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Cinematic infernos: Digital technologies and the remediation of Dante's Infernal imagery through the cinematic screen (2005-2015)

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CINEMATIC INFERNOS:

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND THE REMEDIATION OF DANTE'S

INFERNAL IMAGERY THROUGH THE CINEMATIC SCREEN

(2005-2015)

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ABSTRACT

In 2015 we celebrated the 750th anniversary of Dante Alighieri's birth. In light of the popularity of Dante's imagery, channelled through a variety of the arts and across national contexts for more than seven centuries, this study explores practices of adaptation and remediation of Dante's *Inferno* through the cinematic screen in 2005-2015 as well as its relationship with digital technologies. Despite our understanding of Dante and the screen being enriched by the contribution of several scholars such as Antonella Braida, Luisa Calé, Dennis Looney and Nick Havely, amongst others, very little has been written about the aesthetic, social and political impact of digital technologies on cinematic adaptations of the infernal imagery. In order to fill this gap in knowledge, this study investigates the remediate power of digital technology by *simultaneously* exploring its involvement and its impact. This includes an examination of film production, conservation, circulation and reception. In order to do so, I scrutinise the following three key case studies: Milano Film's *Inferno* (ITA, 1911), Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò – 120 Days of Sodom* (ITA, 1975) and David Cronenberg's *Cosmopolis* (CAN, FR, ITA, POR, 2012). This multi-disciplinary approach offers a theoretical revision of the theory of adaptation, shifting from the enduring centrality of the 'reference text' to a more intermedial awareness of the pivotal role played by the cinematic screen. This enables an exploration of the cultural, political and social impact of Dante's inspired infernal imagery in the 21st century.

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*Please note some of the images have been removed from the online version of this thesis due to copyright reasons.

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Date: _____

Signature: _____

INTRODUCTION

1   The Seminal Importance of Dante's Anniversary

In 2015 we celebrated the 750th anniversary of Dante Alighieri's birth.[1] With at least "187 events held in Italy and 173 at an international level",[2] these celebrations show us that contemporary interest in the *Commedia* is strong, both inside and outside Italy. Dante's work was even sent into space: on April 24th 2015, Captain Samantha Cristoforetti – who is also the first ever Italian female astronaut – read a few lines of the *Paradiso* on a live stream from the space station where she was operating, while "her reading was beamed back to earth and shown in a movie theatre in Florence".[3] There were also many activities held through online platforms, such as the dedicated Facebook Page and the official hashtag *#dante750*, demonstrating that there is a considerable effort being made to continue the discourse surrounding Dante by making use of the digital sphere.[4] In the past few decades many scholars have tried to understand the reasons behind the ever-growing popularity of Dante's text in the West over the last seven centuries. The academic world seems to recognise the literary relevance of the *Commedia*, and it has been described as an "inspiration to any reader in any time in history" thanks to its "capacity to think outside the box" and for facing aspects of "injustice and the abuse of power" and the "destructive effect on human life of greed".[5] However, even these evaluations do not seem powerful enough to explain the plethora of phenomena surrounding the *Commedia* and its persistent influence in the contemporary era. Most extraordinary is the substantial range and depth of its adaptations across various media. In September 2015, the Italian *Centro Pio Rajna – Centre for the*

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[1] Durante Alighieri, or simply Dante Alighieri, was born in Florence (Italy) in 1265, probably between May 21st

[2] 'Original Italian: "In programma 187 eventi in Italia e 173 all'estero". In 'Dante 750: Benigni apre le celebrazioni – Dante 750 Benigni Opens Celebrations'. ANSA – Italian National Press Association (1st May 2015). Full text available at: http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cultura/arte/2015/04/30/dante-750-annibenigni-apre-celebrazioni_dc99f844-5b22-4409-9dba-3082148ffe1e.html Please note all translations from the Italian are my own.

[3] Kleiner, J. (2015). 'Dante Turns Seven Hundred and Fifty', The New Yorker, 20th May. Full text available at: http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/dante-turns-seven-hundred-and-fifty

[4] See https://www.facebook.com/Dante750/

[5] All in Shaw, P. (2014). 'Why Dante is Relevant Today', The Huffington Post, 20th April. Full text available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/prue-shaw/why-dante-is-relevant-tod_b_4790634.html

Literary, Linguistic and Philological Research, confirmed the discovery of the very first illustration of the *Inferno* contained in a Florentine codex dated between 1304 and 1309.[6] This announcement crucial in helping trace the history of the early reception of Dante's work in Tuscany and it raises at least three interconnected pints. Firstly, the dynamics of this discovery and the role of the institution which supported this research show us the contemporary interest of the academic world in investigating practices of circulation of the *Commedia* beyond its literary form. Secondly, this specific illustration strengthens the idea that other arts and media were involved in promoting the circulation of this text through practices of intermedial adaptation. Finally, as the dating of this key find shows, these kind of phenomena started to appear in the years when Dante was not only still alive, but was even still composing the last cantica of his poem. As a consequence, this very first evidence of adaptation should be considered instrumental in opposing the ban that the Catholic Church originally imposed on the poem – a form of obscurantist censorship that meant Dante died in exile and all his autographed copies were required to be destroyed. Eventually the *Commedia* even got listed in the Index of the Prohibited Books.[7] I am going to show in this thesis that this early adaptation is not an isolated episode, as it did not remain confined exclusively to the early circulation of Dante's work. Indeed, it acts as clear evidence of the *Commedia* spreading in non-literary forms since the beginning of its first circulation in the 14th century.[8] As this research explores, practices of adaptation of the *Commedia* have involved the collaboration of several artists and media, including (and this list is not exhaustive) paintings, illustrations, music, theatre and, of course, the cinematic screen. However, whilst the *Commedia* has been adapted and circulated wider and wider for more than seven centuries, it is only in the last two decades that the academic world has

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[6] Di Stefano, P. (2015). 'Il più Antico Disegno dell'Inferno di Dante: Prime tracce della Commedia – the Most Ancient Illustration of Dante's Inferno: First Evidences of the Divine Comedy', *Corriere della Sera*, 26th September. Full text available at: http://www.corriere.it/cultura/15_settembre_26/piu-antico-disegno-dell-inferno-dante-prime-tracce-commedia-5659e504-6425-11e5-a4ea-e1b331475bf0.shtml

[7] For a more detailed overview on the censorship of Dante's work imposed by the Catholic Church see e.g. Bald, M. (2006), *Literature Suppressed on Religious Grounds*, New York: Infobase Publishing Or Purnam; Haven, G. (1906-1907), *The Censorship of the Church of Rome, Vol 1.*, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons. See also Appendix, *Novissimum Librorum Prohibitorum et Expugnandorum Index Pro Catholicis Hispaniarum Regis Ferdinandi VI Regis Catholici*, published in 1747 by the Catholic Church and currently archived at Drew University Library, Madison, NJ, USA, in which we can read from Spanish that the banning was related to "Dante ... with his *Commedia*".

[8] For more extended readings on the legacy of Dante's imagery between medieval manuscripts and the 21st century see Nadalin, B. (2014), *Illustration in Hell: Images of Dante's Inferno*, New York: Fashion Institute of Technology.

recognised the importance of this phenomenon. As Amilcare A. Iannucci (2004) outlined:

> "Dante's cultural predominance in the modern world is enormous [...] However, it is not only in a literary context that Dante's influence continues to be felt. Rather, Dante has also had a profound impact on the visual arts and on music [...] His influence has spread decisively into the non-literary or para-literary world of the visual media unique to the twentieth century, namely cinema and television".[9]

This awareness is therefore the starting point for this research, which explores practices of film adaptation of Dante's *Inferno* during 2005–2015 and its relationship with digital technologies.[10] In particular, I examine the intervention of digital technologies through the stages of film production, conservation, circulation and reception. The reason behind my specific focus on the first *cantica* of the *Commedia* is based on the idea that the infernal imagery might have been an appropriate inspiration for the cinematic screen thanks to an "exceptional capacity to evoke the visual, the visceral"[11] in its environment, sinners and corporeal punishments.

2.   Why is this Research Necessary and Timely?

The main reasons behind developing this research are also what make me the appropriate person to carry out this investigation. They are inspired by both my personal background and the contemporary academic discourse of film adaptation in the post-analogue era.

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[9] Iannucci, A. A. (2004)., *Dante, Cinema and Television*, ed., Toronto-Buffalo-London: University of Toronto Press, 2004, p.IV.

[10] This correlation between practices of adaptation and digital technologies is defined by David Bolter and Robert Grusin as "remediation". See Bolter, D.J. and Grusin, R. A. (1999). *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, London-Cambridge: The MIT Press, p.45 in which we read that *remediation* is "the representation of one medium in another and [...] remediation is a defining characteristic of the new digital media". Thus, though not exclusively related to the digital era, aspects of remediation seem to be more compelling in the 21st century "because of the rapid development of new digital media and the nearly rapid response by traditional media", in Bolter D.J. and Grusin R. A. (1999), p.5. In this thesis I equally employ both terms: 'adaptation' and 'remediation'. More specifically the term 'adaptation' is preferred when I investigate practices of *adaptation as a phenomenon* while the term 'remediation' is employed when I explore practices of *adaptation as a process.*

[11] Shaw, P. (2014). *Reading Dante From Here to Eternity*, New York-London: Liveright, p.XIV.

My previous education has been characterised by a strong multidisciplinary approach as I explored the impact of digital technologies on the arts. My Bachelor of Arts in *Literature, Music and Performing Arts* followed by my Masters Degree in *Film Studies* gained at *Sapienza – University of Rome* allowed me to perceive the process of film adaptation from an intertextual perspective, rather than focusing on the disciplines as separate entities. The methodological cornerstone of my previous education was "studying literary texts together with the ones of music, theatre, cinema, TV and radio […] and with a particular focus on the ways codes and languages interferes in relation to the various cultures and national languages. This awareness is at the base of the contemporary cultural communication, both in a European and worldwide perspective".[12] This course of study has been conceived since the beginning as one which examines the "specialist mastering of digital technologies"[13] which have become indispensable within acts of cultural exchange in the post-analogue era.

In the past few years and alongside my degrees, I have been involved in creative writing: journalism, narrative storytelling, writing for TV and radio, and screenwriting (the latter being my personal specialisation). This bilateral engagement both as a student and as a young professional allowed me to be in constant contact with the most recent academic debates as well as the practical world of writing for audio-visual products. In this way, I could develop and strengthen my theoretical and practical skills within media studies and audio-visual production as well as develop my problem solving capabilities. After prolonged exposure to these two different fields, at the end of my postgraduate degree one key question persisted: why should I keep these two areas separated? Taking this as a preliminary starting point, how could I create a cultural bridge between these two complementary, though apparently distant areas of expertise? What kind of

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[12] As seen in the *Literature, Music and Performing Arts* course manifesto of Sapienza – University of Rome available at http://www.disp.let.uniroma1.it/letteratura-musica-spettacolo-l-10/letteratura-musica-spettacolo-l-10. Original Italian: "Il corso di laurea in Letteratura, Musica e Spettacolo propone lo studio di testi letterari insieme a quelli musicali, teatrali, cinematografici, televisivi e radiofonici, […] con particolare attenzione alle interferenze tra codici e linguaggi, tra culture e lingue nazionali diverse, particolarmente determinanti nell'attuale orizzonte della comunicazione culturale, in chiave europea e planetaria".

[13] As seen in the *Film Studies* course manifesto of Sapienza – University of Rome available at: http://www.filesuso.uniroma1.it/?q=node/56. Original Italian: "I laureati in Spettacolo Teatrale, Cinematografico e Digitale: Teorie e Tecniche dovranno possedere: […] un uso specialistico delle tecnologie digitali".

advantages may arise from a possible exchange between the academic field of Film Adaptation Studies and the screenwriting world in the digital era? With these questions clearly established, I decided that PhD research was the most appropriate means by which I could find the answers.

In addition, the celebrations of *Dante750* held in 2015 acknowledged once more the adaptability of the *Commedia* in the various media beyond the original Italian context. It seemed to me a suitable occasion to propose a re-evaluation of the production and circulation of film adaptations inspired by Dante's work in the digital era, and with a specific focus on the circulation of the infernal imagery throughout the cinematic screen. Finally, as the core of my investigation lies in aspects of cultural exchange within the adaptation process, I decided to also situate myself in an appropriate context in which I could personally experience contact with several different cultures on a daily basis. This is why I moved to London after *University of Westminster* accepted my research proposal. As a young woman living here in the second decade of the 21st century, I had the chance to engage with a city that Mayor Sadiq Khan has often described as being "creative, international, entrepreneurial and full of opportunities". London is a place where respective differences get "celebrated", rather than being simply "tolerated".[14] Moreover, as is now common in the majority of Western countries, digital technologies affect many aspects of communication and cultural exchange: for instance, when we use a smartphone to text in real time with each other, or when we make a video call to someone on the other side of the world, either to talk to family and friends or to undertake a job interview with people we might never meet in person. They are in action any time we access our bank account to make a transaction without actually using banknotes, or when we listen to music by accessing online libraries while monitoring our health statistics in the gym. Thanks to digital technologies we can easily buy flights and train tickets even if the station is closed, we can check when the next bus is going to arrive even if it is the middle of the night or we are able to reserve a cab and check its real-time position and how long it will take for the driver to reach us. That being said, even if the majority of Western countries experience the growing impact of digital

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[14] Credar, P. (2016). 'London is Open for Business despite Brexit: Mayor launches #LondonIsOpen Campaign', *The Evening Standard*, 18th July. Full article available at: http://www.standard.co.uk/news/mayor/london-is-still-open-for-business-despite-brexit-mayor-launches-londonisopen-campaign-a3298211.html

technologies on many levels, our everyday life is fortunately not entirely made of binary codes; rather, it is mutually affected by the coexistence of analogue and digital media. For instance, it is still possible to choose whether to read a text in its printed version or in its e-book version, and to choose whether to take a picture with our smartphones or with analogue cameras. We can still opt to interact face-to-face or to share public and private spaces with other people.

In light of this broader context, the ambivalent coexistence between the analogue and the digital sphere is particularly relevant to the cinematic industry as well, especially if we acknowledge that films are one of the main devices through which this technological shift has been experimenting, affecting matters of film production, distribution and reception. On this topic, Timothy Binkley (1997) has said: "despite its novelty, the digital revolution builds upon long-standing – if sometimes misunderstood – traditions in the arts".[15] This preliminary consideration shows us therefore that digital technologies play an important role in practices of adaptation, as the word digital implies matters of "convergence", as scholar Henri Jenkins (2006) has identified.[16] Nevertheless, as the cinematic screen is put at the very centre of this investigation, some aspects regarding its relationship with digital technologies remain unclear. For instance, we still do not know for sure the full impact of digital technologies on the cinematic screen and beyond. More specifically, current literature has only partly discussed how digital technologies intervene in aspects of film restoration and conservation, how digital conversion help films shot on analogue to renew their circulation, or how shooting directly on digital has changed the way cinematic images are brought to life. Finally, the impact such digitally-influenced films play in the social and political sphere is still yet to be extensively evaluated.

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[15] Binkley, T. (1997). 'The Vitality of Digital Creation', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol.55(2), *Perspectives on the Arts and Technology*, Spring, pp. 107-116, p.108.

[16] See Jenkins, H. (2006), *Convergence Culture – Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York-London: New York University Press, p.2. "By convergence, I mean the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experience they want".

