate themselves with other forms or expressive media, whether it is the theater, the spoken word, dance, or music. In short, cinema and pantomime tend to compromise their expressive purity and autonomy in order to enrich their communicative potential with any possible means. "The history of pantomime" and by extension of cinema, argues Bragaglia, "is an interrupted alternative to the multifaceted collaboration proposed to the 'mute' art by the word and, in different degrees, by dance [...], which deforms and alienates from its being the spiritual and delicate art of Terpsichore."¹¹ Cinema and pantomime are weak arts, corrupted by an original sin, and therefore always seeking a surplus of expression and emotion that they borrow from other arts (spoken word, dance, music, theater...). As a consequence, Bragaglia maintains, they lose their originality, risk failure, and jeopardize their very identity.

Modernity of gesture

As already shown, many theorists share the tendency to refer to the long tradition of pantomime so that they can credit cinema with artistic dignity, regarding it as the last evolutionary stage of an uninterrupted chain of artistic works and expressions. These cinema critics' need to explain the new by relying on the old¹² – or as Antonio Costa suggests following Umberto Eco, to proceed with approximation, first associating the novelty to something known, and then introducing greater specifications – is quite clear.¹³

Nevertheless, the analogy between cinema and pantomime triggers also another interesting comparison of a sociological nature between aesthetic forms and the moment in time that produces them. In this sense, cinematic pantomime is interpreted as the outcome of a need of the times, a fundamental trait of the Twentieth century sensibility.

The first modern trait can be found, naturally, in the mechanical and reproductive nature of the medium, a new spatial and temporal synthesis made possible by the new technology. The most original element, however, is the fact that cinema transforms bodily expressions, clearly modernizing them. In this case, the modernity of the medium, combined with the modernization of its means of expression, greatly augments the spectators' experience of innovation. Within the all-encompassing perceptual balance created by modernity, within the intensity of a life ruled – as Benjamin shows – by visual shocks¹⁴ “the rapid gesture that establishes itself with the precision of a monstrous figurative clock, exalts the spirit of the modern spectators who are already used to a fast living.”¹⁵

There is more to it: the priority of the gesture frees the art form from the dominance (and subordination) of the spoken word, which characterized the previous century, and restores its intrinsic universal value.

With this point of view, the argument put forth by Pietro Gariazzo, the author of *The Mute Theater*, appears stronger. Upon drawing a sketch of recent technological progress and the speed that characterizes it, he claims that the arts interpret the needs of modernity “by becoming more synthetic, seeking forms of greater and faster expression”: in this way the cinema “no longer enclosed in the narrow confines of the verbal forms, from its silent shadow, confronted by a musical rhythm, speaks to everybody with the simple and universal language of gesture, and can easily be considered as the expression of the need for theatrical speed.”¹⁶

Gariazzo expresses a common opinion, namely, that miming, the evocative gesture of the actor, render cinematic language understandable beyond linguistic differences, national boundaries, or differences in education: cinema enacts the universality of the gesture and overcomes the limitations of the spoken or written word. The second characteristic of the cinematic gesture, for Gariazzo, is its immediacy: in cinema “the gesture is the thought become action: the sensation itself is being exteriorized, made visible;”¹⁷ it reaches the mind of the spectator directly, making itself comprehensible, without the mediation of a conceptual or linguistic codification. This statement clearly reveals the utopia (or the over-simplification) of naturalistic acting.

