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WOMEN'S TIME, CINEMATIC TIME: PAST AND PRESENT IN THE FOUND FOOTAGE, OR COMPILATION FILM[2]

Concepts of time are integral to the structuring of history and memory, often invisible, often implicit often seemingly following a teleological line between past and present. Recently, or even for some time now, the traditional image of temporality as linear has been challenged. Radical ideas of history have stretched

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the narrative causality of 'then and then'. Perhaps particularly feminist history has associated the linear causal narrative with a patriarchal control of time, looking to find in women's stories other patterns and configurations. On a different cultural level, memory necessarily blurs a mental image of time, dispersing the immediacy of a present 'now' with the dreaminess and uncertainty of a persistent 'then'.

In her essay on *Women's Time*, Julia Kristeva evokes very vividly the resonant opposition between two images of gendered time. On the one hand: linear, unfolding… departure, progress, arrival and closure, encapsulated by a teleological concept of history. On the other, she cites Plato as the source of this concept of the feminine as outside time: a matrix of space, un-namable, anterior to God. The opposition is reinforced by the Freudian and Lacanian theories of the Oedipus complex: the maternal figure is to be left behind in an a-cultural space outside time, as the child progresses into the patriarchal Symbolic and its temporal order. Kristeva complicates the politics of this gendered opposition through her concept of succeeding generations of feminism. She says: "In their initial struggle for equality, women aspired to escape from their relegation to an a-cultural and pre-temporal space, aspiring to inclusion in the linear, progressive concept of time and the politics that went with it" (Kristeva 1981, 18). Kristeva's second generation, however, are: "Essentially interested in the specificity of female psychology and its symbolic realizations, these women seek to give a language to the intra-subjective and corporeal experiences left mute by culture in the past" (Kristeva 1981, 19). To my mind, Kristeva touches precisely here on two kinds of struggle: the necessary struggle for a 'better life' an intervention into a dominant order, the 'point being to change it', for which a grasp on the idea of the 'future' is essential. On the other hand: an exploration of female symbolic realisations, the difficulty of finding a language for those mute experiences that demand work on the level of imagination, the word and image itself, even the poetic. Here there's an aspiration to find a name for the unnameable, a voice for the muteness of the maternal figure on which the dominance of patriarchy depends.

But quite apart from these questions of gender, time is difficult to conceptualise, or to imagine or to articulate in so many words. Society and culture are possessed, on a daily basis, by patterns of temporality that are habitual and intangible, and an essential part of any social or cultural fabric. From this perspective, there's a politics to making visible the "mythologisation of temporalities" (Berardi 2011, 19) finding images for their reimagination.

Representations of time and the temporal mediation of images are deeply embedded in the cinema. It could be argued that the predominance of 'cause and effect' cinematic narrative has reinforced a linear temporal pattern in popular culture. However, alternative filmmaking had demonstrated across

its history that cinema can also potently disrupt and confuse temporal logic and make visible a more complicated temporality. Not only do duration and instant paradoxically coexist (in the length of a single shot and the single frame of the film strip) but film also easily reverses time and movement. Furthermore, cinema embodies time as contingent and subject to the imagination.

Three kinds of temporality are relevant to cinematic time: 1) indexicality and the photosensitive medium, 2) reversal and pausing of temporal flow, 3) the compilation film.

1. Indexicality and the photosensitive medium

Roland Barthes, the pre-eminent theorist of photographic time, notes that when light casts an image on photosensitive material, its reality is inscribed and preserved as, in semiotic terms, an indexical sign. The persistence of this trace necessarily affects photographic time: "What I see has been here, in this place which extends between infinity and the subject (operator or spectator); it has been here and immediately separated; it has been absolutely irrefutably present, and yet already deferred" (Barthes 2010, 59).

The difficulty of finding an adequate grammatical tense for this uncertain temporality, the coexistence of the 'then' of the operator's past moment with the spectator's 'now', leads to Barthes' term 'this was now'. Ann Banfield has suggested that this formulation points to a failure of language: "Like Proust, Barthes' effort is to find the linguistic form capable of recapturing a present in the past, a form that, it turns out, spoken language does not offer. This now-in-the-past can be captured not by combining tenses but by combining a past tense with a present time deictic (now/then; here/there etc): the photograph's moment *was now*" (Banfield 1990, 75).