3.   Research Questions and Findings

For the reasons above, these are the key questions which underpin this study:

1) How can we trace adaptation in practices of digital film restoration, conversion and circulation for films which have previously been produced with analogue technologies?
2) How has shooting directly on digital contributed to remediating imageries through the cinematic screen?
3) Finally, what is the social and political impact of digitally-influenced films in the 21st century?

Taken together, these considerations seem to relate to at least two separate areas of investigation: that of the intervention of digital technologies on films that have *previously* been produced and circulated through analogue means, and the impact of digital technologies on the practice of filming directly with digital cameras and the subsequent circulation of those movies on digital platforms. Consequently, these questions seem to outline many aspects that at first glance might not be considered to share much in common. In order to reconcile them, the employment of Film Adaptation Studies in the digital era becomes fundamental to this research. The digital era has, in many ways, changed how Adaptation Studies can and should be done. As discussed in the first and second chapter of this thesis, the broad field of Film Adaptation Studies has been consistently affected by digital film practices. On the one hand, the core tenets of the discipline, developed in the late 1970s pre-digital era, lie in re-tracing the aesthetic and narrative echoes of literature in their adaptations (or at least those artworks which are perceived to be adaptations). On the other hand, with the advent of the digital, several scholars have started to investigate adaptation from a predominantly intermedial perspective. Therefore, the aforementioned phenomenon of convergence has led to a greater appreciation that the arts influence and modify each other, rather than exist in a strict hierarchy. A comprehensive study on this complex phenomenon still appears to be lacking from literature.

4. Overall Argument of This Study

Building upon that premise, this study investigates the remediating power of digital technology via the cinematic screen by *simultaneously* exploring the involvement and the social and political impact of film production, conservation, circulation and reception. Films which remediate Dante's infernal imagery are used to conduct this investigation, and they are plentifully available thanks to the enduring popularity of Dante's infernal imagery across the various media.

5. Original Contribution to knowledge

The original contribution to knowledge of this study is two-fold. It applies a multidisciplinary methodology (detailed in greater depth in the following section) to the specific branch of Film Adaptation Studies dedicated to Dante's *Commedia*. It also evaluates the aesthetic implications of the digital. A section of the investigation focuses on exploring the social and political impact of adaptations in the digital era. As a result, this study provides evidence of the insufficiency of centralising the 'reference text' during the adaptation process and instead uses intermedial, transnational and transhistorical lenses.

6. Methodological Issues

In the last few years, the field of Film Adaptation Studies has undergone a theoretical and methodological shift, changing from a predominantly *text-centered* approach, to a more *intertextual* and *intermedial* approach. This shift becomes a crucial facet of the digital era as we analyse the main theoretical claims of early film adaptation theorists still at the core of contemporary debate: that of the supremacy of the 'reference text' among its adaptations and the employment of the criterion of fidelity in its mere aesthetic form. In fact, the obsessive focus on both these aspects that have characterised the branch of Film Adaptation Studies for a long time has not allowed us to consider how different media mutually interrelate. Instead, if we shift the focus on to the *relational space* that the various media share, rather than building hierarchies out of them, we may therefore be more encouraged to investigate aspects of what Fabio Camilletti, Manuele Gragnolati and Fabian Lampart (2010) have

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defined as "appropriation, manipulation and rewriting".[17] In fact, these dynamics are the essence of the adaptation process. As this research shows, they actively participate in practices of remediation of images before they subsequently participate in matters of circulation among the various media and cultural communities.

Dennis Cutchins' claims (2014) that the discipline of Adaptation Studies, and particularly film adaptation, "still suffers from a lack of what might be termed 'grand theory'".[18] This thesis first needed to find and perfect its own methodology in order to provide the study with solidity and coherence. For this reason, as the main aim of this study is to evaluate the remediation of the infernal imagery through the cinematic screen and to understand the extent to which digital technologies intervene in this phenomenon, the methodology can be defined as predominantly *image-based*.

In defining this new approach, a preliminary consideration of the various nuances of the term *image* is necessary. In short, what theory of the image does this methodology invoke and why is it relevant to the field of study investigating Dante's legacy through the big screen? In *The Future of the Image* (2007), Jacque Ranciére challenges the idea that the image exclusively "presents a relationship between the sayable and the visibile, a relationship which plays on both the analogy *and* the dissemblance between them" by advancing that "there is visibility that does not amount to an image; there are images which consist wholly in words" and therefore concluding that "the image is not exclusive to the visible".[19] With this in mind, in this thesis I borrow from W. J. T Mitchell's taxonomy of the image (1984), which is an exploration of the blurred borders of both the visible and the invisible. He distinguishes images as being either (or simultaneously) "graphic, optical,

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[17] Gragnolati, M., Camilletti G. and Lampart, F. (2010). *Metamorphosing Dante – Appropriations, Manipulations and Rewritings in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Century*, Wien-Berlin: Verlag Turia+Kant. See e.g. p.9: "After almost seven centuries, Dante endures and even seems to haunt the present. His works have been used, rewritten and appropriated in diverse media and cultural productions".

[18] Cutchins, D. (2014). 'Bakhtin - Translation and Adaptation', in K. Krebs (ed.), *Translation and Adaptation in Theatre and Film*, London: Routledge, pp. 41-42.

[19] Rancière, J. (2009). *The Future of the Image*, London: Verso, p.7

perceptual, mental or verbal".[20] This multi-layered perspective is in fact particularly relevant when it comes to Dante and the screen, as its infernal imagery has played a complex role in the West for over seven centuries and at different cultural levels, as widely discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. Still, one additional question seems to arise: how can we draw a clear line between the impact of Dante's *Inferno* in the cultural imagination and the images of hell which emerge from other sources, such as the descriptions of hell in the Bible? That is to say, how can we trace and catalogue images of hell inspired directly and indirectly by the work of Dante from those influenced by other sources? What distinguishes an infernal image from a Dantesque image? To answer this question, let us shift from the hierarchical perspective that considers adaptation exclusively as a one-way oriented process to a more *intertextual* view. Several scholars have investigated, for instance, the mutual relationship between the infernal imagery of the Bible and Dante's *Inferno.*[21] Dante's capacity to express, empower and question the *memento inferni* of the Jewish-Christian literary tradition has been widely demonstrated to have impacted the West for over seven centuries.[22] As a consequence, it is possible to claim that contemporary Western images of hell - the violence, the damnation, the perpetual suffering - may be rooted in the Bible but are also evolved from Dantesque adaptations. This feeds a dialectic dichotomy between the *infernal* and *Dantesque* which dates back to the 14th century.

With this in mind, a final consideration of one possible ambiguity surrounding the term "digital" needs to be clarified. Some might question why the focus of this study is upon the remediation of Dante's infernal imagery *and* the role of digital technologies in this process instead of a more general investigation of the

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[20] Mitchell, W. J. T. (Spring 1984). 'What is an Image?', *New Literary History*, 15(3), "Image/Imago/Imagination", pp. 503-537, p.505.

[21] On the relationship between the Bible and Dante's work see Benfell, S. V. (2011). *The Biblical Dante*, Toronto-Buffalo-London: University of Toronto Press, p.79, in which we can read that: "The pre-modern Bible was a text that informed the ways in which Dante and other writers perceived the world, and this 'biblical world' comes through the Inferno as well, underpinning its structure and landscape. [...] When the pilgrim becomes disgusted with the corruption of the church [...], the poet has him turn the Bible to offer a devastating critique and denunciation of papal simony [...]. The Bible, in other words, has a crucial role to play in the *Commedia*'s opening canticle".

[22] On the impact of Christianity upon Western societies see e.g. Mellor, P. A. (2004). *Religion, Realism and Social Theory: Making Sense of Society*, London - Thousand Oaks - New Dehli: SAGE Publications, p.20, in which we can read that: "the Christian influence upon social life is not only historical but evident in the present too, even if this influence is to a large degree concealed by a discourse of secularity".

circulation of Dante's infernal imagery *in* the digital era. The main reason for this subtle, fundamental distinction becomes necessary when investigating the digital in its multiple uses and impacts: from film production, aesthetics, conversion, conservation, circulation and reception. This comprehensive inquiry has not yet been conducted in contemporary Film Adaptation Studies and clarifying this seemed to be necessary before concentrating on more specific historical periods. Through the case study of the remediation of Dante's infernal imagery through the cinematic screen, these aspects are therefore considered together, both concomitant and interdependent. This sheds light on how film adaptation is to be understood *inside* and *beyond* the screen. This choice is inspired and underpinned by Giorgio Agamben's *What is an Apparatus?* (2009), in which we read that dispositifs are to be considered as apparatuses instead of hierarchies, as an ecology of practices and effects which literally have "in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gesture, behaviours, opinion, or discourses of living beings".[23] Therefore, "it would not be wrong to define the extreme phase of capitalist development in which we live as a massive accumulation and proliferation of apparatuses".[24] This is why this study investigates the digital as a wider ecology of technologies which are expanding their impact far beyond aesthetics and into the social, cultural, and political sphere *together*.

The *image-based* methodology of this study therefore does not aim to investigate the sole aesthetic role of Dantesque infernal images in practices of film adaptations, but instead invites theorists to rethink adaptation as images across various and converging media. Literature does not necessarily have to be central. There are many different angles from which to evaluate film adaptations: from film production and aesthetics, to practices of film conversion, circulation, reception and their impact in the political and social sphere. That being said, what does applying an *image-based* methodology to this study mean in practice? Essentially, after adopting the lenses of *intermediality* and *remediation* promoted by the most recent studies – and not the criterion of fidelity on a merely aesthetic level – as the theory behind this research, I employ a multidisciplinary approach combining analytical tools provided

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[23] Agamben, G. (2009). *What is an apparatus?*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, p.14

[24] Ibidem, p.17

by different branches of film analysis from film aesthetics and psychoanalysis to cultural and reception studies when exploring the resulting social and political impact of these films beyond the cinema. This methodology is applied to the selected film case studies and represents an innovative approach to the area of Dante and the cinematic screen. In fact, the unique contribution to knowledge of this research does not lie only in its revised methodology, but also in its contents. The first chapter shows in depth how the specific branch of studies which investigate the relationship between Dante and the cinematic screen is relatively new, and only formed in the mid 1990s. Despite the discipline being enriched by the contribution of several international scholars, only a small body of literature on the circulation of infernal imagery through the cinematic screen has been produced. In addition to this, none of the existing works have undertaken a comparative study during 2005 – 2015, where digital technologies are outlined as a fundamental factor of both the remediation and the circulation of the infernal imagery using the cinematic tools. In this way, while the literary importance of Dante's *Commedia* in Western countries will never be questioned, the primary intention of this research is not to consider the 'reference text' as the starting and the returning point of this investigation. On the contrary, this research tests the boundaries of film adaptation in its relationship with literature and cinema mainly by undermining the supremacy of the 'reference text' as theoretically incorrect and by questioning the employment of the criterion of fidelity strictly in its aesthetic interpretation. In particular, in order to deconstruct the false belief of the supremacy of the 'reference text' in its relative adaptations, the assessment of three relevant film case studies proves how part of the imagery of Dante's *Inferno* on the screen is the result of the interrelation of different media across decades and cultural contexts and is not necessarily reliant on direct access to the literary poem alone. This stage is required to explore the remediation of infernal images through the cinematic screen and to understand how digital technologies have promoted the production, the conservation and the circulation of these movies during 2005-2015. As a result, I hope this theoretical revision will enrich the contemporary discourse surrounding the entire discipline of film adaptation. More specifically, the shift towards a broader multidisciplinary approach may lead contemporary and future theorists towards a greater understanding of the ways in which the cinematic medium relates to the reworking of imageries – the infernal

imagery, in this case - and of the ways digital technologies may encourage and renew practices of film production and circulation in the post-analogue era.

7.   Thesis Overview

In relation to the structure of this research, this thesis is around 80,000 words in length and is composed of five chapters. Together, Chapter One and Chapter Two are of a contextual and methodological nature. Their argument focuses on the question of film adaptation of the *Commedia* within the existing body of academic literature and with evidence of contemporary remediation during 2005-2015. Chapter Three, Chapter Four and Chapter Five are dedicated to the assessment of selected film case studies, which are, respectively, *Inferno* (Milano Films, ITA, 1911); *Salò - 120 Days of Sodom* (P. P. Pasolini, ITA, 1975) and *Cosmopolis* (D. Cronenberg, CAN, FR, ITA, POR, 2012). I have decided to focus predominantly on these films because despite being produced in different times and national contexts, they have been heavily actualised by the intervention of digital technologies which gave them renewed importance in 2005 to 2015, surrounded by social and political criticism.

Chapter One looks at the existing body of literature on Film Adaptation Studies and its relationship with the specific field of Dante and the cinematic screen. In this way, this comparative overview of the main contributors in each discipline helps us to both identify and assess the main theoretical and methodological gaps in knowledge that this research later helps to fill. In particular, a great focus is put on examining the recent theoretical shift which the field of Film Adaptation Studies is currently undergoing as it transfers from considering adaptations only as final 'products' and in constant rivalry with their 'reference text' into a more *intertextual* interest in examining the interrelations that different media create and therefore avoiding the creation of a strict hierarchy among the arts. With this in mind, the second part of this chapter considers how, since its birth in 1996, the discipline of Dante and the screen has tried to maintain an organised investigation of the specific movies that interact with Dante's *Inferno* and their resulting social and political impact beyond cinema.

In light of these preliminary evaluations, Chapter Two examines the context

of the research and then assesses the methodology adopted for the analysis of the selected film case studies in Chapter Three, Chapter Four and Chapter Five. The first section of this chapter provides an overview of the intermedial circulation of Dante's *Commedia* during 2005-2015. In particular, here I examine three key examples showing how this intermedial interest in approaching and reworking Dante's *Commedia* has become markedly international, rather than solely Italian. The first example investigates the relevance of the 2013 English translation of the *Commedia* by Clive James.[25] The second one explores the importance of Roberto Benigni's show *Tutto Dante* (RAI, 2006-2015) as it promoted an innovative form of public reading in Italy and internationally. Finally, the extensive body of video fan tributes on Youtube such as *Dante's Inferno (Clay Animation 16mm) (2007)*; *Barbie's Inferno (2007*) and *Dante's Inferno Lego Stop Motion* (2008) investigates the role of online fan communities in reworking and promoting Dante's *Commedia* on the Internet.[26] Following this, the second part of this chapter assesses in greater depth the methodological approach which I will adopt for the film case studies. In particular, I point out the necessity of shifting from a predominantly *text-centered* approach to a predominantly *image-based* one. As previously discussed, the main aim for proposing this methodological shift is to deconstruct the criterion of fidelity in its mere aesthetic employment, in order to give more relevance to the ways images circulate at different times and are received by different communities. In this way, this new set of perspectives considers all the media involved in the adaptation process equally and equips the following chapters with bolder methodological tools.

Following this, Chapter Three assesses the pioneering relevance of *Inferno* (Milano Films, ITA, 1911) in the creation and the circulation of the infernal imagery on the cinematic screen along with exploring its impact during 2005-2015 thanks to the intervention of digital technologies. More specifically, the first part of the chapter opens up the dialogue once more about the importance of this movie in

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[25] James, C. (2013). *The Divine Comedy – Translated by Clive James*, New York: WW Norton & Co.