All theoreticians, still searching for defining categories and an appropriate lexicon, are struck by the unprecedented power of the gesture as revealed by cinema: Canudo talks about the actor's capability to translate an emotion, an action, a sensation into a living movement.¹⁸ The actor becomes the necessary link enabling the pantomime to

take place: his body, as already suggested by Noverre, becomes a speaking body. Man becomes visible – to paraphrase Balázs – through his body and the mimic gesturing.¹⁹

In some passages of his extensive work on the subject, Antonio Giulio Bragaglia both recuperates Gariazzo's position and moves beyond it, by connecting it to the issue of the 1900s *Zeitgeist*: in the new century the opposition that the theoretician of Photodynamism regards as the most irreconcilable, is once again that between word and gesture. Cautiously committed to the defense of silent cinema's pantomime in the years of the advent of sound, Bragaglia erupts in a venomous denunciation of the anachronistic "resistance" of the word: he asserts that "today's ears are already full of words upon words" and maintains that "word's decadence is marked by the very character of nineteenth centuries' sensibility."²⁰

We are not that far from the meditations of some theoreticians of modernity, such as Simmel, for whom "modern art lives immediately the very sense of our life; it is much more faithful to reality than any imitation, because it is not only truthful but truth itself."²¹ And cinema finds itself confronting reality without the mediation of word, both complicit in and testimonial to the world's changing makeup. This prompts Bragaglia to claim, with an effective metaphor, "the silence of the modern art is the living resting place against the assaults of reality."²²

Differences

While some critics continue to celebrate the identity between cinema and pantomime, a more specific awareness of the differences between the two expressive forms slowly begins to spread. These differences will be augmented by the most acute film critics and by the first attempts to systematize an aesthetic of cinema. It is not by chance that, usually, this way of putting pantomime at a distance precedes the enunciation of a precise aesthetic project for cinema, however utopian: while what cinema *is not* is strongly underlined (and in this case it is pantomime), what it *should be* is also powerfully established so that its expressive originality can be fully pursued.

Let us examine the exemplary – under this respect – trajectories of Ricciotto Canudo and Sebastiano Arturo Luciani. In an enthusiastic and programmatic 1908 essay, *The Triumph of the Cinematographer*, the former – writer, poet, critic and European playwright – articulates some precocious thoughts about cinema: among the different issues examined (some about the specificity of the medium, other of an aesthetic nature),²³ there are references to the theme that I have been addressing: "The cinematographer – Canudo claims – is therefore theater of a new Pantomime. It is consecrated to painting in motion, and contains the full manifestation of a most singular creation, realized by men, who are for this reason of a new kind: a new Pantomime, a new dance of expression."²⁴ According to Canudo, the elegant prose, the frequent recurrence of synaesthesiae, and the foreshadowing tone of the discourse²⁵ attenuate the awareness that is nevertheless surfacing: with cinema, another art has appeared under the guise of the "modern Pantomime." Some years later, while he perfects his famous conception of cinema as the seventh art, synthesis of the arts of time and the arts of space, Canudo distanciates himself even more from pantomime and all the other mimodramas, considering them a nourishment for cinema during its inexperienced youth,²⁶ but from whose constraints it had slowly freed itself. The aesthetic ideal that cinema should conform to, this time enun-

ated explicitly by the critic from Bari, is the "visual drama," a work capable of translating the Wagnerian aspiration to the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Along this line, pantomime follows cinema at a considerable distance because – still according to Canudo – it is an imitative, illustrative art, destined to represent stories, ideas, emotional states, but incapable of spiritually evoking them through the abstract procedures of visual drama.²⁷

Sebastiano Arturo Luciani, scholar and musician, as well as critic for a number of prestigious journals, moves from a different position, reaching a perspective not too dissimilar: he begins by observing some similarities between cinema and pantomime, such as the extreme popularity of both and their capability to effect social processes, producing, for example, phenomena of stardom. However, this analogy is comprised within a fundamentally negative vision: Luciani considers both cinema and pantomime as decadent expressive forms, both guilty of having tried to incorporate or substitute for other arts, poetry in particular. He nevertheless sees a possibility of amend for cinema, more than for pantomime, in the modern mimic musical drama, where music is the element leading the representation. Luciani refers to the Russian Ballets as an example where music has freed itself from the constraints imposed by choreography: similarly cinema, by relying on the musical element, can produce a representation that is free, inspired by it, and authentically poetic:²⁸ the impressionist drama.

