

Gioli, Phlegm and Paranoia

For forty years, Paolo Gioli has experimented with the processes of composition of image and sound in the cinema, the analysis of which should be evaluated in the context of a common language, or if you prefer, a vulgate. When at the end of the 60s, he began to make films, film language remained in thrall to the theory of semiology: spatial and temporal decoupage, the laws of editing and continuity are the basis of its syntax. The reinvention of cinema in a primordial language, that the author would himself qualify as “filmic flux,” and where the story is the story of the author in his cultural and intellectual, intimate, obsessive and carnal aspects, places Gioli among the ranks of the heretics. Now, this semiology of the cinema has largely retreated, under aggressive assaults by the languages of the large audiences for video, for the internet, and for multi-media production. Today, images-within-images, mirror effects, positive/negative reversals could (theoretically) merge into a language of the contemporary image, obliging us to revise our own analysis of the work of Paolo Gioli.

Gioli has remained faithful to the same means, a 16mm Bolex camera given to him by Paolo Vampa in 1966. This remark is not intended as fetishistic on my part; however, this mechanical camera from the era of the silent cinema, which you wind up like a clock, and which has been the emblematic instrument of the entire film avant-garde since Maya Deren, Sidney Peterson and, of course, Jonas Mekas, has permitted many kinds of experimentation on the image, the parameters of which were thus brought within reach: a true portable laboratory. This instrument, as with any instrument, produces its own kinds of formats: the temporal units of 2'45" corresponds to the 30 meters of a roll of 16mm film, the beginning and end-of-roll flares; Warhol made of them a kind of standard for filmed portraits with his *Screen Tests*. The images produced by Paolo Gioli are formatted according to the mechanisms of the instrument, in conformity with the machine that produces them. They do not slip, they shift and fall back into place, come out of the sprockets, jump out of the film path, jerk; they don't get fogged up (as in a fog), they crumple up. It is the mechanism of the sewing machine, permitting the movement of the film strip, it is the mechanism of cutting the visual flux into autonomous units; it is the mechanism of inverting tonal values and restoring them, permitting the illusion of movement.

While structural filmmakers “dismantled” the cinema conceived as a substitute for reality—*mimesis*—Gioli chose to dismantle the machine; proof, if there ever was one, that the essence of the image passes through the primary power of the instrument. Gioli's dismantling is the most radical ever undertaken, it is transgressive. The integrity of the motion picture apparatus, before Gioli, never seemed to be called into question, as if dismantling it meant the irremediable loss of the “cinema effect.” Paolo Gioli managed to show that as soon as there was film projection, the filmic flux oriented itself unerringly, like the needle of a compass, towards a kind of north, or “critical mass,” a convergence of the heterogeneous towards the harmony of movement. Paolo Gioli thus dismantles the motion

picture camera scientifically and meticulously brought into function in the last quarter of the 19th century, piece by piece: on one occasion, the shutter with *Filmfinish*; on another, the optical part of the machine replacing it with a simple pin hole with *Film stenopeico*.

I spoke in a previous text of the paradigm of the filter in the films of Gioli, which appeared to me always to be restitutions of vision “passing through” [something]. The popular adage has it that one must “see things big” meaning to have ambition. The cinema allows one to see big, very big; this characteristic of projection on a screen has greatly influenced the other arts, and the visual arts in particular. Painters have felt the need to respond to the challenge of monumentality proposed by the cinema. However, in order to allow one to see big in the cinema, the camera operator looks through a primary cleft—the eye piece of the camera—a one-eyed and miniaturized reproduction of what will be imprinted on the film strip. The first images in motion were seen through the slit of a drum (a zoetrope), on a little piece of mirror (phenakistoscope), on a small round disk of cardboard (a thaumatrope). The surreptitious glance often assimilates to the key hole, participates to a large degree in the magic of this device. It’s a matter of an inverse relation in the arithmetic sense of the term, between the immensity of the macrocosm, and the entrance, the eye of the needle or the pin-hole, through which rays transit to turn upside down and imprint an image of reality on a sensitive surface. The infatuation with the infinitely large in the infinitely small is, at the very least, troubling. It is the absorption or the consumption of the macrocosm in a synaptic microcosm, that Dali described to us in *Impressions de la haute Mongolie—Hommage à Raymond Roussel* [*Impressions of Upper Mongolia—Homage to Raymond Roussel*] (1976, directed by José Montes Baquer) where the Catalan makes a demonstration of a kind of ubiquity of the World, which can be described in all its complexity by means of a simple [ballpoint] pen, thanks to the paranoiac-critical method.