[26] See MugglebornSweethart (2007). *Barbie's Inferno*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBMzUPmSS1k&t=36s (Accessed 30/01/2017); Allmanknack (2011). *Lego Dante's Inferno*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97_IhOr4dMc&t=33s (Accessed 30/01/2017) and alexgwaller (2007). *Dante's Inferno (Clay Animation 16mm)*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XW8L7O8qGgg (Accessed 30/01/2017).

film history, as "the Italian film industry between 1908 and 1912 produced no fewer than eleven films based on the *Commedia*. Its length, its costs, its innovative special effects, and its publicity distinguish *Inferno* by Milano Films as the first true, Italian kolossal".[27] This is why I chose this film as the first case study. With this in mind, this chapter discusses how the cinema medium, far more than Dante's text, played a key role in the circulation of the infernal imagery remediated in this film among non-Italian communities and far-flung Italian communities. In order to e strengthen my *image-based* approach, I then go on to assess the case of the movie *Go Down Death!* (USA, 1944) by the African-American director Spencer Williams who freely employed original footage from Milano Films' *L'Inferno* taken from a copy of the movie tailored by the American distributors. Williams' film was shot entirely with an all-black cast and explores aspects of the African-American segregation of the 1940s on the screen. However, as the director decided to employ some footage taken from the 1911 Dante-inspired film to make its black protagonist experience an infernal vision of the afterlife, *Go Down Death!* acts as an engaging dialogue between Italian Silent Cinema and American Independent Cinema of the 1940s. Although the interactions between Milano Film's *Inferno* and Spencer Williams' *Go Down Death!* have previously been discussed by Dennis Looney (2004), he did not point out the set of aesthetic and technological mechanisms interplaying with the infernal imagery on the screen.[28] This section therefore helps to clarify this point as well as carry out a psychoanalytical analysis of the 'vision of hell' that the main protagonist of Williams' *Go Down Death!* experiences through the employment of the footage taken from Milano Films' *Inferno*. This psychoanalytic reading of the sequence is much-needed as it enriches the academic understanding of these films in relation to matters of adaptation and the construction of national identities. With this in mind, and moving forward towards a greater understanding of the impact of digital technologies on this film during 2005-2015, the second part of this chapter includes a detailed interview with Cineteca di Bologna, the Italian archival institution that completed the restoration of Milano Films' *Inferno* in 2006. The restored movie

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[27] Welle, J. P. (1995), 'Dante in the Cinematic Mode: An Historical Survey of Dante Movies', in M. Musa (ed.), *Dante's Inferno – The Indiana Critical Edition*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p.385.

[28] See e.g. Looney, D. (2004), 'Spencer Williams and Dante: An African-American Filmmaker at the Gates of Hell', in Amilcare A. Iannucci (ed.), *Dante, Cinema and Television*, Toronto-Buffalo-London: University of Toronto Press, pp.129-144.

was subsequently digitalised with an official DVD edition created for both Italian and international distribution. This interview investigates the set of aesthetic, technical and financial issues the institution had to face during the restoration process. I conduct a comparative study between this DVD edition and the pirated copies of *Go Down Death!* (1944) and Milano Films' *Inferno* (1911) currently available on YouTube in order to investigate how these different digital media have promoted new forms of official and unofficial circulation of these movies during the years 2005-2015.

Exploring digital technology's impact on film restoration, Chapter Four proposes an evaluation of forty years of turbulent circulation of Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò – 120 Days of Sodom* (ITA, 1975) in order to understand to what extent digital technologies may have played a role both in practices of film conservation and film censorship. This chapter details the limits of a strictly *text-centered* approach based on the sole focus on a merely aesthetic interpretation of the principle of fidelity. Here, for instance, the main literary influence is not exclusively related to a single book, but is connected to Dante's *Inferno* and Marquis De Sade's *The 120 Days of Sodom* at the very least. As Richard Lansing (2010) and Lindsay Alley Hallam (2012) have explained: "in his last film, *Salò*, Pasolini employs the structure of the *Inferno*, beginning with an Ante-Inferno and proceeding through three circles of perversions".[29] Meanwhile, "in *Salò*, Sade's work is used as a means to explore the cruellest and the darkest aspects of human nature. Like the libertines in *The 120 Days of Sodom*, the four protagonists in the film find pleasure in the pain and suffering of their captives, with both sadism and suffering shown in great detail by Pasolini".[30] Taking this as the main starting point, the second part of this chapter focuses on the 2015 celebrations for the 40th anniversary of *Salò*'s first distribution, exemplifying the mixed reception to this film within Italian public discourse. In fact, when *Salò* first came out in 1975, this film sparked off one of the most popular post-mortem trials in Italy for an offence against public decency, culminating in a heavy act of censorship, both in Italy and also in the UK. Beyond the political critique,

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[29] Lansing, R. (2010). *The Dante Encyclopedia*, London and New York: Routledge, p.249.

[30] Hallam, L. A. (2012), *Screening the Marquis de Sade: Pleasure, Pain and the Transgressive Body in Film*, Jefferson: McFarland and Company, p.150.

Dante's influence on structure and imagery is acknowledged in this section as I explore the relevance of the 2015 DVD edition curated by Cineteca Bologna and highlight the pivotal importance that digital technologies have played in the conservation of this movie. In addition to this, I also show how its digitalisation did not protect the film from suffering acts of sabotage, even during the 2015 anniversary. Chapter 4 concludes that this movie still plays a controversial role in contemporary Italian public discourse.

Finally, in relation to the pivotal importance of film adaptations of Dante's *Inferno* beyond the cinematic screen, the final chapter investigates the social and political impact of David Cronenberg's *Cosmopolis* (CAN, FR, ITA, POR, 2012). First, the chapter acknowledges the legacy of Dante's *Inferno* in Don DeLillo's novel, on which the film is based. In fact, as outlined by David Cowart (2012): "like his great Italian ancestor, the author of the Divine Comedy, DeLillo contemplates the introduction of a deadly poison into the veins of a once-robust civilization".[31] With this in mind, the chapter then moves forwards towards an evaluation of the entire adaptation *process* by combining elements of screenwriting and aspects of production issues that led to the choice of shooting this movie entirely on digital cameras. Subsequently, the chapter focuses on investigating the aesthetic and narrative functions of the dystopian imagery of the city of New York – the setting of the story – alongside a discussion of the image of digital technologies presented in the film. It will therefore be possible to study the remediation of the infernal imagery within the context of the 21st century financial metropolis. The second part of the chapter focuses on the relationship between the protest of *Cosmopolis* and the contemporary Occupy Wall Street movements which broke out in the same months the film was distributed. These evaluations will show the continuity between aspects of social revolution in cinema and in the wider world, therefore enabling us to consider the film adaptations beyond only their aesthetic features.

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[31] Cowart, D. (2012), *Don DeLillo: The Physics of Language*, Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, p.92.

CHAPTER 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This research explores the phenomenon of remediating Dante's *Inferno* on the cinematic screen during 2005-2015, and the text's relationship with digital technologies. This first chapter evaluates the constituent disciplines of this academic area, with a particular focus on both Film Adaptation Studies and the publications dedicated to the relationship between Dante and the cinematic screen. This chapter first discusses the reasons behind the lack of a solid theoretical framework within the broader context of Film Adaptation Studies and later explores the most recent contributions which call for a methodological shift. As previously discussed, the essence of this revised perspective lies in abandoning the belief that an adaption needs to be approached purely as a final 'product' which is in constant rivalry with its 'reference text', and move towards establishing a more productive process which explores the relationships between the media and eschews a strict hierarchy of the arts. Secondly, the chapter moves on to consider the group of studies on Dante and the cinematic screen: a young and developing field of work with its inaugural academic publication dating back to 1996. I discuss how, since then, this discipline has tried to construct a coherent internal organisation, its core line of investigation dedicated to identifying sensitive movies that adapt Dante's *Inferno* and how they approach relevant political and social issues on the screen. However, I also demonstrate that this group of studies has a tendency to analyse only some specific case studies rather than providing the discipline with a bold theoretical framework. For this reason, this chapter develops as follows: the first part is dedicated to addressing the main voices of Adaptation Studies as a general research area while the second part explores in more depth the specific case of Dante and the cinematic screen. This allows us to evaluate the relevant existing literature and to identify the most sensitive gaps in knowledge that my research then helps to investigate and fill.

1.1   A historical perspective around the field of Film Adaptation: between theory and practice

A premise on which to base terminology is necessary. The term *adaptation* and particularly *film adaptation* cannot be defined with monolithic and immutable precision. Ilana Shiloh (2007) has defined it as "an ambiguous term, both semantically and conceptually." More specifically, "among its multiple connotations, the word 'adaptation' may signify an artistic composition that has been recast in a new form, an alteration in the structure or function of an organism to make it better fitted for survival, or a modification in individual or social activity in adjustment to social surroundings".[32]

As we can see from this definition which combines elements of biology, media studies and sociology, the adaptation process involves several stages where the source material is altered in order to *adapt* itself into a new environment, or more specifically, to make itself more suitable for the new context into which the pre-existing material is placed. It is also important to bear in mind that the adaptation process, both in its biological and artistic states, does not aim to entirely erase the characteristics of the pre-existing material. On the contrary, it does preserve some of them while altering others in order to let the pre-existing material survive or, in the case of film adaptation, to circulate. What becomes evident is that, apparently, there is no chance for the pre-existing material to survive as unchanged in different environments and eras. Hence, the pre-existing material does need to modify itself; otherwise it is condemned to extinction. Two questions remain unclear in the adaptation process: are the changes made intentionally? Most importantly, what does get preserved and what does change? These questions are extremely relevant to the cinematic screen itself, as movies are brought to life by the work of several people who are also influenced by their own social, political, cultural and technological factors. Finally, as the grade of alteration or preservation is extremely variable and unpredictable from case to case, film adaptations cannot be classified within a strictly academic discipline. That being said, this field of study should not be

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[32] Shiloh, I. (2007). 'Adaptation, Intertextuality, and the Endless Deferral of Meaning: Memento', *M/C Journal,* 10(2). May. Full text available at: http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0705/08-shiloh.php

underestimated as we are constantly exposed to adaptations in the 21st century. In fact, Dennis Cutchins (2014) writes that the massive proliferation of adaptations in everyday life is a pivotal concern for Western Countries in particular: "more than half of the films produced by Hollywood are adaptations, at least half of the shows on television are either adaptations, or based on the true story. The literature we read and the music to which we listen constantly adapt texts, as well as genre and style".[33]

In the past few decades the academic field of Adaptation Studies was conceived and developed in order to provide a coherent and theoretical framework to the discipline. However, it is difficult to take an unequivocal perspective on the theoretical debates around the branch of Film Adaptation Studies as, paradoxically, the most recent works have identified the discipline's weaknesses rather than proceeding further towards mapping its cornerstones and boundaries. This problem mainly derives from the lack of a solid methodological organisation of the relative discipline. Thomas Leitch (2003) has argued that: "there is such a thing as adaptation studies […] But this flood of studies of individual adaptations proceeds on the whole without the support of any more general theoretical account of what actually happens, or what ought to happen, when a group of filmmakers set out to adapt a literary text".[34] In addition to this, Kamilla Elliott (2013) argued that since the rise of the golden era of Film Adaptation Studies in the 1970s, the majority of scholars have focused on proposing a series of "theoretical turns" that "fail[ed] to cite their predecessors".[35] As a consequence, this has led to a deceleration of the discipline's development as "too much repetition, with or without citation, keeps a field from evolving, contributing to the lack of a cumulative knowledge that […] inevitably hampers theorization".[36]

These different academic perspectives in the theoretical debate question whether the disorganisation of the discipline is the result of too much focus being paid to only certain key case studies, rather than a common and unified range of

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[33] Cutchins, D. (2014), p. 41.

[34] Leitch, T. (2003). 'Twelve Fallacies in contemporary Adaptation Theory', *Criticism*, 45(2), Spring, pp. 149-171.

[35] Elliott, K. (2013). *Theorizing Adaptations/Adapting Theories*, in J. Bruhn, A. Gjelsvik, Hanssen and F. Eirik, *Adaptation Studies – New Challenges, New Directions*, London: Bloomsbury, p.25.

[36] Ibidem, p.29.

theoretical methodologies being developed through a productive dialogue between past and present scholars. But this seems to me to be the inevitable consequence of a questionable premise that has characterised the field of Adaptation Studies for a long time: that of the centrality of the 'reference text' and the underestimation of the screenwriting work in the adaptation process. However, before assessing these two issues in more depth, it is still possible to identify a few important tendencies in the theoretical debate of Film Adaptation Studies, with a particular focus on its exploration of adapting Dante on the screen.

1.1.1   The Issue of Fidelity

One of the most important debates that scholars have promoted in the field of Film Adaptation Studies is the never-ending issue of fidelity. In particular, this idea proposes a strict classification of the adapted films according to their proximity to the 'reference text', the literary precedent which is alleged to be the main source of inspiration for the film. As Brian McFarlane (1996) has written: "the issue of fidelity is a complex one but it is not too gross a simplification to suggest that critics have encouraged film-makers to see it as a desirable goal in the adaptation of literary works".[37] The issue of fidelity has its roots in considering the 'reference text' as central, necessary and seminal in the process of film adaptation and therefore promotes a vision where the adapted films tend to be considered as *imperfect* because of their differences with the 'reference text'. Despite the fact that a solid definition of the concept of *fidelity* is not strictly possible, some scholars have still maintained that "the adaptation is faithful to a cumulative understanding of what the text means as a piece of literature and as a cultural object".[38]

In 1975, Geoffrey Wagner proposed one of the most crucial models of classification for adapted films. The scholar identified three main categories based on the criterion of fidelity to the 'reference text'. The first group contains those movies

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[37] McFarlane, B. (1996). *Novel To Film – An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 9.

[38] Stam, R. (2008). *Literature and Film – a Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, p.15.

called *transpositions* that exhibit only a "minimum of apparent interference"[39] with the 'reference text'. The movies from the second group show some alterations to their 'reference text' and consequently they are named as *commentaries*. This level of alteration does not need to be considered as an "outright violation", but the result of a "different intention on the part of the film-maker".[40] Finally, the movies from the third group are considered as *analogies* of their 'reference text' and therefore they show only a few similarities with it as the intention of the film production is clearly "to make another work of art".[41] In the following decades, the legacy of Wagner's classification has encouraged other scholars to improve upon the model. However, what remains at the foundation of this theoretical debate is the concept of fidelity to the 'reference text'.[42]

In particular, this kind of approach has also influenced a few scholars who studied the issue of adapting Dante on the screen. Consider for instance Farassino's essay *Dante in modern and contemporary cinema* (1996),[43] which features in the very first anthology related to exploring the relationship between Dante's *Commedia* and the cinematic screen. Here, the scholar proposes a peculiar classification of the movies based on the *Inferno* by following the criterion of fidelity. Farassino used the term *circle of the forgers* to indicate that some movies contain a direct reference to Dante in their title, but then do not explicitly refer to the text in the diegetic story. This example shows how Wagner's classification puts the text at the centre of the adaptation process and consequently considers any act of appropriation and manipulation of the 'reference text' as an attempt of *falsification* by the cinematic hand. This is also the result of the underestimation of the adaptation as a creative process in filmmaking along with the interrelations between different texts and media. In the following decades other scholars have enriched the debate surrounding

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[39] Wagner, G. (1975). *The Novel and the Cinema*, Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, p.222.

[40] Ibidem, p.224.

[41] Ibidem, p. 226.

