

A CINEMA OF FRAGMENTATION INTERTEXTUALITY, INTERMEDIALITY AND NARRATIVE FORMS IN ITALIAN EPISODE FILM (1961-1976)

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Episode film has an ambiguous nature: it is actually not a genre, but it is also not simply a strand of the Italian Comedy. It can rather be considered as a cross-genre narrative formula. In Italy, the relevance of the films belonging to this narrative formula is powerful enough to justify an analytical approach. This thesis, in fact, does not want to trace a history of the Italian episode film, but it seeks instead to analyze its thematic, narrative and structural characteristics. In particular, one specific aspect that seems more important and fruitful than all the others has been taken into consideration: episode film as a privileged place for intermedial and intertextual trends.

The thesis focuses on the 1960s and 1970s because in these two decades, episode film seems to take on a number of more coherent characteristics, besides witnessing a more considerable production. In fact, the number of episode films not only increases vis-a-vis the production landscape as a whole, but the larger part of the episode films seems to belong to comedy or farce. Furthermore, cinema of the 1960s and 1970s – and not just the episode film – starts an intense dialogue with various other sectors of the mass media of that time.

The first part of the work tries to clarify and justify the chronological delimitations given to the corpus of films. The choice to focus on the period spanning from 1961 to 1976 was made after careful consideration of the internal dynamics of history of cinema together with the history of mass media in general.

As is known, the 1960s and 1970s are two decades of profound transformation for Italian cinema, which goes from a flourishing productive situation to one of deep crisis. This movement results in the decrease of cinematographic consumption, which ultimately becomes dependent on other forms of entertainment. At the beginning of the 1960s, due to the deep changes caused by the economic boom, a radical transformation of the cultural industry and of the consumption patterns takes place in Italy. So an intermedial landscape establishes itself in Italy, where every communicative aspect is intertwined with all the others, and where skills and expertise migrate from one medium to the other. This period of exchange between media comes to a definite halt in the mid-1970s, in conjunction with the settlement on television legislations that brings about the authorization of a private television system of broadcasting.

Unlike the 1950s, where episode films were mostly linked to authorial experiences, in the 1960s and 1970s episode film is an economic strategy that is frequently used. Moreover, the episode films belonging to these two decades are primarily comedies and farces. For this reason, it is possible to discern a strong homogeneity and thematic repetition in the corpus taken into consideration. In fact, we can identify a predominant theme in all of them: the uses and customs of the Italian people, with a particular interest in the love-sex adventures.

With regards to the narrative structure of episode films, the thesis tries to analyze the recurring narrative typologies: narrative frames or other elements used to confer an element of unity to the fragmentary structure of the episode film are not so frequently used in the episode films of the 1960s and 1970s; in fact, it must be noticed that many of the episode films simply placed one episode next to another, without attempting to link them via a series of narrative strategies.

The second part of this work takes its cue from an observation: since the 1960s, when Italy definitely enters into a modern mass culture, cinema is immersed in a network of intertextual and intermedial relationships which conditions its production as well as its communication strategies. Cinema caters for a spectator who is, at last, familiar with a multimedia landscape, a spectator, in other words, who is constantly exposed to various other sectors of the media which interact with one another. Episode films often contain the thematization of other media as well as a series of linguistic influences, while bearing a strong structural resemblance with other communicative forms of the time.

For all these reasons, intertextuality and intermediality become crucial and extremely productive aspects for the study of a phenomenon such as episode films. According to these initial assumptions, each paragraph of the second chapter aims at tracing the relations between episode films and different media or entertainment forms: television, advertising, vaudeville, comics, picture story, literature and popular literature, newspapers. The work takes into consideration even the question of intertextuality: though mindful of the fact that episode film is not the sole territory for the analysis of intermedial strategies or metalinguistic devices in Italian cinema, the sheer amount of quotations, parodies, and film within films made an in-depth examination of such techniques necessary.

The last part of the thesis specifically takes into consideration two films, which were also chosen in order to delimit the corpus: *Pesci d'oro e bikini d'argento* (Carlo Veo, 1961) and *Signore e signori, buonanotte* (Luigi Comencini, Nanni Loy, Luigi Magni, Mario Monicelli, Ettore Scola, 1976). Structured as the programme timetable of another medium, radio in the first film, television in the second, both films take on the form of inspirations or parodies of radio and television programmes of that time, through a direct dialogue with other sectors of the media. Therefore, they become highly representative of two different moments of the Italian cultural industry, which symbolically open and close the chosen time.

By way of conclusion and for the sake of completeness, together with the bibliography, I have included an annex which contains an exhaustive and chronologically ordered filmography of the episode films spanning the period 1961-1976, and detailed information on each film: cast & crew, a summary of each episode, and finally, information about the narrative structure (e.g. the presence or absence of a narrative frame).