Gioli implicates the body, his own, in the process of the elaboration of his images, as if recourse to the body legitimated the intellectual and artistic validity of these processes. Cinemas without machines, the man without a movie camera, but body-cinema. Marshall MacLuhan has given us the principle of the camera as a prosthesis for the body, which has become artificial, of an instrumentalized body, in the manner of Stelarc. The instrument disappeared in Gioli’s work on behalf of a cinema in the hollow of the hand transformed into a camera obscura, a shutter, a pin-hole. The 1970s saw the appearance of the “hand cam,” so small that the body forgets about it at the end of your hand, but we were still seeing things from the perspective of the body assisted by or equipped with a machine. Gioli’s camera is a body, curled up in the hollow of his hand. Let us imagine for a moment the gesture of primordial preemption: gathering. Gioli, thus, gathers his images.

If the very body of the artist is substituted for the machine, that of his wife is the object of predilection for his erotic imaginary. The absence of the machine as chilling interface exacerbates the relationship between the filmmaker and his model to lead it to an extreme intimacy, towards body to body contact. *Film stenopeico* brings into service the voyeuristic proximity of the *peep show*, with the desired body within sight and within reach. The exchange no longer takes place in a symbolic dimension, but in a sensory exchange; it is in the promiscuity of sight and smell, of the color of the skin, of its heat and scent. The pin-

hole camera overturns the sensory orders of the visual, of the haptic and of the olfactory. In the manner of mediumistic photography, which sought the inscribable trace on the sensitive surface of invisible phenomena such as a magnetic field, the transmission of an “aura,” and in a duchampian line of thought, which he never escapes, Gioli made impressions of the feminine sex organ on the sensitive surface of film. Marcel Duchamp had molded the feminine sex organ (“Female Fig-leaf”) probably with a view to surpassing the power of scandal of Courbet’s painting *L’origine du Monde*, by furnishing a negative imprint, where matter penetrates the slit; matter, in this case, is phallic and in a state of desire. Gioli gambles that he is able to achieve an image without the aid of light rays, with only the heat and seminal liquid of the sex organ, that will perform the chemical operation on the sensitive surface; the vulva considered as flesh in a state of desire makes itself the incarnation of the image.

Gioli has made several films using sequences of x-rated films, to which he applies his processes of decomposition of the integrity of the image and his mimetic powers: shifts of the film strip and displacements of the frame thus rescue the image from its pornographic shipwreck. But the film with the greatest erotic charge is undoubtedly *Film stenopeico*, because it’s a body to body film, the body of the filmmaker and the body of his model. In the absence of the cold apparatus, the bride and the bachelor celebrate their proper nuptials. One may legitimately wonder why the pin-hole image with its “aberrations,” slightly soft and deformed (or rather, not corrected) could unleash so many emotions. The paradigm of the peep show of course, which has in common with the film image the intimacy of the approach to the exposed body, to its scents, to its animality, but most probably what dominates in this case is an atavism, a primal emotion, the product of childhood, of having looked at the forbidden through a hole or a slit.

The cinema produces two categories of blindness: bedazzlement and darkness. The alternations of positive and negative in Gioli’s films demonstrates their interchangeability. Gioli is, however, obsessed by shadows (*il buio*); a mixture of fascination and horror. His images appear out of the shadows; towards the shadows, the *Sconosciuti* [*Persons unknown*] seem to turn once again. If Gioli has often evoked omnipresent death with *Filmarylín* or *Traumatografo* for example, and through this latter, the reckless dialectic of physical disappearance and memory, he seems with *Volto Sopreso al buio*, a film composed using [images from] *Sconosciuti*, to make a definitive response to the inanity of the function of preservation of the photographic image (its function of immortalizing the real), when this latter is brought back to its own physical degradation; the death of the image, which will be the second death of the models, produces a filmic flux one might assimilate to a photographic skeleton.

When Gioli dedicates a film, he comments on a work which arrests him: a commentary without words, a visual commentary. These commentaries, whether they concern Muybridge, Eakins, Duchamp, Rothko, or Bert Stern, converge towards what one might call, to paraphrase Edouard Glissant, a “whole-world” cinema of the thaumaturge Paolo Gioli. This paranoid posture show us, that in Gioli’s world, there is a strange personal alchemy between Dali and Marcel Duchamp.