[42] See e.g. Dudley Andrew's categories of "borrowing, intersection and fidelity of transformation" in Dudley, A., (1984). *Concepts of Film Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.98 or John M. Desmond and Peter Hawkes' "close, loose and intermediate types of adaptation", in Desmond, J. M. and Hawkes, P. (2005). *Adaptation: Studying Film and Literature*, New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, p.44

[43] Farassino, A. (1996). *Dante in modern and contemporary cinema - Dante nel Cinema Moderno e Contemporaneo.* In G. Casadio, *Dante nel Cinema – Dante and Cinema*, Ravenna: Longo Editore, pp. 83-92.

the issue of fidelity, with a specific focus on questioning the supremacy of the 'reference text' compared to its adaptations. Indeed, scholars such as Peter Reynolds (1993) argued that one should "examine adaptations without prior prejudice"[44] as "through them we can enter into an exciting debate with the literary text itself",[45] and the seminal work of Deborah Cartmell (1999) aimed to "dispel the idea that literary adaptations are one-way translation from text [*as*] most studies of adaptation concentrate entirely on the novel, leaving dramatists like Shakespeare to be evaluated on their own".[46]

But why is fidelity so difficult to define? In order to assess its complexity let us reflect upon the two key terms of this discourse: the first is 'reference' and to what extent the act of referencing or mentioning previously existing literary sources implies matters of adaptation. The second is 'text' signifying 'original source' and its relative authority - that which confers the legitimacy of an 'adaptation' when the adaptation is considered to be 'derivative' of the (literary) text. Let us consider the importance of referencing when evaluating fidelity first. As seen before, when it comes to fidelity the perspective through which the phenomenon has been analysed seems to usually be unilateral. First there was a novel or a book, or, more generally, a piece of literature. Then the film industry decided to make a movie out of it and this is why that piece of literature gets designated as the film's "source" or "reference text". The more the film presents and reworks formal, narrative and imagery components that immediately recall in the audience its literary precedent, the more the film adaptation is faithful to it. Also, the more elements are recognised as 'referring' to the text, the more the film is considered to be a good adaptation. This process of association is the essence of referencing. However, how many of these references compared to a single 'mention' are considered sufficient for designating something as an adaptation is not easy to deduce. This lack of scientific precision is one of the main limits of the fidelity debate. Gordon E. Slethaug has argued (2014) that:

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[44] Reynolds, P. (1993). *Novel Images, Literature in Performance*, New York: Routledge, p.2.

[45] Ibidem, p. I.

[46] Cartmell, D. (1999). *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*, London: Routledge, p.21.

"citation and fragmentary, allusive adaptations are just as important as adaptations on a large scale, as discursive technique that revisits and critiques other works for structural and thematic purposes as well as formulating new discourses. This discursivity can be a full-scale single adaptation or citation, multiple adaptations/citations of the same source, or one adaptation/citation using multiple sources".[47]

A second key term, "text", is worth reflecting upon as well. Simply *intending* to produce an adaptation of a designated text may not be enough for it to warrant the status of an adaption. In defining "knowing audiences",[48] scholars such as Linda Hutcheon (2013) have attributed the role of deciding whether a piece of work is an adaption or not to the audience. This depends on whether they are culturally positioned to link the film with its literary precedent(s). This adds another layer to the complexity of the fidelity discourse, and it shows once more the impossibility of tracing the origin of imageries with impeccable precision.

However, despite mainstream academic theory on the issue of fidelity changing directions in the past decades, the idea that *something* passes from the 'reference text' to the resulting film adaptation remains a popular notion among audiences, filmmakers and film critics. The *text-centered* perspective compares the 'reference text' and its filmic adaptations in order to identify what *can* be transferred from the text into the movie, and what *must* be transferred from the text into the movie. The main risk of this approach, of course, is to affirm the supremacy of literature over cinema and therefore to create a strict hierarchy of arts.

1.1.2   Transfer, Intertextuality, Intermediality and Remediation

What exactly passes from the text to the cinematic screen in the adaptation process? This is another important aspect that many adaptation theorists have explored with a *text-centered* approach and which has its roots in early Semiotics and Narratology studies. Adaptation theorists have largely made use of the New Critics and Structuralism scholars, such as Walter Pater and Ferdinand De Saussure, who

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[47] Slethaug, G. E. (2014). *Adaptation Theory And Criticism: Postmodern Literature and Cinema In The USA*, New York-London: Bloomsbury, p.30.

[48] See Hutcheon, L. and O'Flynn S. (2013). *A Theory of Adaptation*, London: Routledge, pp.120-121 in which we can read that: "to experience [a film] as an adaptation [..] we need to recognize it as such and to know its adapted text, thus allowing the latter to oscillate in our memories with what we are experiencing."

provided an overview of the early debate about the nature of the linguistic sign. This perspective approaches only the semiotic components of the cinematic medium, where form and content are assimilated to indivisible signs, to *signifier* (form) and *signified* (content).[49] As Brian McFarlane (1996) has pointed out, Adaptation Studies needs to focus on "distinguishing from between that which can be transferred from one medium to another (essentially, narrative) and that which, being dependent on different signifying systems, cannot be transferred (essentially, enunciation)".[50]

This position is founded upon the premise that only the narrative components of the text can be transferred into the cinematic medium, while its formal components cannot, and therefore the position is in dialogue with the previous narratological approaches of academics like Roland Barthes (1975).[51] In his structuralist analysis of narrative in literature, the French scholar identified two groups of components involved in the adaptation process. In particular, the first group refers to *distributional functions* (named also *functions proper*) while the second one is named *integrational functions* (or *indices*). Specifically, *functions proper* relate to any actions or events of the diegesis and help the story to develop in a 'horizontal' direction, while *indices* deepen the text in a 'vertical' way, by enriching the story with any non-action details related to characters, objects and places, such as their psychological background or any data related to their identity. This way, Barthes concluded, *functions proper* can be transferred from one text into another, or in this case from one medium into another, while *indices* cannot. The works of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes have played a crucial role in the organisation of Adaptation Studies, as early adaptation theorists have taken them as the starting point of their own lines of study, particularly to explore the transfer process from literature to the cinematic screen. However, the transfer theory in the structuralist perspective tends to frame the practice of film adaptation mainly as a

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[49] See De Saussure, F. and Bally, C. (1915). *Course in General Linguistics*, New York-Toronto-London: McGraw Hill Book Company, p.67. "I propose to retain the word *sign* [signe] to designate the whole and to replace *concept* and *sound-image* respectively by *signified* [signifre] and *signifier* [signifiant]; the last two terms have the advantage of indicating the opposition that separates them from each other and from the whole of which they are parts".

[50] McFarlane, B. (1996). *Novel to Film – An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation,* Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. VII.

[51] See e.g. Barthes, R. and Duisit, L. (1975). 'An Introduction to the Structuralist Analysis of Narrative', *New Literary History*, 6(2), "On Narrative and Narratives", pp. 237-272 and Barthes, R., (1968). *Elements of Semiology*, New York: Hill and Wang.

one-way process that starts from literature and ends up on the cinematic screen. In this way, the basis of the investigation is focused on analysing the specific *shift* from one medium into another. Can this premise be considered acceptable and immutable? As a matter of fact, this perspective does not take into account the mutual *interaction* which may occur among the different media, including literature and the cinema. In her canonical essay *Literary Adaptation and the Form/Content Dilemma*,[52] Kamilla Elliott (2004) has questioned the structuralist perspective by challenging the assumption that it is impossible to separate *form* from *content* without causing any irreparable damages to the 'reference text'. Moreover, the scholar reconsidered the *text-centered* approach promoted by early adaptation theorists and instead explored the relationship between form and content along the line of tension between the production of literature and cinema. This alternative perspective is based on considering the relationship between *form* and *content* as a *dynamic process* rather than as a static one. Kamilla Elliott has explored the potential influence that *form* exercises in the adaptation process. This aims to counter the previously popular positions of scholars such as Marshall McLuhan (1964) who have argued that the content of each medium is the medium itself - *the medium is the message*[53] - and therefore there cannot be a separation between enunciation (form) and message (content). However, McLuhan's perspective does not take into account that despite the fact that each medium may present some specific technical components, all media tend to communicate and interact with each other and therefore may overcome the formal specificity of each medium. To this end, Kamilla Elliott argued:

> "To dismiss the idea that something passes between novel and film in adaptation as theoretically incorrect, as a naïve popular illusion harking back to outmoded semiotic theories as, therefore, unworthy of serious scholarly attention, is to miss a great deal about the perceived interaction between literature and film in the adaptation".[54]

This position is also strengthened by Thomas Leitch (2003) who posited that

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[52] Elliott, K. (2004). *Literary Adaptation and the Form/Content Dilemma*, in Ryan, M. L., *Narrative Across Media – The Languages of Storytelling*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press pp. 220-243.

[53] See McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding Media: The extensions of Man,* New York: McGraw-Hill.

[54] Elliott, K. (2004), p.239.

one of the greatest fallacies in contemporary adaptation theory is the belief that narrative media presents unchangeable formal and narrative boundaries. The scholar does still acknowledge the counter-arguments put forward, for instance, by Sparshott and Perkins' (1985) publications exploring the ways literature and audio-visual media interact with both their technical aspects (form) and narrative components (content).[55] As a consequence, Rudolf Arnheim's "specificity thesis" (1966) claims that cinema and literature are distinctive and they decay independently as these properties "are functions of their historical moments and not of the media themselves".[56] This, of course, challenges also Siegfried Kracauer's (1960) foundational principle: "each medium has a specific nature which invites certain kinds of communications while obstructing others".[57] Consequently, it now becomes necessary to advance and encourage the relativity of the 'reference text' as part of the adaptation process. This enriched perspective opens up the following questions: What kind of *intertextual* relationships influence the 'reference text' if we consider it in the light of the wider literary and artistic background? What kind of *intermedial* dynamics are involved in the adaptation process? With this in mind, how can this be applied to the phenomenon of adapting Dante on the cinematic screen?

In recent years, many scholars have changed their mind on the *intertextual* and *intermedial* nature of the adaptation process. Julia Kristeva (1969) provided one of the most important definitions of *intertextuality*, following the wave of Mikhail Bakhtin's studies of semiotics, and approached the outcomes of literature in general as "an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings".[58] Taking these considerations as a revised starting

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[55] Thomas Leitch alludes to Sparshott, F.E. (1985). *Basic Film Aesthetics* in G. Mast and M. Cohen, *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings,* 3rd ed., New York: Oxford University Press, pp.286-287. and Perkins, V. F. (1986). *Film as Film: Understanding and Judging Movies*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p.59.

[56] Leitch, (2003), p.153. See also Arnheim, R. (1957). *Film as Art*, Berkeley: University of California Press, p.35 "The film producer himself is influenced by the strong resemblance of his photographic material to reality. As distinguished from the tools of the sculptor and the painter, which by themselves produce nothing resembling nature, the camera starts to turn and la like-ness of the real world results mechanically. […] In order that the film artist may create a work of art it is important that he consciously stress the peculiarities of his medium […] to show how the various particularities of film material can be, and have been, used to achieve artistic effects".

[57] In Kracauer, S. (1960). *Theory Of Film – The Redemption of Physical Reality,* London-New York, Oxford University Press, p.3.

[58] Kristeva, J. (1969). *Word, Dialogue and Novel.* See the essay in the edited collection Kristeva, J., (1980) *Desire in Language, A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, New York: Columbia University Press, p.65.

point, this approach has later been applied to cinema itself, and particularly to the exploration of the phenomenon of film adaptation. The work of Robert Stam, especially *Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogic of Adaptation*, (2013) has been of fundamental importance to the growth of the discipline as he "manage(d) to read the history of cinema as deeply related to the history of the novel",[59] or, more precisely, he investigated the mutual influence between both films and texts and their impact on the society in which they were first conceived. In fact, this investigation was not only conducted as an analysis of correspondence or of variations between films and literature, but as an examination of the cultural impact of all literary and audio-visual elements involved in the adaptation process, highlighting once more the necessity for film adaptation theorists to focus their studies on the social and cultural impact of adaptations. Thus the *intertextual* approach in practices of film adaptation "refers to the infinite and open-ended possibilities generated by all the discursive practices of a culture […] which reach the text not only through recognizable influences, but also through a subtle process of dissemination".[60]

In recent years, this idea of a productive discourse within the literary world has led film adaptation theorists to consider in greater depth the practices of dialogue, exchange and contamination across different media. This shift of perspective, starting in the late 1990's with works of academics such as Deborah Cartmell (1996) and Sarah Cardwell (2002), has derived from considering adaptations not only as *products* but also as results of an active *process* which involves different media, professionals and audiences in its development, circulation and reception.[61] In the past two decades, scholars have started to question the cornerstone of *medium specificity* by focusing more on the interrelations within different media, rather than on media boundaries, especially when in relation to the incredible velocity of technological development in the last century. This rapid

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[59] Bruhn, J. (2013). *Dialogizing Adaptation Studies: From One-Way Transport to a Dialogic Two-Way Process*, in J. Bruhn, A. Gjelsvik and F. E. Hanssen, (2013). *Adaptation Studies – New Challenges, New Directions*, London: Bloomsbury, p.75.

[60] Stam, R. (2000). *Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation*, in J. Naremore, *Film Adaptation*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, p. 64.

[61] For further reference see Haide, H., Whelehan, I., Cartmell D. and Hunter, I.Q. (1996). *Pulping Fictions: Consuming Culture Across the Literature/Media Divide*,London: Pluto Press and Cardwell, S., (2002). *Adaptation Revisited: Television and the Classic Novel,* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

change has in fact opened up to a more evident collaborative approach among media. Consequently, theory and theorisation have bent towards a greater focus on the principle of *intermediality*. In this research I work with the definition provided by Chiel Kattenbelt (2008) that frames *intermediality* within the phenomenon of mutual interaction of different media with the following result:

> "A redefinition of the media that are influencing each other, which in turn leads to a refreshed perception. *Intermediality* assumes a co-relation in the actual sense of the world, that is to say a mutual affect. Taken together, the redefinition of media co-relationships and a refreshed perception resulting from the co-relationship of media means that previously existing medium specific conventions are changes, which allows for new dimension of perception and experience to be explored".[62]

Consequently, this position challenges the cornerstones of medium specificity and intends to build upon Bolter and Grusin's (1999) principle of *remediation* in its broadest sense where "media are continually commenting on, reproducing and replacing each other, and this process is integral to media. Media need each other to function as media at all".[63] These principles of *intertextuality*, *intermediality* and *remediation* are at the very centre of Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O'Flynn's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2013).[64] This publication has contributed to rethinking the theory of Film Adaptation with new and more solid methodological tools. The relevance of this work is twofold: first of all this book can be considered as the first comprehensive and most extensive study on the theory of adaptation, rather than a "series of extended case studies of specific adaptations"[65] and therefore it supports Leitch, Elliott and Cutchins' arguments that there is a lack of solid theoretical organisation to the discipline. Secondly, this study tackles the growing phenomenon of film adaptation from the simultaneous perspectives of the producers, the screenwriters and the audience along with the influence of

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[62] Kattenbelt, C. (2008). 'Intermediality in Theatre and Performance: Definitions, Perceptions and Medial Relationships,' *Cultura, Lenguaje y Representaciòn/Culture, Language and Representation - Revista de Estudios Culturales de la Universitat Jaume i/Cultural Studies Journal of University Jaume*, 6(1), n. 1697 – 7750, pp.19-29, p.25.

[63] Bolter, J. D. (1999). *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, London, Cambridge: The MIT Press, p.55.

[64] Hutcheon, L. and O'Flynn, S. (2013). *A Theory of Adaptation*, Second Edition, New York: Routledge.