More clearly – and more programmatically – in his 1928 volume, titled *The Antitheater*, Luciani denounces the fact that the development of film aesthetics and film art has been delayed by the serious prejudice of "those who persevere in considering this newest art form, created by modern sensibility, as a drama in which words are not heard, or, at best, as a pantomime cinematically reproduced."²⁹

Beyond specific outcomes, which should be examined also in relation to their effects on cinema's production, I think we can detect a common core in the argumentation of both intellectuals: the desire to move from pantomime in order to go beyond it, toward the search for other specifying elements that would allow cinema to become a new and original expressive form: an art synthesizing different perceptual experiences (musical and/or visual), no longer reproductive pantomime, but accomplished "drama".

Destines: pantomime and sound cinema

In the wake of the advent of sound cinema, the debate on cinema and pantomime revives for the last time: this is the dismay of the two forms of silent art, both undertaking a common and unavoidable journey towards decadence. The first signs of the technological revolution of cinema precipitate the debate on the use of sound, on the value of the spoken word, and the related aesthetic transformations of cinema: theoreticians and critics take positions against or in favor of sound cinema often evoking the similarities between cinema and pantomime. Two examples of opposed positions can clarify the meaning of this alternative and the use, once again instrumental, of pantomime to support one's convictions.

Marcel Pagnol, playwright and theoretician of the "filmed theater,"³⁰ was one of the more determined supporters of sound and of the power of the word in film. Drawing on already established arguments, Pagnol talks about early cinema as a mechanically reproduced pantomime, whose possibilities are limited. Sound provides cinema with new possibilities: it frees the actors from the necessity of using exaggerated and unnat-

ural gestures, and attracts cinema under the protective wing of theater. Sound works as a divide between pantomime and theater, locating cinema alternatively on each side of this divide. Pagnol concludes:

1. *Silent film was the art of impressing, fixating, and spreading pantomime.*
2. *As the invention of the press had enormous influence on literature, similarly the invention of silent cinema had great influence on pantomime: Charlot, Gance, Griffith, René Clair have renewed the pantomime.*
3. *The spoken film is the art of impressing, fixating and spreading theater.*
4. *The spoken film, which brings new resources to theater, must re-create theater.*³¹

Therefore cinema, no matter whether it is theater or pantomime, has the effect of reviving and renewing the higher arts on which it depends.

Within the group of the cautious defenders of silent cinema, we have already met Anton Giulio Bragaglia, who devotes more space to the reflection on the relationship between pantomime and film in his two volumes written between 1929 and 1930.³² The structure of this impressive study, especially the *Evolution of Mime*, reveals the author's intention: proving the relationship between cinema and pantomime, is, as we have seen, the condition for reinforcing the necessity of silent cinema. Therefore, from his introductory chapter, Bragaglia claims that sound breaks the link between cinema and pantomime. "As the theatrical pantomime has become drama once mouths have been opened, similarly the cinematic pantomime will become something else once it adopts the spoken word; it will easily be something beautiful [...] but it will no longer be cinema, nor it will belong to the pantomime's genre."³³

Sound is much more limiting, because it stops cinema's development as an art that has reached great accomplishments: the trajectory of the "simple theatrical pantomime" that has become "pantomime in itself" and has culminated with the "silent theater," undergoes, with the introduction of the word, a drastic fall. "The pantomimist, highly refined in cinema, regresses in his footsteps and becomes mime, thus necessarily losing, because of the word, the originality of his mimetic expressions."³⁴

Bragaglia then ventures into prophecy and foresees the success of sound film, destined to be appreciated for its realistic nature; but he also predicts that alongside it, silent cinema will continue to exist and to emphasize its poetic vocation, because "the Pantomime, Poetry's mysterious creature, has a magic charm that is superior to any verisimilitude, and therefore it is immortal."³⁵

From Theory to Practice

So far I have sketched an outline of the main issues concerning the relationship between cinema and pantomime: we have noticed how different attempts to formulate a film aesthetics by drawing on this link (or on mutual differences) lead to theoretical statements hardly applicable, for naïveté or for lack of awareness of cinema's means of expression, or because of the lack of interest towards the pure cinema encouraged by theoreticians. We have understood how different prophecies about a pantomimic cinema have remained – in most cases – mere auspices and unrealized projects.