Barthes' use of the shifter, or deixis, that is, marks a point at which the tense of the photograph, due to its essential confusion of temporal linearity, evades conventional grammar. Although this argument is concentrated on the still photograph, the cinema also captures its images indexically, the instant of each frame's registration is preserved and persists into the future.

2. Formal powers of arrest and reversal of movement

Roland Barthes had pointed out polemically in *Camera Lucida*: the unstoppable flow of film and its easy affinity with narrative flow tended to hide the complex temporalities he associated with the photograph, that is, the inextricable co-presence of past and future. But Raymond Bellour has argued that the presence of a stilled image (for instance, a photograph) disrupts cinematic continuity, breaks the flow of the narrative drive forward; the presence of its filmic past moment is inserted into the flow of a fictional present.

In *Death 24 x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* I tried to take this argument into the realm of new technologies: once the spectator could pause the flow of a film, the unfamiliar stillness opened up the time to think about time, its registration, representation and its passing. To my mind, these kinds of temporal complexities characteristic of photosensitive material could be returned to film – obviously paradoxically and anachronistically - once its flow was stilled. Digital technologies literally placed this possibility into the hands of every spectator. I hoped to argue that, even if only in metaphor, that this film/digital conjuncture could create a confused temporality that spread out and stretched time itself, reaching into a zone in which it stands suspended as though in space. This intrusion of stillness into the moving image has always existed. As Annette Michelson says: 'To describe a movement is difficult, to describe the instant of arrest and of release, of reversal, of movement is something else again; it is to confront that thrill on the deepest level of filmic enterprise, to recognise the privileged character of the medium as being in itself the promise of an incomparable, and unhoped for, grasp upon the nature of causality" (Michelson 1975, 104).

3. The found footage, or compilation film

The double temporality of the compilation film and its significance for 'women's time' is the central topic of my presentation today. The compilation film is a form of cinematic and historical narration based on the reconfiguration of archive material or found footage. Pre-existing footage, raw material from some past moment in history, that is then re-edited into a new work, represents a meditation on that past from the perspective of a new present (the moment of the filmmaker, who further extends time to that of the future audience). Jay Leyda summed up the first two moments in the title of his early book on the topic *Film Begets Film,* which is also evoked by Christa Blüminger's term "second hand film". Although pre-existing footage has been reassembled since the beginnings of cinema, there are landmark moments in its history. Estir Shub pioneered the use of found footage as critique in her film *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* (1927), Joseph Cornell pioneered its use as art in *Rose Hobart* (1936) and the form has continued along these paths as well as deviating into others.

To reiterate: there is a crucial gap between the time when the original footage was shot and its later editing and arrangement. In this layering of time, the later reworking is laid, as it were, onto or over, the found footage's past. And then, as Jaimie Baron has pointed out, the spectator, at some later moment of exhibition, must be conscious of this 'temporal disparity'. Baron uses the term 'archival effect' to underline the specificity of the relation between the form and its double/triple temporality: "Hence I suggest that we regard archival documents

as – in part – the product of what I call 'temporal disparity', the perception by the viewer of a 'then' and 'now' generated within a single text. Indeed, the experience of temporal disparity is one of the things that gives rise to the recognition of the archival document as such, or, in other words to the 'archive effect" (Baron 2013, 106).

Public recognition is the compilation film's third temporal level: the audience and the public sphere of the film's ultimate distribution and exhibition. This temporal intricacy inherent in the compilation, or found footage film, offers an alternative to conventional historical narrative and thus has particular relevance for feminist historical thought.

Cinematic time and women's time in the compilation film

This form of film, compilation or appropriation film, represents a look back into a past from a present, addressing a future spectator, creating a complex layering of time. Although the compilation film has no inherent relation to women, the form, as I'll argue, is appropriate for stories that emerge out of silence and cultural marginalization, quite tentatively making the shift from an individual and private, world, into circulation in the public sphere. Sheila Rowbotham has suggested a differentiation between the silence of the complete cultural exclusion of oppressed people and the consciousness of that silence in a moment of dawning political awareness. She said: "The oppressed without hope are mysteriously quiet. When the conception of change is beyond the limits of the possible, there are no words to articulate discontent so it is sometimes held not to exist. This mistaken belief arises because we can only grasp silence in the moment in which it is breaking" (Rowbotham 2015, 29).