[65] Hutcheon, L. and O'Flynn S. (2013), p.XV.

contemporary technology and social and cultural contexts of the production of a film until its reception. In addition to this, the study takes into account adaptation as an intermedial perspective in diverse forms, from theme parks to music, film to opera, as well as the increasingly popular platform of video games, involving multiplayer participation thanks to online connections. From the beginning, this study acknowledges the enduring impact of the massive changes occurring in narrative media thanks to the digital revolution:

> "Digital is more than a platform; it is changing the context in which film, for instance, are made, distributed, and consumed (see Perlmutter 2011). But of particular interest to Adaptation Studies is the fact that technology is also altering how we actually tell and re-tell our stories, for it challenges the traditional cinematic way of narrating: now, a new compendium of graphic text, still and moving images, sound and a cursor or interactive touch screen is to digital narration what cross-cutting, tracking shots, and close-ups are to narration that privileges the moving images and sound".[66]

With this in mind, the book considers "What? Who? Why? Where? When?" a cultural object gets adapted and therefore sees the term 'adaptation' in terms of being both a *process* and *product*. This allows us to "expand the traditional focus of Adaptation Studies on medium-specificity and individual comparative case studies in order to consider as well relations among the major modes of engagement".[67] In fact, the aim of this approach is to question the supremacy of the criterion of fidelity now that technological change is promoting new forms of media interactions which are now the foundation of the adaptation process. When we apply this specific view to the cinematic screen we understand that the text "is not something to be reproduced, but rather something to be interpreted and recreated, often with a new medium".[68] The premise of this perspective – which is at the heart of this study – is a fluid concept of authorship. This, of course, does not work with audio-visual media only, but also has its roots in literature. In fact, as Roland Barthes (1977) has previously argued: "writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin: writing is

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[66] Ibidem, p.XXI.

[67] Ibidem, p.22.

[68] Ibidem, p.84.

that neuter, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing".[69] This position must always be kept in mind as texts inherited from literature still play a key role, even if we decide to question the issue of fidelity. As film adaptation is a collaborative and practical work, Hutcheon has picked out a few key figures which embody the role of the *adapter* at different stages of the production phase. These figures include the writing (screenwriters), the shooting (designers, actors, DOPs and director) and the assembly phase (editor and music composers). However, the scholar still attributes more responsibility to the screenwriter and the director in the whole process as they ultimately provide "the overall vision for the adaptation *as adaptation*".[70] Therefore, the concerns about the issue of authorship in film adaptation does not terminate in a Barthes-inspired 'death of the author', but in a new form of positive and participative attitude that all the figures of the adaptation process experience in the making of the movie. Furthermore, the scholar must not forget the huge impact of film adaptations on the audience. On the one hand, Linda Hutcheon attributes the success of on-screen adaptations to "their mixture of repetition and difference, of familiarity and novelty" which is the cause of the "confidence that comes with the sense of knowing what is about to happen next",[71] while at the same time it keeps the spectator intrigued with a taste of suspense. As per Henri Jenkins and Lancaster's definition (2001), spectators often act as *textual poachers* and *textual performers* by using the web for sharing and circulating their fan tributes.[72] In particular, these videos rework several aspects of one or more cultural products to which fans are emotionally attached such as their contents, their structure and their style. The lively presence of fan tributes on the Internet expands the boundaries of the adaptation phenomenon and therefore enriches the debate

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[69] Barthes, R. (1977). '*The Death of the Author'* in *Image, Music, Text*, tr. by Stephen Heath, London: Fontana Press, p. 142.

[70] Hutcheon, L. and O'Flynn S. (2013), p.85.

[71] Ibidem p.114.

[72] See Jenkins, H. (1992). *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Cultures*, London: Routledge, p. 26, defining the act of poaching as "a type of cultural bricolage through which readers fragment texts and re-assemble the broken shards according to their own blueprint, salvaging bits and pieces of the found material in making sense of their own cultural experience" and Lancaster, K. and Jenkins, H., (2001). *Interacting with "Babylon 5": Fan Performance in a Media Universe*, Austin, University of Texas Press, p.155 defining the textual performance as the attempt to "capture – through participation and immersion – the original cathartic moment felt during the first viewing of the text".

surrounding the mutual and circular relationships between institutional and spontaneous production of adaptations.

It is now evident that the criterion of fidelity on its own cannot mark the beginning and the end of the adaptation process. The digital era blurs media boundaries and creates fragmentation by circulating cultural products in the digital environment. This shift of perspective has recently attracted a few theorists engaged in the resurrection of the criterion of fidelity in contemporary Film Adaptation Studies. In particular there has been a recent sociological turn within the discipline. Nico Dicecco (2015) has put the case forward for reconsidering the issue of fidelity from the perspective of the audience of the film *as an adaptation*. But he maintains that it should be beyond the aesthetic "lens of formal repetition" that has characterised the employment of the criterion of fidelity for a long time, as this approach "risks reinforcing the very problems of fidelity that intertextual approaches purport to overturn".[73] Indeed, this revised theoretical model has a precedent in the work of Christine Geraghty (2008) which[74] "allows us both to engage meaningfully with aesthetics accomplishments and to explore the ideological stakes of representation, but without getting mired in the definitional ouroboros that drives so much work in the film".[75] Dicecco also purports that "the field has much to gain through a slight shift in emphasis, away from what adaptation is and towards what adaptation does",[76] and therefore claims that fidelity is not a "stable formal category".[77] In the same vein, Casie Hermansson (2015) has claimed for a new employment of the criterion of fidelity within "the intertextual tools of adaptation criticism"[78] as one of the "tools among many" that should be employed "in

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[73] Dicecco, N. (2015). 'State of Conversation: The Obscene Underside of Fidelity,' in *Adaptation* 8(2), Oxford: Oxford University Press; 29th April, pp.161-175, p.163.

[74] See Geraghty, C. (2008). *Now a Major Motion Picture – Film Adaptations of Literature and Drama* Lanham, MD: Rowman, p.3: "Faithfulness matters if it matters to the viewer".

[75] Dicecco, N. (2015), p.163.

[76] Ibidem, p.163.

[77] Ibidem, p.174.

[78] Hermansson, C. (2015). 'Flogging Fidelity: in Defense of the (Un)Dead Horse', in *Adaptation* 8(2), (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 29th April, pp.147-160, p.156.

combination with other tools"[79] when it comes to research around the area of film adaptation.

Finally, the necessity of considering film adaptation as a *process* rather than just a final product leads us to include the contribution of the screenwriting in Adaptation Theory. Screenwriting has often been underestimated and excluded from a productive dialogue with the academic world. So how can the practical perspective of the screenwriting world contribute to enriching the academic debate around the *intertextual* and *intermedial* roles of the adaptation process? And how can it rehabilitate the issue of fidelity within the academic discourse and separate it from its sole aesthetical implications?

1.1.3 The Screenwriter's Perspective

Considering the outcomes of the discipline outlined above, it is possible to evaluate how the academic debates have traditionally been oriented to examine the issue of film adaptation from two opposing points of view: the first one promotes the criterion of fidelity as a key factor and tends to evaluate the resulting films only as final products. This system can be defined as *text-centered* as the constant comparison with the 'reference text' is both the starting and finishing point of the investigation. Therefore, this system advocates the principle of *transmediality*, defined as "media unspecific phenomena that can be employed in various media"[80] and consequently enabling us to see which components of one medium transfer to another during adaption.

On the other hand, the most recent debates have focused on deconstructing the strict hierarchy of the media, recognising the great importance of media interrelations and the relativity of media boundaries. The 'reference text' is then considered only as an *element* in the process of adaptation. However, this approach risks underestimating the cultural impact of literature and the potential dialogues it has in two directions: with adaptations and with historical determination. Both

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[79] Ibidem p.156.

[80] Rajewsky, I. O. (2002). *Intermedialitaat*, Tubingen: Francke.

systems possess a few key methodological tools in the field, but both also seem to have forgotten one of the key stages in the phenomenon of film adaptation: that of the screenwriting process. The reasons why I have decided to include this approach in my investigation come from my personal experience as both a doctoral researcher and a screenwriter. I strongly believe it is important to combine an understanding of contemporary theoretical debates with the reflections of a screenwriting background in order to provide a bolder perspective on the issue of film adaptation that therefore may enrich the entire discipline. With this in mind, in which ways can screenwriting as an *act of adapting* connect the *process* of adaptations to their nature as *products*? The contribution of Francis Vanoye[81] and the American screenwriting guru Syd Field[82] help us to answer these questions in two ways. First of all, despite the fact that Francis Vanoye comes from the academic world, his influential book *Scénarios modèles, modèles de scénarios* (1991) collects several contributions from professional screenwriters. Meanwhile Syd Field's *The Definitive Guide to Screenwriting* (2008) results from his active screenwriting work and aims to practically teach aspirant screenwriters to produce their movie scripts in the context of the mainstream American film industry.

Francis Vanoye's *Scénarios modèles, modèles de scénarios* (1991)[83] begins by setting out how the film writing process involves several different phases, generally known as *synopsis*, *subject*, *treatment*, *dialogued continuity* and *script*. Over several drafts, writing passes through each stage until approval of the final draft. Therefore, as the French theorist reminds us, the film script should be considered as an

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[81] Francis Vanoye is a French scholar currently recognised as an emeritus professor at University of Paris X-Nanterre in the department of Film Studies. His works are well known in France, but widely translated in Italian as well. His publications focus on film and screenwriting analysis. See e.g. Vanoye, F. and Goliot-Lété, A. (1992) *Précis d'analyse filmique - Principles of film analysis*, Paris: Armand Colin and Vanoye, F. (2011) *L'adaptation littéraire au cinéma - Film Adaptation,* Paris: Armand Colin Cinema.

[82] Syd Field (1935-2013) was an American writer commonly recognised as one of the most important screenwriting guru of the 20th Century. His publications are extremely famous in the USA and have helped to establish the three-act structure paradigm in American mainstream cinema. His publications include Field, S. (1998) *Screenplay – The Foundation of Screenwriting*, New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group; Field, S. (1984) *Selling a Screenplay: The Screenwriter's Guide to Hollywood,* New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, and Field, S. (1998). *The Screenwriter's Problem Solver: How To Recognise, Identify and Define Screenwriting Problems*, New York: Dell Trade.

[83] I could access this book through its Italian translation *La Sceneggiatura – Forme, Dispositivi, Modelli*, Torino: Lindau, 1998. This book has registered a considerable and burgeoning interest in Italy and it has been reprinted in 1991 and 2011. I am not a French speaker and I did not have direct access to any English edition of the book. I have therefore translated into English all the quotes taken from this Italian edition and included in this chapter. Thus all quotations refer to the Italian edition.

"unstable object [that] often assumes hybrid or intermediate forms".[84] This is fundamental to understanding the next chapter of Vanoye's analysis which is specifically dedicated to the process of film adaptation. Here, the scholar decides not to adopt the *text-centered* perspective. On the contrary, he assesses two possible approaches that all screenwriters have to address before proceeding further. The first group of issues identifies a "set of technical problems"[85] in the adaptation process. Evidently, at this stage of the writing phase the 'source text' is still considered as a starting point for the screenwriter. However, the technical limitations of the cinematic medium must be kept in mind throughout the entire procedure. Vanoye refers to "the temporal limitation the adaptation has to face".[86] As a consequence, screenwriters have to cut a lot of the pre-existing material in terms of "descriptions, action and dialogues" while in other parts they are simultaneously "adding, expanding and supplementing".[87] Vanoye also identifies in the *"set of aesthetic choices"* the tension between the "realistic narrative"[88] (also referred to as "classic") and the "modern" one,[89] which is characterised by a higher level of narrative discontinuity, along with temporal and psychological fragmentation. In this way, the *style* of the adapted film may differ from the 'source text'. Here the scholar points out that the adaptation of a "classic novel" (such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*) may result in a "modern movie" (such a Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*).[90] He is approaching the phenomenon of film adaptation with a focus on its process, though not ignoring the practical engagement of the screenwriter amongst the web of technical, narrative and aesthetic challenges to be faced when adapting a literary text. Both the scriptwriter and 'reference text' may also have involvement in the later stages of making the film. Therefore Vanoye is espousing the principles of *intertextuality*, *intermediality* and *remediation* from a practical perspective, never forgetting to incorporate the criterion of fidelity as a methodological tool for the

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[84] Vanoye, F. (1991), p.10.

[85] Ibidem p.132 .

[86] Ibidem, p.132.

[87] Ibidem, p. 133.

[88] Ibidem, p. 143.

[89] Ibidem, p.143.

[90] *Apocalypse Now* (F. F. Coppola, USA, 1979).

adaptation process, bringing it out from its aesthetic constrictions.

Meanwhile, Syd Field teaches aspirant screenwriters to exclusively approach the adaptation process in a creative way. Therefore, the quality of the adapted script does not result from the acceptance of the criterion of fidelity exclusively in its aesthetical implication. On the contrary, "an adaptation must be viewed as an original screenplay. It only *starts* from the novel, book, play, article or song. That is *source* material, the starting point. Nothing more. When you adapt a novel, you are not obligated to remain faithful to the original material".[91] Syd Field's view of the adaptation process restores the importance of the screenwriters' authorship at the screenwriting phase. At the same time, he underlines how stories pass from one medium to another thanks to the specificity of each medium, in this case literature and cinema. "A novel usually deals with the *internal* life of someone", he writes. "It takes place inside the character's head [*while*] the screenplay deals with *externals,* with details. A screenplay is a story told with pictures, placed within the context of dramatic structure".[92] In conclusion, "you are still writing an original screenplay".[93] As a consequence, Field argues, the 'reference text' must not be "superimposed"[94] onto the screenwriter's shoulders, as both the novel's author and the screenwriter have the same dignity and, most importantly, the two media stand on their own and are independent from each other. Despite the fact that Field's guidelines do not consider the outcomes deriving from the phenomenon of *intertextuality* and *intermediality* and consequently he does keep the boundaries of each medium well separated and defined, this kind of perspective still allows us to give some consideration to the role of the script and the screenwriter in the adaptation process. Field claims that the writing process should not be underestimated and even when reduced to a marginal, technical stage of the film production, scripts still work as the starting point for the development of a film industry populated by multi-millionaires as well as zero-budget productions**.** As argued by Francis Vanoye, scripts already contain the visual power that will later be evident in the final cut. As a consequence,

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[91] Field, S. (2008), p. 324.

[92] Ibidem, p. 323-324.

[93] Ibidem, p. 323.

[94] Ibidem, p. 323.

scripts play a fundamental role in determining the quality and the success of the movie itself along with influencing the earnings of several film companies.[95]

1.1.4   A Possible Counterargument

The theories of *intertextuality*, *intermediality* and *remediation* alongside the practical screenwriting world provide a fascinating insight into how imageries relate with each other. However, when addressing the issue of Dante's *Inferno*, some might still argue: if an adapted 'infernal image' has no fidelity to the original 'text' - if one rejects fidelity - what becomes the criterion for deciding whether or not something is an 'adaptation' at all, let alone a 'successful' adaptation? Does the aforementioned *image-based* methodology locate a different criterion? And if so, what is it? These questions address the challenges the audience face to recognise fidelity as central. If, for instance, they do not know exactly where an imagery comes from, this may prevent adaptation from taking place and being investigated. This is an *adaptation paradox* which shows once more a greater urge for Adaptation Studies to shift to a unified range of methodologies. This thesis is built upon the premise that an obsessive focus on the aesthetic origin of the birth of images and imageries prevents impact of adaptations in societies from being explored. The *image-based* methodology adopted in this thesis instead shifts from the centrality of fidelity to examining when and why some specific imageries might have become crucial to the cultural, political, and social discourse, even when their origin may have been unknown. In this thesis, this becomes the new criterion for investigating adaptation. It is an approach which specifically applies to Dante. As discussed, though Dante's poem cannot be considered as the origin of infernal imageries, its lasting popularity across different times and national contexts have taken the topic of fidelity far beyond aesthetics and closer to social and political discourses. The following section thus evaluates the available academic discourse on the influence of Dante's *Commedia*, and, more specifically, Dante's *Inferno* on the screen in order to position

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[95] Recall the 2008 writers strike led by the two main American writers labour unions, WGAE and WGAW. The strike involved thousands of film, TV and radio writers. The protest mainly called for a salary raise for American writers operating in the entertainment industry along with the possibility of gaining a larger stake in the profits. The strike literally blocked a conspicuous part of the 2008 film, TV and radio productivity with damages calculated between $380 million (UCLA Anderson School Management) and $1.2 billion (Jack Kyser). For extended readings see Banks, M. J., (2015). *The Writers – a History of American Screenwriters and Their Guild*, New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press.

my contribution at the heart of a lively debate which can eventually enrich the entire discipline.