This does not preclude the fact that at the level of production pantomime effectively entered into cinema. As correctly observed by Claudio Camerini, the influence of pan-

tomime needs to be detected – besides the move of actors from pantomime to cinema (the most famous and international is Maria Carmi's)

at the level of characters: cinema has revived classical characters such as Pierrot, to whom many films are devoted [...]; at the level of subject matter, by drawing the screenwriters' attention to the typical themes of classical pantomime, especially in the realm of comedies; at the level of acting, by enlarging the sphere of action of mimic and suggestive language, and at the same time directing the potential of the repertoire of gestures towards more precise and restrained effects; at the level of representation, by directing the mise-en-scène towards a sobriety that contrasts with most contemporary production and by stimulating the linguistic research to find new representative solutions, especially elliptical and metaphorical.³⁶

The analysis of the theoretical debate suggests another possible line of inquiry that I will only mention here. Besides the white pantomime, which culminates with the notorious *Histoire d'un Pierrot*,³⁷ besides the acting of comedians trained in the pantomime and another number of influences suggested by Camerini, the Italian tradition of pantomime expresses itself also with the pantomimic dance, following the example of Manzotti's great choreographies,³⁸ very popular at the turn of the century. The influences of pantomimic choreography on cinema are not merely limited to the film transposition of the Excelsior Ballet realized by Comerio in 1913 with the La Scala dancers,³⁹ or to the citations ("in the manner of") of the same dance in films such as *Giornalissimo* by Ugo Falena (1914).⁴⁰ Rather, and more in general, they extend from the reproduction of the mimicry of the masses, to choreography, to the spectacular and scenographical dimension of films.

It is precisely from this pantomime, with the assistance of opera, that the interest for the composition of masses and for spectacle is born: a tendency shared by all genres – although very evident in the historical genre – whose echo is found in the theoretical debate. As early as 1907, an anonymous newspaperman believes that cinema's ambition is not to become art but choreography, and explicitly indicates Manzotti as the model:

Choreography is [...] the soul of cinema. The audience wants to have a good time, that is, be struck by the spectacle of greatness, of wonders, and comedy. The spectator will watch simple scenes, with few characters, with more or less interest, but he will soon be tired. His spirit, instead, will appreciate the agitated mass on screen [...] To bring all this together, however, a really talented choreographer is needed [...] Manzotti's skills.⁴¹

The influence of pantomime on cinema is maybe appreciated by looking into the mimic of masses, the representation of choral movement, for the first time visible through cinema not unlike the manifestation of the small gesture, or the character's face. This is a different direction, which might contribute to illuminate another issue, such as the relationship between pantomime and cinema from the perspective of national identity⁴². This is what a patriotic Gariazzo seems to suggest, when he talks about the historical genre:

the great historical film has proven the uselessness of word and this is because it is a spectacle seen from a distance, essentially choreographical. ... The representation of events in ancient Rome has introduced the taste for grandeur [...] and this taste has become a necessi-

ty that has spread on all production [...] Its success – Gariazzo continues – has opened the way for composing predominantly mimic subjects.

And, while we fundamentally know that this did not give a definitive linguistic or expressive impulse to Italian cinema, we also know that it at least tried to interpret “our dreams, our ideals, seen under an heroic light.”⁴³ Once again prophecies seem destined to fail: not only in film theory but also in film practice, the season of cinematic pantomime ends very soon, even before producing its best results.