The compilation film's doubled temporality is echoed in the doubling of women's consciousness: the work of bringing silence into public visibility must be performed later, that is, within a new context of political aspiration, both on the part of the filmmaker and the future audience.

The compilation film can, of course, be extremely conventional. But the double temporality, this persistence of the past, its refusal to be laid to rest as it were, generates its own metaphor of haunting. The compilation process, rather similar in a sense to the work of 'history from below', can construct a story, transforming it from cultural invisibility, silence, into a meaningful discourse. However, the form preserves the voices of its witnesses; those memories that are embedded in the raw material continue to speak. In the essential incompleteness and residual heterogeneity that characterises even the final version of the edited film. This refusal to be neatly closed off seems to carry the ghostly voice's message

insistently into the future. The old footage, often incomplete and partial, full of holes and gaps, often without cinematic aesthetic value, might be seen metaphorically to function in this genre as 'cinematic memory'.

Four tropes are relevant to the process of reconfiguration

Palimpsest: evokes the gap in time between the original footage and the final film. A palimpsest refers to a double inscription: one text is laid over another; the original might be partly erased but still haunts the later text. Similarly, as found footage is overlaid by its later reconfiguration, two time levels exist simultaneously. This persistence of the past generates its own metaphor of haunting.

Détournement: refers to the frequent, but not essential, ideological gap between the original footage and the final film. The term cites the Situationist practice in which a pre-existing cultural text (usually of high standing) would be distorted for political critique, producing an antagonistic or antithetical meaning.

Gleaning: relates to the gap in value between the found material and the final film. Suggested by Agnes Varda's film *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse* (France 2000), the term gives a cultural lineage to the process of collecting, accumulating, sifting through and recycling discarded materials. Gleaning not only refers to what was, once upon a time, a specifically female task (collecting the unwanted residue of an agricultural harvest) but also evokes the kind of apparently trivial things, personal or emotional, collected and saved, in which women invest value. By extension, the term also evokes the often apparently valueless nature of found footage material that, almost by definition, has no place in film culture; only when re-evaluated and recycled does it acquire significance, and consequently, value.

Haunting: In the dislocations between found footage and its reconfigured form, ghostly figures, preserved as they are on film, refuse to be laid to rest. Film's preservation of images of the living dead, figures from long ago that still move, gesture, perform exactly as they did when registered on film, gives substance to a message from the silenced and oppressed of the past brought back to light by new political perspectives. In the meantime, they have, if only metaphorically, refused to 'give up the ghost' of to be laid to rest.

How do these formal properties fit with the stories that emerge out of silence and cultural marginalization, as they tentatively make the shift from an individual and private world into circulation in the public sphere? To refer back to

Kristeva's 'symbolic realisations,' the temporality of her second feminist generation, the form can begin to move towards the restoration and re-configuration of those experiences that have been left mute in the past. Thus: gleaning – the collection of fragments of film material without apparent value speaks to the undervalued cultures of the feminine; détournement – the rearrangement of the film material from a different political perspective, speaks to the feminist film maker who reveals misogynies of the past; the palimpsest – the persistence of the past material through its re-arrangement – speaks to a feminist aesthetic of the heterogeneous; haunting – speaks to the political nature of these stories, lost and mute, that have been returned to a future time in which they might be able to find public recognition.

Feminist methodologies privilege informal materials, often the only traces left of women's difficult everyday lives, constructing the past out of personal relics such as memorabilia, letters and diaries. Out of these necessarily scraps of sources, a picture of the past can emerge in which women's lives are central rather than marginal; and, in the absence of public events usually associated with politics, women's everyday struggles challenge given boundaries of formal, political history. Problems associated with the female body, with sexuality, emotion or motherhood, for instance, can be extracted from the taboo of the feminine, from the silences of embarrassment and shame, to find a historical discourse in the public sphere.

To reiterate: beyond the question of content and untold stories, this kind of gathering together of disparate material affects the formal structure of the text and its process of narration. On the one hand, these texts tend to be made up of heterogeneous fragments; on the other, feminist history, once having given space to unheard voices, has a commitment to their integrity; a balance must be made between creating a political discourse and fidelity to the material from which its drawn. Aesthetics and politics intertwine to form textual heterogeneity, an unfinished and unpolished final product.