1.2   Dante and the screen

By 2015, we find three anthologies that are entirely dedicated to exploring the adaptation and remediation of Dante's imagery through the different arts and media. These studies represent the very first attempt to rationally organise this discipline in the academic world. These publications are *Dante nel Cinema – Dante and Cinema*, edited by Gianfranco Casadio and published in Italy in 1996; *Dante on View – The Reception of Dante in the Visual and Performing Arts*, edited by Antonella Braida e Luisa Calé and published in the UK in 2007, and finally *Dante Cinema and Television*, edited by Amilcare A. Iannucci and published in Canada and the United States in 2004 thanks to the active collaboration between the aegis of the Charles Speroni Chair of the Department of Italian, University of California in Los Angeles and the University of Toronto.[96] The three anthologies have therefore been edited in four different countries - Italy, United Kingdom and Canada/U.S.A. – and originally written in two different languages: Italian and English. These three works are strictly connected to each other and create significant cultural bridges in the academic world, between Italy and Europe and between Europe and North America.

Among the plethora of essays identifying and subsequently assessing relevant case studies in these anthologies, one main issue becomes evident: the lack of a shared methodology which can be adopted by those who would like to tackle the investigation of Dante and the screen, beyond selected case studies. Before proceeding to a more detailed examination of this methodological weakness, let us consider the main highlights of these anthologies and what common aspects they share. There is a noticeable pattern. The numerous academics who have studied practices of adaptation of Dante's *Commedia* have identified different strategies for approaching the topic. Firstly, all scholars agree in recognising that this phenomenon is primarily expressed through practices of intermedial interaction. As a matter of

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[96] Casadio, G. (1996). *Dante nel Cinema – Dante and Cinema*, Ravenna: Longo Editore; Braida A., and Calé, L. (2007). *Dante on View – The Reception of Dante in the Visual and Performing Arts*, London: Routledge and Iannucci, A. A. (2004) *Dante, Cinema and Television*, Toronto-Buffalo-London: University of Toronto Press.

fact, both *Dante and Cinema* and *Dante, Cinema and Television* are the result of three separate conferences.

Dante and Cinema contains a selection of essays following the 100th anniversary of the birth of Cinema in 1995. However, the anthology and preceding conference were just the final stages of a series of special events organised in Ravenna, the same city where Dante died as an exiled man. This included the screenings of movies related to Dante's *Commedia* and an associated photographic exhibition. Similarly, *Dante Cinema and Television* has its roots in the 1997 and 2001 conferences about Dante's legacy in cinema and television that their curator Amilcare A. Iannucci held in California. Combining academia with a festival atmosphere, these conferences "generated considerable interest" on a "subject which only very recent has begun to attract sustained scholarly attention"[97] and this is why the publication of the anthology became necessary.

But it is *Dante on View* which explores intermediality specifically, and through both historical and transnational perspectives. The second theme that distinguishes these studies is their international flavour, something which is made very clear in the introduction of *Dante on View* where we read: "the forms of transmission and adaptation of Dante's *Commedia* have much to do with movements and encounters of texts and people within and beyond Italy as well as with cosmopolitan communities, disciplines and practices".[98] This work therefore posits that the inner intermedial nature of the *Commedia* has inspired a particularly intense phenomenon of appropriation and a reworking of other visual and performing arts, taking Dante's work far "beyond the precincts of the literary".[99] But how could this be possible?

An answer is given in Peter Armour's opening essay, *The Comedy as a Text of Performance*, in which the scholar shows how the *Commedia* has managed to overcome the boundaries of literature since its first divulgation in the 14th

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[97] Iannucci, A.A. (2004), p.VII.

[98] Braida A., and Calé, L. (2007), p.2

[99] Ibidem p.3

century.[100] This was first due to Dante's choice to write the text in vulgar Florentine Language[101] rather than in Latin – a choice which has certainly increased the range of its audience and transcended any distinction of class.[102] However, the intertextual and intermedial nature of the *Commedia* were not only related to the employment of different writing styles, but to a certain *performative* drive. Armour explains: "though certainly written to be read, the Comedy contains innumerable references to the poem, and to works by other poets, as speech or song, and hence to its receiver as a hearer rather than as an individual reader".[103] Here Armour refers not only to preceding religious books such as the Bible, but also Thomas Aquinas' and Boethius's *oeuvres* which explore the structure and the sorting of the afterlife.[104] It has been widely agreed that many other non-religious texts have deeply influenced Dante's *Commedia* such as the love poetry of the *Stil Novo circle*[105] and Brunetto Latini's *Tesoretto* and *Tresor*.[106] In this way, Armour seems to align with subsequent scholars such as Richard H. Lansing (2003), who has investigated how Dante himself has

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[100] Armour, P. (2007). *The Comedy as a Text of Performance*. In A. Braida and L. Calé, *Dante on View*, London: Routledge, pp.17-22.

[101] With 'vulgar Florentine Language' we refer to the dialect spoken by common people ('vulgus' in Latin means people) in Florence in Dante's times. After the Italian unification in 1861, the government of the new-born state decided to adopt the Florentine Vulgar as a national language, thanks to the vital importance that this language played in the literary *oeuvres* of Tuscanic writers such as Dante Alighieri, Francesco Petrarca and Giovanni Boccaccio. For further references see Shapiro, M., (1990), *Dante Alighieri's De Vulgari Eloquentia – The Book of Exile*, tr and ed., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

[102] For a portrait of the Italian society and the role of women between the 13th and 14th Century see Trevor, D., (2000). *The Towns of Italy in the Late Middle Ages*, Manchester: University of Manchester Press, and Black, R., (2007). *Education and Society in Florentine Tuscany: Teachers, Pupils and Schools (1250-1500)*, (Leiden, NL: Koninklijke Brill NV).

[103] Armour, P. (2007), p.18.

[104] For further references about the relationship between Dante and the Bible or Dante and his contemporary theological debates see Benfell, S. V. (2011). *The Biblical Dante*, Toronto-Buffalo-London: University of Toronto Press Inc.

[105] *Dolce Stil Novo* is an Italian literary movement developed in the 13th Century among several Italian areas such as Sicily and Tuscany and the city of Bologna. The main themes Stilnovist poets face are Love (Amore) and Noblemindedness (Gentilezza). The term was originally created by Dante Alighieri to indicate himself along with other poets of his time such as Guido Guinizelli, Guido Cavalcanti, Lapo Gianni, Gianni Alfani, Dino Frescobaldi and Cino da Pistoia. For further references please see Barolini, T. (2006). *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture*, New York: Fordham University Press.

[106] Brunetto Latini (Florence c.a. 1220 – 1294 or 1295) was an Italian poet and politician. He was one of Dante's closest friends and guardian after the death of Dante's father. He first wrote "Tesoretto", an unfinished poem in "Florentine" vulgar. The protagonist of the poem gets lost in a 'diverse forest' where several personifications of Nature and Virtues talk with him about the order of the world. Subsequently, he wrote "Li Livres dou Trésor" or simply "Tresor" during his exile in France. The *oeuvre* is written in Langues d'Oil and constitutes three books facing several religious, scientific and philosophical issues. Dante collocates Brunetto Latini in the XVth canto of the *Inferno*, in the circle of the Sodomites. For further references see Dante Alighieri, *Inferno* XV and Bolton-Holloway, J. (1993). *Twice-told tales: Brunetto Latini and Dante Alighieri*, New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc.

productively interacted with the literature around him with "authoritative freedom" and "poetic license"[107] along with an unmistakable stylistic trademark. This demonstrates how Dante's text itself presents a high level of *intertextuality* and therefore cannot be considered as the *zero grade* in the film adaptation process but, on the contrary, should be considered as part of the productive dialogue within literature and the other arts. The *Commedia* is in fact a *producerly text,* which, in John Fiske's analysis (1987), also "combines the televisual characteristics of a writerly text with the easy accessibility of the readerly".[108] In this way, the adaptation of the *Commedia* throughout the centuries has involved several arts and media: from medieval public readings and commentaries, passing through illustrations and paintings, and into the modern era with theatre, ballet, opera and audio-visual products. *Dante on View* explores precisely this intermedial phenomenon with an international focus.

To begin with, a seminal group of studies is dedicated to exploring the remediation of Dante's imagery in the visual arts, starting from middle-age manuscripts and the Renaissance paintings. In fact: "the early Trecento represent(s) the beginning of a tradition of *Commedia* illumination, one which culminated in Botticelli's designs for the poem, produced during the 1480s and 90s".[109] It is in fact "Botticelli's realistic, recognisable and definite portrait of the poet [which] demonstrates the need that had arisen for such an image as the Renaissance became established with its more literal and materialist ideals".[110] This visual heritage has evolved and been reworked among "patrons, scholars, scribes, commentators, oral recitations of the poem, workshop practice, and other illustrators and artists"[111] leading up to the modern era through works including Gustave Doré's illustrations of the *Commedia*, the Pre-Raphaelites and Salvador Dalì's paintings.[112] Since 1861,

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[107] Lansing, R. H. (2003), *Dante: the Critical Complex – Volume I*, New York: Routledge, p.161.

[108] Fiske, J. (1987). *Television Culture*. London: Methuen, p.95.

[109] Owen, R. (2007). *The Image of Dante Poet and Pilgrim.* In A. Braida and L. Calé, *Dante on View*, London: Ashgate, p.84

[110] Ibidem, p.84

[111] Ibidem, p.84.

[112] For more extended readings see also Havely N., (2007). *Francesca Observed: Painting and Illustration, c. 1790-184.* In A. Braida and L. Calé, *Dante on View*, London: Ashgate, pp.95-108; Pieri, G. (2007). *Dante and the Pre-*

"Doré's illustrations, in particular, accompanied almost every new edition of the *Commedia* [...] and became the lens through which Dante's text was viewed by generations of readers".[113]

Meanwhile, in music, we acknowledge that between the 16th and early 21st century at least "200 adaptations of Dante's *Commedia* have been composed"[114] across different music genres such as classical, electronic with live chorus and hyper-instrumental with a chamber orchestra. Equally, the dialectic between Dante and stage arts is central to other essays, including Richard Cooper's *Dante on the Nineteenth-Century Stage*.[115] Besides Italian productions, Cooper explores this phenomenon among the "60 or more plays [that] put Dante on stage"[116] between 1750 and 1910. Among them he recalls the importance of *Ugolino* (1768) by the German playwright Heinrich Wilhelm Gerstenberg (1737-1823) and the hugely successful play based on *Paolo and Francesca* by the American dramatist George Henri Boker (1823-1890), first produced in 1855 and then followed by an acclaimed revival in 1882. But it was the itinerant work of actor Gustavo da Modena (1803-1861) which "rapidly set the fashion of Dante declamations".[117]

The legacy of Dante's imagery was not limited only to the theatrical stage, but it quickly became central to the cinematic screen from the Silent Era onwards. This is particularly relevant because the cinematic medium itself presents audio-visual and performative components inherited and reworked by contact with other arts. A good example of how this process has worked throughout the decades has been investigated in Amilcare A. Iannucci's *Francesca da Rimini: the Movie* which

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Raphaelites: British and Italian Responses. In A. Braida and L. Calé, *Dante on View*, London: Ashgate, pp.109-140 and Schiaffini, I. (2007). *From Hell to Paradise or the Other Way Round? Salvador Dalì's Divina Commedia.* In A. Braida and L. Calé, *Dante on View*, London: Ashgate, pp.141-150.

[113] Pieri, G. (2007), p.119

[114] Roglieri, M. A. (2007). *La Dolce Sinfonia del Paradiso: can Mere Mortals Compose it?.* In A. Braida and L. Calé, *Dante on View*, London: Ashgate, p.67.

[115] Cooper, R, (2007). *Dante on the Nineteenth-Century's Stage.* In A. Braida and L. Calé, *Dante on View*, London: Routledge, pp.23-38.

[116] Ibidem p.26

[117] Ibidem p.25

analyses the huge impact this Dantean character has had in film history.[118] The essay investigates the variations of the story according to different popular traditions as "it is estimated that the Nineteenth century saw the production in Europe alone of some 60 plays on the Francesca theme", especially in Italian and American productions. Surprisingly, the American film industry preceded the Italian one as "the first film version of Francesca story was made by the Vitagraph Company of America in 1907".[119] Meanwhile in Italy, audiences enjoyed films entirely centred on Francesca da Rimini as a main protagonist, such as those made in 1908 (directed by Ugo Morais) and 1910 (directed by Ugo Falena). But there were also movies where Francesca da Rimini appears as a secondary character such as *Inferno* (Milano Films, ITA, 1911), a pivotal film which is central to this research in Chapter Three. The last movie of the Silent Era, *The Drums of Love* (Griffith, USA, 1928), started two trends of reworking Francesca's story: by actualizing the story - for example in Griffith's version which "transposes Francesca's story to Nineteenth-century South America"[120] - or by considering other variations which belong to popular tradition, such as Paolo Matarazzo's *Paolo e Francesca* (ITA, 1949) and Gianni Vernuccio's production (ITA, 1971), both of which are chiefly based upon Boccaccio's version of Francesca da Rimini.

While *Dante on View* dedicates equal attention to the adaptation and remediation of Dante's imagery among the various visual and performing arts, a deeper focus on the cinematic screen is the core of both of the other anthologies, *Dante and Cinema* and *Dante, Cinema and Television*.[121] Here, we find another common theme: that the remediation of Dante's imagery has "nourished both cinema and television from their inception down to present day",[122] and, based on the diversity of the contributions, this is true of European and Northern American

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[118] Iannucci, A. A. (2007). *Francesca da Rimini: the Movie.* In A. Braida and L. Calé, *Dante on View*, London: Ashgate, pp.153-162

[119] Ibidem p.154

[120] Ibidem p.155

[121] Braida A., and Calé, L. (2007). *Dante on View – The Reception of Dante in the Visual and Performing Arts*, London: Routledge and Iannucci, A. A., (2004) *Dante, Cinema and Television*, Toronto-Buffalo-London: University of Toronto Press.

[122] Iannucci, A. A. (2004), p.X.

productions. However, if we go through the anthologies attempting to historically trace and address this phenomenon, we notice the lack of a solid method of categorisation for the movies, made evident by the numerous attempts to both reaffirm and deconstruct the criterion of fidelity.