[Translated from Italian by Alessandra Raengo]

- 1 I draw the definition of production-oriented theories from F. di Chio, “La teoria americana e lo specifico del cinema muto”, *Lo Spettacolo*, no. 4 (October-December 1992), pp. 514-516.
- 2 A. Boschi, “Le origini della teoria nel cinema”, in G. P. Brunetta (ed.), *Storia del cinema mondiale. Teorie, Strumenti, memorie*, vol. V (Torino: Einaudi, 2001), p. 374; on the periodization of the theoretical debate in early cinema see also A. Boschi, *Teorie del cinema. Il periodo classico* (Roma: Carocci, 1998), pp. 27-50 and specifically concerning the French debate see, R. Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism, vol. I, 1907-1929* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1988).
- 3 Boschi acknowledges this fluidity describing it as “an uneven, not at all linear, trajectory.” See A. Boschi, “Le origini della teoria nel cinema”, cit., p. 374.
- 4 Later, particularly in the late ‘30s, the different meanings of the term pantomime are subsumed in the notion of pantomimic gesture, whose best examples, as is universally acknowledged, are Charlie Chaplin’s performances.
- 5 S. D’Amico, “Il cinematografo non esiste”, *In Penombra*, no. 4 (September 1918), pp. 135-137.
- 6 A. Carou, “L’Autre Art muet. Pantomime(s) et cinéma en France”, in L. Quaresima, L. Vichi (eds.), *La decima musa. Il cinema e le altre arti – The Tenth Muse. Cinema and the Other Arts* (Udine: Forum, 2001), p. 525.
- 7 R. Bracco, *Tra le arti e gli artisti* (Napoli: Giannini, 1919), pp. 301-302; this essay, titled “Cinematografo”, appeared in *L’Arte Muta* on 15 July 1916. For more information on the relationship between critics, theoreticians and the pantomime in Italy, see my “La pantomima nel cinema muto italiano. Il caso de *Il ballo Excelsior*”, in M. Canosa (ed.), *A nuova luce. Cinema muto italiano. I* (Bologna: Clueb, 2000), pp. 217-231.
- 8 P. A. Gariazzo, *Il teatro muto* (Torino: Lattes, 1919); A. G. Bragaglia, *Il film sonoro* (Milano: Corbaccio, 1929) and A. G. Bragaglia, *Evoluzione del mimo* (Milano: Ceschina, 1930). Information on Bragaglia’s activities are found in S. d’Amico’s (ed.) *Enciclopedia dello spettacolo*, vol. II, (Roma: Le Maschere, 1954), pp. 975-979.
- 9 A. G. Bragaglia, *Evoluzione del mimo*, cit., pp. 158-9.
- 10 Writing in the journal *Lux* and as early as 1908, Roberto Bracco argues that the artistic form that cinema will accomplish in the future “will be nothing other than pantomime, which, on the other hand, finds its roots in the theater and in other developments of stage performances.” R. Bracco, “I nuovi orizzonti del cinematografo”, *Lux*, no. 1 (December 1908).
- 11 A. G. Bragaglia, *Evoluzione del mimo*, cit., p. 11.
- 12 R. Canudo, “Le Septième art et son esthétique”, in *L’Amour de l’Art* (1922). I’m quoting from the Italian translation in R. Redi (ed.), *L’officina delle immagini* (Roma: Bianco e Nero, 1966),