Alina Marazzi: *Un'ora sola ti vorrei.* Italy 2002

Un ora sola to vorrei tells the story of Liseli Hoepli/Marazzi. It was made by Liseli's filmmaker daughter Alina Marazzi, primarily from home movies shot by Liseli's father, Alina's grandfather. These images are the main source of the film's visual track, but Marazzi drew on Liseli's letters and diaries, her own words, to construct the soundtrack. After a privileged upbringing during the 1950s in a cultured, bourgeois Milanese family. Liseli married and moved to the US with her children and her anthropologist husband where she began to suffer

from depression. On her return to Italy, she spent most of her time in clinics, undergoing the kind of treatment for mental illness that was current at the time. At the age of thirty-two, when Alina was seven, she committed suicide. She was never subsequently mentioned in her family.

In *Un ora sola ti vorrei* the gap in time, characteristic of the compilation film, between the time when the raw material was shot and the time when it was edited into the film's final form is accentuated by the ideological gap between the 'then' of the grandfather's world view and the 'now' of Marazzi's narration. In the first instance, she was searching on a personal level, for her lost mother. But as her work continued, she, in dialogue with her editor Ilaria, came to the realisation that Liseli's story has a significance and importance beyond the individual. From this point of view, folded within the gap of time that separates Marazzi from her grandfather is also marked by a pivotal shift in consciousness. Her grandfather's overarching intention, as his granddaughter perceived it, was to record on film a privileged bourgeois way of life, that of his own well-to-do, elegant and cultured family. Having grown up into a new, feminism influenced, social consciousness, Marazzi invests the footage with a changed or charged significance: Liseli's story is translated into a history, emblematic of many young women's experiences in contemporary Italy. Out of the fragmented bits of home movie footage, Marazzi made a film that found public recognition and understanding very particularly among women, and, among them, most particularly women of her mother's generation. The film moves the story, that is, from the realm of women's silence and suffering to recognition within a feminist discourse of history. As Marazzi puts it: "In the dialogue between the images and the words, beyond the letters and diaries, there is another level of writing: Ilaria's and mine. We edited and re-edited, subverting the original intention of the images, appropriating and retelling the story as it seemed to us, taking up the point of view of the filmed. In a certain sense we liberated the feminine spirit imprisoned in those boxes, as though with Aladdin's lamp" (Marazzi 2006, 53).

Some concluding points

Jacques Derrida's reflection on the temporality of the archive has particular bearing on the temporal disparities of the compilation film. He says: "In an enigmatic sense, which will clarify itself *perhaps*, the question of the archive is not, we repeat, a question of the past. It is not a question of a concept dealing with the past that might be already at our disposal, *an archivable concept of the archive*. It is a question of the future, the question of the future

itself, the question of a response, a promise and of a responsibility towards tomorrow. The archive: if we want to know what that will have meant, we will only know in times to come. Perhaps. Not tomorrow but in times to come, later on or perhaps never. Spectral messianicity is at work in the concept of the archive and ties it, like religion, like history, like science itself, to a very singular experience of the promise. And we are never very far from Freud in saying this" (Derrida 1966, 36).

Derrida makes no mention of film. However, the concept of 'spectral messianicity' implies a confusion of time, or a co-existence of past and future, that has special bearing on the complexity of cinematic time. In the first instance, the indexical materiality of film itself may preserve a moment and a voice that lie in wait for the moment of future discovery. Secondly, that confusion of time is further heightened by the compilation film's double temporality. And then, in Baron's terms, the future spectator's recognition of these coexisting temporalities creates the 'archive effect', also a recognition of the lost voice, of the promise exchanged between past and future.

Just as celluloid confuses temporality, so does the concept of promise: speaking towards a time in which unrecognised experiences might find recognition or even redemption. As Alina Marazzi layered scraps of archival material, taken from Liseli's past, into her work on the film *Un'ora sola ti vorrei*, the daughter seemingly redeems a promise to her mother to tell her story. But, in Derrida's terms, this exchange would leave the material within 'an archivable concept of the archive'. The film becomes political in its promise to a future, when Liseli's ghostly spirit can be put to rest, when, *perhaps,* a feminist future can make at least a gesture towards the silenced past. This is the point at which, after decades of invisibility, the film's affect, embedded in actual instances and split seconds, becomes political.

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