A good example of the *text-centered* tendency is found in Martinelli's filmography overview. In his *Reasoned Filmography*,[123] the scholar proposes a preliminary distinction of the movies in three categories, respectively named *Dantean Biographies*, *Cantiche* and *Characters*. The first one includes all those movies aiming to transpose on the screen the life of Dante and his times with historical accuracy. The second category is related to those movies which are based on a single *cantica* such as *Inferno* by Milano Films (ITA, 1911) and the trilogy produced by Psyche-Helios: that of *Inferno* (Berardi, Busnego 1911), *Purgatorio* (1911) and *Paradiso* (1912). The third category is the collection of movies based on the adventures of a specific character of the *Commedia* such as *Il Conte Ugolino* (e.g. De Liguoro 1908 and Freda 1949), *Francesca da Rimini* (e.g. Blacktone 1908 and Blacktone 1910) and *Pia De' Tolomei* (e.g. Lo Savio 1910, Pratelli 1941, Grieco 1958).

Parallel to the employment of the criterion of fidelity as a main theoretical tool, others advance the possibility that the adaptation of Dante's world on the screen does not necessarily imply a strict and intentional adaptive relationship with the 'reference text'. Gian Piero Brunetta's *Padre Father Dante who art in Cinema* and Antonio Costa's essay *Revisited Inferno*[124] are prime examples of this second tendency. The former focuses on the influence of Dante on Federico Fellini and Pier Paolo Pasolini, critiquing structure and style more than content. In fact, as Brunetta points out, they have "assimilated and metabolised the narrative structure and the epiphanic power of the characters of Dante's *Commedia*".[125] In this way, Dante becomes a *de facto* moral guide for the artists: a "deep ethical and cultural model" to

[123] Martinelli, V. (1996). *Filmografia Ragionata - Reasoned Filmography*. In G. Casadio, *Dante nel Cinema*, Ravenna: Longo Editore, pp.103-119.

[124] Brunetta, G. P. (1996). *Padre Dante che sei nel Cinema – Father Dante Who Art in Cinema*. In G. Casadio, *Dante nel Cinema*, Ravenna: Longo Editore, pp.21- 28 and Costa. A., (1996). *L'Inferno Rivisitato – Revisited Inferno*. In G. Casadio, *Dante nel Cinema*, Ravenna: Longo Editore, pp. 45-58.

[125] Original Italian: "hanno assimilato e metabolizzato nella sua opera, la struttura narrativa e la potenza epifanica delle figure della commedia dantesca". In Brunetta, G. (1996), p.21.

follow thanks to the "contamination of all the writing styles and as a sense of exemplar journey".[126] Acosta's *Revisited Inferno* draws attention to this creative attitude towards the source text, by showing how Dante could also be parodied. The film, *Maciste all'Inferno* (Brignone, 1926), a parody infernal journey of a post-fascist avenger, had deeply influenced Federico Fellini's filmography, especially in terms of the employment of irony. This is further explored in an international context by essays like Amilcare A. Iannucci's *Dante and Hollywood*, in which Dante's influence in the USA has been identified in "all forms of popular entertainment".[127] More specifically, Iannucci explores Dante's impact on the political criticism expressed by directors such as Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, Sir Alan Parker, David Lynch and Tim Burton through their movies. Dante's infernal journey not only "serves as the backdrop to the visual treatment of a modern journey through hell"[128] in movies such as Martin Scorsese's *Mean Streets*, (1973) or *Taxi Driver* (1976) but also takes a leading role in guiding the "plot, theme, or structure".[129] Several neo-noir movies such as Taylor Hackford's *The Devil's Advocate* (1997) are in the first group. David Fincher's *Se7en* (1995) is in the second as it creates an infernal mood with incessant rainfall in the dark, dystopian city. In the third group are movies such as Woody Allen's *Deconstructing Harry* (1998) which uses the *Commedia*'s structure of interlocking biographical stories in a comedic way.[130] This attitude towards the *Commedia* from contemporary directors is defined by Iannucci as a process of "appropriation by metonymy".[131]

In the same vein, John Tulk's *Dante and Canadian Cinema* focuses on the impact of Dante's *Inferno* in Canadian cinema.[132] Tulk points out that the

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[126] Original Italian: "modello etico e culturale profondo da riutilizzare per il suo esempio di contaminazione di tutte le scritture e per il suo senso di itinerarium esemplare". Ibidem, p.23.

[127] Iannucci, A. A. (2004). Dante and Hollywood. In A. A. Iannucci, *Dante Cinema and Television*, Toronto-Buffalo-London: University of Toronto Press, pp.3-20.

[128] Ibidem p11

[129] Ibidem p.11

[130] For a deeper analysis of these and other movies see Iannucci, A. A., *Dante and Hollywood*, in A. A. Iannucci, Amilcare A. (2004) *Dante, Cinema and Television*, Toronto-Buffalo-London: Toronto University Press, pp.3-20.

[131] Ibidem p.18

[132] Tulk, J. (2004). *Dante and Canadian Cinema.* In A. A. Iannucci, Amilcare A., (2004) *Dante, Cinema and Television*, Toronto-Buffalo-London: Toronto University Press, 2004, pp.176-188.

appropriation of Dante in Canadian film history is "pervasive and enduring"[133] from the Silent Era to contemporary film productions and especially on the "pivotal issue of vision".[134] In relation to this, the scholar focuses on two English-speaking Canadian productions, one of which was produced in the Silent Era. David M. Hartford's *Back to God's Country* (1919) continues the American tendency in the Silent Era of taking Dante into the genre of melodrama, making use of sequences of a freezing sea-crossing and shots in the forest as a metaphorical journey inside human nature - with a theme of good versus evil. Bruce Elder's *Illuminated Texts* (1982) takes the power of the vision out of the mechanism of narration. Indeed, the afterlife vision is taken as a proper "spiritual education" that both Dante and Elder undertook through their own art. Both of them have, at their core, explore the visionary boundaries of "images of suffering" (particularly related to their personal life experience of exile, and in general to human suffering) and a "discovery of divine love".[135]

However, despite all three anthologies offering an overview of the international legacy of Dante's imagery among the arts and and especially on cinema and TV, very little has been agreed in terms of a shared methodology when approaching this new field of study. In his essay, *Dante in the Cinema or Dante and the Cinema?* Christopher Wagstaff (2007) proposes an overdue change of perspective when facing up to the "topic of Dante in the cinema - or more accurately "Dantesque materials in films".[136] Contrary to a "philological/historical approach"[137] proposed by scholars such as John Welle, Wagstaff instead encourages the academic world to alter their "perspective, installing the concerns of the present as paramount", as in this way "we might be able to view Dante and his poetry from the point of view of the concerns of the cinema in the twentieth century. This

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[133] Iannucci, p.177

[134] Ibidem p.177

[135] Ibidem p.183

[136] Wagstaff, C. (2007*). Dante in the Cinema or Dante and the Cinema*? In A. Braida and L. Calé, *Dante on View*, London: Ashgate, p.164.

[137] Iannucci, A. A. (2004). *Dante, Cinema and Television*, p. XII. See more specifically, Welle, J. P. (2004). *Early Cinema, Dante's Inferno of 1911 and the Origins of Italian film Culture*. In A. A. Iannucci, Dante, Cinema and Television, pp.21-50.

perspective restores a more active role to contemporary culture, and invites us to enquire whether contemporary artists might not be tackling problems similar to those which faced Dante seven hundred years ago".[138] This theoretical framework aims therefore to solve the two apparently contradictory and irreconcilable methodologies foregrounding the broader field of Film Adaptation Studies: that of the strict employment of the criterion of fidelity in its aesthetic reading and a greater focus on the intermedial appropriation and circulation of Dante's legacy in the past seven centuries in a transnational context.

Within the broader field of Film Adaptation Studies, Linda Hutcheon's previously discussed *A Theory of Adaptation* (2013) is joined by Antonella Braida and Luisa Calé as they argue the case for a multidisciplinary methodology when analysing Dante on the screen. In their introduction to *Dante on View* in which the intermedial nature of the phenomenon is remarked upon, they explain "to study the visual reception means more than to trace such an act of translation from one medium to another, and to secure such media to the tools of discrete disciplines".[139] However, neither Wagstaff, Calé, Braida nor any other theorist from the general field of Film Adaptation Studies has explained in any further depth how and in which ways this multidisciplinary approach should be developed for analysing Dante and the screen in order to focus on the adaptation of its images and imageries across different media, especially through the cinematic screen. Linda Hutcheon herself, despite promoting a more multidisciplinary based approach, remains closer to the centrality of the 'reference text' by explaining how her "method has been to identify a text-based issue that extends across a variety of media, find ways to study it comparatively, and then tease out the theoretical implications from multiple textual examples".[140]

Another deficiency becomes relevant when confronted with a lack of detailed methodology: there is no deep and comprehensive exploration of practices of adaptation of Dante's work in the digital era among the different arts and media in

[138] Wagstaff, C. (2007), p.164

[139] Braida A. and Calé, L. (2007), p.5

[140] Hutcheon, L. and O'Flynn S. (2013), p. XIV.

any of these volumes. As a consequence, before addressing in more depth the question of methodology, the following chapter is dedicated to a general understanding of the adaptation of Dante's work across the different arts in 2005 to 2015 before providing a broader discussion of the methodology applied to the following chapters.

CHAPTER 2.   DANTE TODAY: AROUND AND BEYOND CINEMA

The previous chapter argued that the phenomenon of adapting Dante's *Commedia* has endured and grown over the past seven centuries, characterised by a strong transnational and intermedial nature, through practices of appropriation, manipulation and rewriting. We could therefore conclude that this phenomenon does not show the predominance of literature among other media, but on the contrary, a coexistence and mutual dialogue. In light of this, I also followed the line of recent academic discourse by turning the methodological lenses towards the principles of *intermediality* and *remediation* rather than the employment of the criterion of fidelity from a merely aesthetical standpoint. Also, while many scholars have contributed to enriching Adaptation Studies by exploring the adaptation of Dante's *oeuvre* through the different arts in the past seven centuries, very little has been written about this phenomenon in 2005-2015. Consequently, two questions still remain unclear: what kind of intermedial adaptations have arisen in 2005-2015? In light of this broader context, which methodology may be addressed to support an appropriate investigation of this phenomenon in its specific relation to the cinematic screen in the digital era? The aim of this second chapter is therefore twofold and will clarify why this shift in perspective is indispensable in order to better investigate the relativity of media boundaries in practices of adaptation. This chapter therefore intends to provide a significant overview of this process of interrelation and hybridisation in the years indicated, and shows how the intermedial adaptation of Dante's *Commedia* has been continuing through 2005 to 2015, before paying greater attention to the cinematic experience, which remains the main focus of this thesis. For these reasons, I explore three key examples of this context that rethinks the boundaries of literature, public readings and the Internet fan tributes which show further evidence for an urgent shift to a shared methodology. In particular the chapter develops as follows: first, I discuss the importance of the 2013 English translation of the *Commedia* by Clive James.[141] This provides a general assessment of

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[141] James, C. (2013). *The Divine Comedy – translated by Clive James*, New York: WW Norton & Co. Clive James was born and has spent most of his youth in Australia, where he completed his university degree. In early 1960s he moved to the UK, a country that has progressively become his new home. During the course of his life he has

the international circulation of Dante's text in the years considered. Secondly, I consider Roberto Benigni's popular show *Tutto Dante* (RAI, 2006 - 2015) in order to explore the how the practice of public reading of the *Commedia* has been broadcast on Italian TV and simultaneously became truly international. Finally, I address the extensive body of Dante fan tributes on YouTube by investigating the key examples of *Dante's Inferno (Clay Animation 16 mm.)* (2007), *Barbie's Inferno* (2007) and *Dante's Inferno Lego Stop Motion* (2008).[142] This enables an assessment of the popularity of Dante's legacy among Dante's online fan communities. This enables us to reach a broader insight of the methodology adopted for the second part of this thesis, which mainly focuses on the cinematic screen.

2.1 The Divine Comedy by Clive James (2013) – Translating the *Commedia* as a Text of Performance

2.1.1 Introduction

In 2013 *The Divine Comedy – Translated by Clive James* came out. Up to 2015, this is the latest translation of Dante's poem in English, which was first published in the U.S.A by the American Liveright Publishing Corporation, and followed just a few weeks later by Picador in the UK.[143] Both these editions are available in printed and ebook versions, as the studios let this translation circulate between traditional and digital devices. The genesis of this translation has its roots in over fifty years of Clive James' work. In fact, this 2013 edition of came out when the author was already in his seventies, and is the result of a lifelong interest in the *Commedia*, thanks also to the mediation of his wife Dr Prue Shaw, who is a remarkable scholar in Italian

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published several collections of poetry, along with autobiographical memoirs and non-fictional works including, for instance, collections of essays and books of television criticism. See for example James, C. (1991). *Clive James on Television*, London: Picador or James, C. (2009). *The Revolt Of the Pendulum: Essays 2005-2009,* London: Picador.

[142] MugglebornSweethart (2007). *Barbie's Inferno*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBMzUPmSS1k&t=36s (Accessed 30/01/2017); Allmanknack (2011). *Lego Dante's Inferno*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97_IhOr4dMc&t=33s (Accessed 30/01/2017) and alexgwaller (2007). *Dante's Inferno (Clay Animation 16mm)*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XW8L7O8qGgg (Accessed 30/01/2017).

[143] James, C., (2013). *The Divine Comedy – translated by Clive James*, New York: WW Norton & Co, and James, C., (2013), *The Divine Comedy – translated by Clive James,* London: Picador.

Studies at the University College London.[144] What is the significance of a new translation of Dante's *Commedia* in modern English more than seven centuries after its first circulation? Thanks to his proficiency in Italian, Clive James attributes the never-ending success of Dante's poem among audiences to the greatness of its fictional world and the captivating power of its verse, which James considers to being too often underestimated by many translations resulting "in very compressed English prose".[145] On the contrary, the Italian poet was able to create a dynamic interaction between language, structure and story. In James' words: "Dante is not only tunnelling in the depth of meaning, he is working much closer to the surface texture: working within it".[146] In this way, the purpose of Clive James's work was designed to "make the text more readable instead of less"[147] while trying to maintain this tension between the story and the verse that James conceives as being interdependent and connected and not separated in a sterile dichotomy between form and content. However, achieving this balance was not an easy task. As Hans Gadamer (1975) reminds us of this in *Truth and Method* where each act of translation deals with matters of "interpretation", mostly from the perspective of both the translator and the readers.[148] It is therefore impossible to obtain a perfect and immutable translated version that might be able to stand as eternally accessible to audiences. It is evident that the relativity of the reading experience is a direct consequence of the plethora of historical, social and cultural changes affecting the translation process and the reader's subjectivity, and affected by changes in

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[144] Clive James reminds us in the introduction of the book that Prue Shaw has played an important role for him to approach Dante: "when we were together in Florence in the mid-1960s, a few years before we were married, [she] taught me the great secret of Dante's masterpiece lays in the handling of the verse, which always moved forward, even in the most intensely compressed of episodes". In James, C. (2013). *The Divine Comedy – translated by Clive James*, London: Picador, p.XI. Moreover, it is curious to underline that as Dante was encouraged to complete his afterlife journey by his beloved Beatrice, Clive James too was originally pulled by his beloved wife to approach Dante's work.