- p. 84: "The miserable mistake of our cinematic production relies precisely in this confusion, which manifests itself in the vile need to link new things to old ones just in order to accept them at once, without taking the time to define them or understand them."
- 13 A. Costa, *Teorie del cinema dalle origini agli anni Trenta: la prospettiva estetica*, in G. P. Brunetta (ed.), *Storia del cinema mondiale*, cit., p. 417.
 - 14 W. Benjamin, "Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire", in *Schriften* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1955); English translation "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire", in H. Harendt (ed.), *Illuminations. Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 155-200.
 - 15 R. Canudo, "Il Trionfo del Cinematografo", *Giornale Nuovo* (25 November 1908), now in G. Grignaffini, *Sapere e teorie del cinema. Il periodo del muto* (Bologna: CLUEB, 1989), p. 108.
 - 16 P. A. Gariazzo, *Il teatro muto*, cit., p. 12.
 - 17 *Ibid.*, p. 129. In chapter VI of this volume, devoted to mimic gesture, Gariazzo gives a rough classification of types of gestures. He divides them in action movements, character movements, instinctive movements, descriptive movements, complementary movements.
 - 18 R. Canudo, "Chronique du septième art. Vedettes du cinéma", *Paris-Midi* (27 August 1923), Italian translation in R. Redi, *op. cit.*, pp. 135-138.
 - 19 Within the extensive bibliography on actor's gestures and pantomimic acting, let me recall B. Brewster, L. Jacobs, *Theatre to Film: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1997); R. Pearson, *Eloquent Gestures: the Transformation of Performance Style in the Griffith Biograph Films* (Berkeley: University of California, 1992); L. Vichi (ed.), *L'uomo visibile. L'attore dalle origini del cinema alle soglie del cinema moderno – The Visible Man* (Udine: Forum, 2002). See also Francesco Pitassio's doctoral dissertation *Ombre silenziose. Teoria dell'attore cinematografico negli anni Venti* (Bologna, 2001) whom I would like to thank for his kind suggestions.
 - 20 A. G. Bragaglia, *Il film sonoro*, cit., p. 169.
 - 21 G. Simmel, "Rodin", in *Philosophische Kultur* (Leipzig: 1911). I am quoting from the Italian translation in G. Simmel, *Il volto e il ritratto*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1985), p. 214. On this subject see D. Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity. Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin* (Cambridge – Oxford: Polity Press – Basil Blackwell, 1985); F. Casetti, *Il cinema, per esempio. La nascita e lo sviluppo del cinema tra Otto e Novecento* (Milano: Isu Università Cattolica, 1999); L. Charney, V. R. Schwartz (eds.), *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley – Los Angeles – London: University of California, 1995).
 - 22 A. G. Bragaglia, *Evoluzione del mimo*, cit., p. 213.
 - 23 G. Grignaffini, *op. cit.*, p. 59 and followings.
 - 24 R. Canudo, "Il Trionfo del Cinematografo", *Giornale Nuovo* (25 November 1908), now in G. Grignaffini, *op. cit.*, p. 109.
 - 25 See G. Grignaffini, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
 - 26 R. Canudo, "Le Septième art et son esthétique", *L'amour de l'art* (1922). I am quoting from the Italian translation in R. Redi (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 85.
 - 27 "Expressing life as a whole, with its infinite range of emotions, aspirations, failures, and triumphs, using the eternal play of light, understanding beings and things only as forms of light, harmonized and orchestrated according to the animating idea of action: this is the secret, the glory of Visual Drama. This way there won't be 'plays' or 'pantomimes' any longer: this is the highest, most spiritual work among our aesthetic creations." R. Canudo, "Le Septième art et son esthétique", *L'amour de l'art* (1922). I am quoting from the Italian translation found in R. Redi (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 90.
 - 28 S. A. Luciani, "Impressionismo scenico", *Apollon*, no. 3 (April 1916), also in R. Redi, C. Camerini (eds.), *Tra una film e l'altra. Materiali sul cinema muto italiano 1907-1920* (Venezia: Marsilio,

- 1980), pp. 279-282. "Here is the direction the cinema could undertake, thus developing originally: realizing, beyond theatre, the stage musical drama, that is, a representation where the visual element is not so much constituted by the actor's gestures, but rather by real and fantastic landscapes, harmonies of lights and colors, that alone can render vaguely, as music does, emotions and sensations. We would then have a newest form of representation where musical impressionism would be fully integrated with the impressionism of the scene: in one word, the impressionist drama." This essay is completed by "Poetica del cinematografo", *Apollon*, no. 4 (1 May 1916).
- 29 S. A. Luciani, *L'Antiteatro. Il cinematografo come arte* (Roma: La Voce, 1928), p. 9 and 17.
- 30 See A. Boschi, *L'avvento del sonoro in Europa* (Bologna: CLUEB, 1994), pp. 30-33.
- 31 M. Pagnol, "Cinématurgie de Paris", *Les Cahiers du Film* (15 December, 1933), also in M. Lapiere (ed.), *Anthologie du cinéma. Rétrospective par les textes de l'art muet qui devint parlant* (Paris: La Nouvelle Edition, 1946). Excerpts can be found also in A. Boschi, *L'avvento del sonoro in Europa*, cit., pp. 30-33.
- 32 For Bragaglia's general opinion about sound cinema see A. Boschi, *L'avvento del sonoro in Europa*, cit., pp. 25-29. Here I am rather interested in highlighting the relationship between sound cinema and cinematic pantomime.
- 33 A. G. Bragaglia, *Evoluzione del mimo*, cit., p. 16.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 204.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 222.
- 36 C. Camerini, "La formazione artistica degli attori del cinema muto italiano", *Bianco e Nero*, no. 1 (January-March 1983), pp. 9-43.
- 37 See C. Camerini, "L'Histoire d'un Pierrot", *Immagine. Note di storia del cinema*, n. 7 (January - March 1984), pp. 23-26. Among the other Italian films inspired by the character made immortal by Debureau: *Il romanzo di un Pierrot* (tit. alt. *Pierrot innamorato*, M. Caserini, Cines 1906); *Cuore di Pierrot* (Pineschi, 1907), *Buonasera Pierrot* (Ambrosio 1908), *Gelosia di Pierrot* (Rossi & C., 1908), *Pierrot all'Inferno* (Cines 1908 - realized in 1906), *Cuor di Pierrot* (R. Bacchini, Vesuvio-Film, 1909), *Pierrot geloso* (Cines, 1910 - realized in 1906); *I due Pierrots* (A. Brunero, Brunero prod., 1915); *Pierrot* (D. Karenne, Karenne Film, 1917).
- 38 See under "Manzotti" by G. Tani in S. d'Amico (ed.), *Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo*, vol. VII, (Roma: Le Maschere, 1960), pp. 79-82. On the popularity of pantomimic dance in Italy see also L. Tozzi, C. Celi, A. Testa, "Il balletto in Italia", in A. Basso (ed.), *Musica in scena. Storia dello spettacolo musicale. L'arte della danza e del balletto*, vol. V (Torino: UTET, 1995), pp. 39-162.
- 39 See F. Pappacena (ed.), *Excelsior* (Roma: Di Giacomo, 1998), and my "La pantomima nel cinema muto italiano. Il caso de Il ballo Excelsior", cit., pp. 226-231.
- 40 The metalinguistic angle developed in Ugo Falena's film is quite interesting: "A curious character has invented special eyeglasses that will permit to see animated the characters he talks about [a failed newspaper] The film is composed by a great number of gags in which public figures from articles about national and international politics, life-style, theater, crime, sports, and literature jump from the articles and animate their description. To conclude: Excelsior Ballet, with Apotheosis of Journalism and the Fourth Estate..." Rugantino, *La Cine-Fono* (11 July 1914), quoted in A. Bernardini, V. Martinelli, "Il cinema muto italiano. I film degli anni d'oro 1914", *Bianco e Nero*, no. 1-2 (Torino: Nuova Eri, 1992), pp. 238-239.
- 41 Pellicola, "La cinematografia è un'arte?", *La Rivista Fono-Cinematografica*, no. 9 (December 1907), also in R. Redi, C. Camerini (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 35-38.
- 42 See J. Deslandes, "Victorin Jasset, 1862-1913", in *Anthologie du cinéma*, t. 9 (Paris: L'Avant-scène/C.I.B., 1976).
- 43 P. A. Gariazzo, *Il teatro muto*, cit., pp. 119-122.