[145] Ibidem, p. XIII

[146] Ibidem, p. XIII, The *terzina* is the typical three-verse structure of Dante's *Commedia*. It is composed of three hendecasyllables where the first and the third ones rhyme with each other in an 'A B A' pattern, while the second line rhymes with the first and the third ones of the next *terzina*, in a 'B C B' pattern. Benedetto Croce defines it as: "not any *terzina* in general but precisely the Dantesque *terzina* – kneaded out of his very linguistic, syntactic, and stylistic material, beaten out with the inflection and accent, that he himself gave it, different from the *terzina* adopted by other poets." in Croce, B. (1990). *Essays on Literature and Literary Criticism*, New York: State University of New York Press, p. 71.

[147] Ibidem, p. XVIII

[148] In Gadamer, H. G. (2004). *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed, London - New York: Continuum, p.386: "Thus every translation is at the same time an interpretation. We can even say that the translation is the culmination of the interpretation that the translator has made of the words given him".

technology. More specifically, the kind of translation Clive James had to face dealt with actualising a piece of literature written in 14th century vulgar Italian into a new piece of literature written in 21st century modern English. As James himself explained in the introduction to his version, his biggest intervention was to transform the Dantesque *terzina* into the English *quatrain*, a four-line verse structure. He explained some potentially obscure passages within the body of the text rather than in the footnotes.[149] In this way, it was possible to preserve the engaging Dantesque rhythm in English, a kind of rhythm that is constantly able to push the afterlife journey of the text onward and not to interrupt the reader's flow. But why is the adoption of the *quatrain* so important for appealing to contemporary readers? This necessity of preserving an engaging rhythm in order to keep the reader focused on the text is connected to the cinematic and narrative sensibility to which wider audiences are constantly exposed in the West. As previously stated in the Introduction to this research, many scholars have recognised the powerful presence of audio-visual features in Dante's *Commedia*. Prue Shaw herself (2014) has further explored Dante's capacity to:

> "imagine a world and give it form and substance with incredible verbal economy and precision. By conjuring up the sights and sounds and smells of the familiar world with unparalleled immediacy, he was able to lead his readers through invented worlds that were utterly convincing though infinitely strange. He populated them with individuals whose emotions and moral predicaments and tangible and compelling. Those he encounters speak with eloquence and their interchanges with Dante are full of drama."[150]

This combination of synesthetic narrative and compelling characters is in accordance with Karin Littau's idea of *cinemacity* in media history (2013), where *cinemacity* is not solely intended to be the exclusive property of the medium of cinema, but as an endemic drive that "might help express the sense of cinema as dynamic, interconnected and interrelated not only with those media it closely resembles, but with a broad range of art forms and expressive modes, even those

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[149] A *quatrain* is a type of stanza composed of four lines. Marjorie Boulton defines it as "Any verse of four rhyming lines: the possible rhyme schemes are: ABAB, ABCB, AAAA, ABBA, AAAB, AABA". In Boulton, M. (2013). *The Anatomy of Poetry*, London: Routledge, p.150.

[150] Shaw, P. (2014). *Reading Dante From Here to Eternity*, New York, London: Liveright, p.XIV

that came before the watershed year of 1895".[151] This perspective strengthens once more the idea that the phenomenon of adapting Dante's work should be approached with the lenses of *intermediality* and *remediation,* as it encourages us to remember that "all media, cinema included, are part of an ecology of intermedial borrowings, conjoinings and convergences".[152] This allows us to think about media history not in a strictly chronological nor hierarchical order, but instead as an enduring dialogue where past and present mutually reshape each other. If we adopt this revised perspective, it is possible to refer to *cinemacity* in Dante's *Commedia* in at least two ways: the one involving the fictional world of the text and the second belonging to the acknowledged cinematic sensibility of contemporary spectators. Both aspects may actively contribute to an understanding of the popularity of the *Commedia* in contemporary times as not being solely confined to the literary premises. The following examples of the *intermedial* circulation of the *Commedia* in the period of focus of this thesis helps to strengthen this evidence.

2.2   Roberto Benigni's *Tutto Dante* (ITA, 2006 – 2015)

2.2.1   Introduction

The Oscar winner[153] Roberto Benigni originally performed his first *Tutto Dante* show in June 2006, at Patrasso theatre, Greece. After this inaugural event, the following cycle of thirteen performances took place in Piazza Santa Croce, Florence, right at the centre of Dante's hometown (Figure 1).

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[151] Littau, K. and Geiger, J. (2013)., *Cinemacity in Media History*, ed., Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p.8.

[152] Ibidem, p.3.

[153] Roberto Benigni won the Oscar for the Best film in a foreign language with *La Vita è Bella – Life is Beautiful* (ITA, 1999).
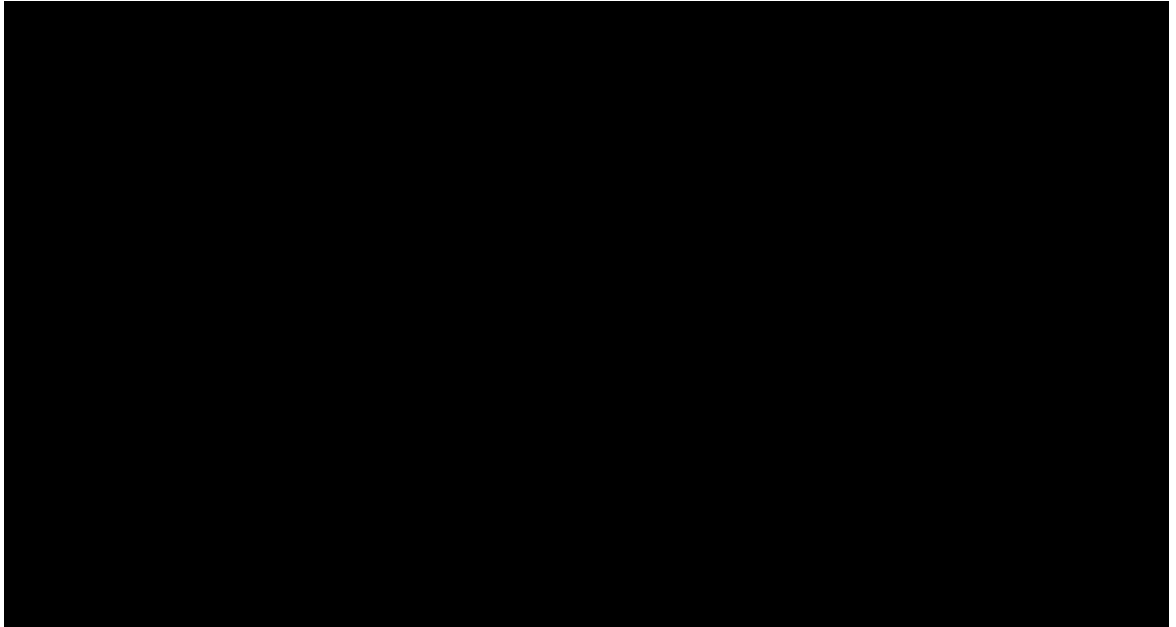
Figure 2.1 *Tutto Dante 2006:* **View of Piazza Santa Croce (Florence) with audience**

Since 2006, the show has toured over fifty Italian piazzas and theatres, with "more than 600.000 spectators, 120.000 in Rome alone".[154] In addition, several of the shows performed in Florence have been filmed and broadcasted on RAI TV channels, the main Italian public TV network. Furthermore, in order to celebrate the huge success of the first edition of the show, a special DVD collection was launched between March and June 2008 on the Italian market. The first thirteen DVDs are exclusively dedicated to the shows performed in Florence during the summer of 2006, while the last two contain the show dedicated to *Inferno V*, which was broadcast by RAI1 in primetime in 2007. Finally, during the last season in 2014 Benigni has performed all the 34 cantos of the *Inferno* and therefore completed the reading of all the first *cantica*, the *Inferno* garnering much greater interest than the other two *cantiche: Purgatory* and *Heaven*.[155]

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[154] These data are taken from the official website of the show http://www.tuttodante.it/

[155] On the reasons why Dante's *Inferno* is in conversation with contemporary times, Pino Loperfido has pointed out: "The inferno the Poet goes through is the inferno that belongs to our everyday life. It deals with bills, diseases, accidents and with the efforts we make every day. That kind of efforts we are asked to make as, like Dante, if we want to reach Heaven, if we want to experiment what happiness is in this specific moment, we need to pass through hell. It's a mandatory step. We cannot skip it. We cannot pretend that evil does not exist and that it is useless. We need to face what's evil; we need to cross it while we look inside of ourselves. We must face the scariest part of ourselves." Original Italian: "L'inferno in cui il Poeta scende è l'inferno delle nostre vite, fatto di mutui da pagare, di malattie, di incidenti, della fatica di ogni giorno. Una fatica che ci viene chiesta proprio perché,

However, the tradition of public lectures of Dante's *Commedia* did not start with Roberto Benigni alone, but dates back to the 14th century, a few years after Dante's death, when Giovanni Boccaccio gave public readings and held discussions about the poem in Piazza Santa Croce, Florence, the same place where Benigni often performed his show.[156] Nevertheless, Boccaccio's reading was not an isolated episode, as many other lecturers have performed the *lectura dantis*[157] in universities, squares and theatres for the past seven centuries.[158] Roberto Benigni's *Tutto Dante* is the second relevant example that supports the urgency of a methodology shift towards a greater employment of intermedial lenses, in order to better evaluate practices of adaptation of Dante's *Commedia* in the decade 2005-2015. Benigni's show owes its popularity to three main aspects: that of the involvement of different media both in its performance and circulation, a witty political satire aiming to link Dante's legacy to the contemporary Italian public discourse and finally, a strong international circulation that attracted "another 100.000 spectators" to watch the show in Europe, USA and Canada.[159]

The format of this specific *lectura dantis* makes it clear that, despite being at the essence of the public reading, the text itself is not the sole component of Benigni's success, rather it should also be attributed to the mutual interaction of different performative elements. The structure of the show itself uses this intermedial dialogue from the beginning. An instrumental overture welcomes Benigni on stage, where the Italian actor greets the audience enthusiastically. Subsequently, Benigni reminds the audience which *canto* taken from the *Commedia* he is going to analyse,

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come Dante, per andare in paradise, per sperimentare cioè la felicità qui ed ora, bisogna prima passare dall'inferno. E' un passaggio obbligato, irrinunciabile. Fare finta che il male non esista non serve a nulla. Bisogna affrontarlo il male, attraversarlo guardando dentro di noi. Mettersi faccia a faccia con quella parte di noi stessi che più ci fa paura." In Loperfido, P. (2007). 'Benigni e Dante: all'Inferno ci siamo noi - Benigni and Dante: we are the ones in Hell', *L'Adige*, 1st December.

[156] Giovanni Boccaccio (1313 – 1375) is recognised as one of the greatest Italian writers and poets of the 15th century. Along with Dante Alighieri and Francesco Petrarca is considered as one of the Fathers of modern Italian. His most famous work is the *Decameron* (1348-1351) written in Florentine vulgar. The *Decameron* narrates the story of ten young people, three boys and seven girls, who decide to escape from the plague that hit Florence in 1348. In ten days they narrate to each other exactly 100 stories, that of ten per day. Consequently, the *Decameron* is the literary collection of these 100 stories. For more extended reading see Papio, M. (2009). *Boccaccio's Expositions on Dante's Comedy*, Toronto-Buffalo-London: University of Toronto Press.

[157] With *lectura dantis* we refer to the public declamation of the cantos taken from Dante's *Commedia*.

[158] See Smarr, L. (2007). *Writers Reading Writers: Intertextual Studies in Medieval and Early Modern*, Cranbury, NJ: University of Delaware Press.

[159] As reported in the show's official website http://www.tuttodante.it/

explain and read during the show. Benigni often expresses his political satire by creating a parallelism between the theme of the canto and some contemporary political hot topics. Later, Benigni starts reading the *canto terzina* by *terzina* (three verses at a time). In this phase of the show, the *canto* is read directly via a printed copy of the book which the actor holds next to him at the centre of the stage, visible from the audience. In this way, the *Commedia* as a physical item becomes a stage prop and a fundamental component of the reciting performance. Here, Benigni paraphrases some difficult words that cannot be immediately understood and then explains the themes of the *canto* by including comments on the characters, the afterlife environment and the actions which take place. The first three phases of the show generally maintain the comedic tone and then turn more pedagogic only in the explanation of the *terzine*. Finally, the last part of the performance is entirely dedicated to the recitation by memory of the whole *canto* in its original 14th century language. Here, the tone suddenly becomes serious and solemn. In order to underline this change of register, the stage lights change from being clear and diffuse to being darker and focused on the reciting actor, left alone in the penumbra of the piazza. Even if this last part is shorter than the explanatory section – generally under ten minutes - it still results in being the most intense part of the whole performance. At the end of the show, the audience's applause is enthusiastic. However, while Benigni's charisma undoubtedly play an important part in engaging the audience in the square, this aspect alone cannot be considered as the unique contributing factor to the popularity of the show in Italy. Instead, it should be read also in light of its broadcasting on national TV and its subsequent DVD edition, which helped the show to reach a wider audience thanks to the support of the audio-visual language.

In light of this, between 2008 and 2015 *Tutto Dante* was broadcast on Italian TV in at least three separate cycles. All of them were related to the shows performed in piazza Santa Croce, Florence. In particular, between December 2007 and March 2008, RAI1 broadcast the thirteen dates of *Tutto Dante 2006* during prime time. Each of these episodes was later transformed into a DVD edition. Later, between February and April 2013 *Tutto Dante 2012* was broadcast by RAI2 but gained only a poor share of the TV audience. Finally, RAI announced the presence of *Tutto Dante 2013* in its 2014 schedule. However, the show was not confirmed and did not take place in 2014,

but postponed to 2015.[160] In light of these consideration what are the main features of the show through the lenses of the audio-visual language?

In relation to the filming style we recognise the employment of various cameras alternated with a *spider-cam*, a very lightweight and agile camera which is able to "fly" over the audience, often creating a ghostly subjective effect which encouraged the spectator to empathise with the reading of the canto. Importantly, the TV broadcast was not conceived to merely register and 'document' the event, but to support the gradual change of tone that Benigni adopts during his performance, as previously discussed. In fact, the initial comedic phases are supported by a larger use of the *spider cam* and a preference for establishing long and medium shots - both on the audience and the actor. These choices were able to visually support Benigni's effervescent movements along the entire stage space. In contrast, the final reading of the *canto* is characterised by a solemn tone. Here, Benigni stands still at the centre of the stage while the camera remains on his face, with an insistent extreme close-up that highlights the actor's concentration and labour. Thanks to the close framing, Benigni's facial beads of sweat became visible to TV spectators. This effect is not visible to the audience in the square but only to the audio-visual spectators (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

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[160] Moreover, while *Tutto Dante 2013* performed in Piazza Santa Croce, Florence, managed 12 sold-out events, less than three months later Rai2 broadcast the 2012 edition of the show, without the section related to the political criticism was and hit the minimum share, going from 35.68% in 2007 to 4.54% in 2013. This is comparable with the results of the 2013 national elections. On this occasion, despite the PD, the left-oriented Italian party won against the PDL, Silvio Berlusconi's party for only 0.40%, the Italian political map was redesigned by the aggressive growth of *Movimento 5 Stelle* party, led by the former comedian Beppe Grillo. For more extended readings see 'Ascolti flop per Tutto Dante presto in seconda serata a Dicembre in TV con I Dieci Comandamenti - Low Share for Tutto Dante, Benigni soon on TV with the Ten Commandments' Link available at: http://www.lanostratv.it/programmi-tv/roberto-benigni-ascolti-flop-per-tutto-dante-presto-in-seconda-serata-a-dicembre-in-tv-con-i-dieci-comandamenti/ based on Auditel Data
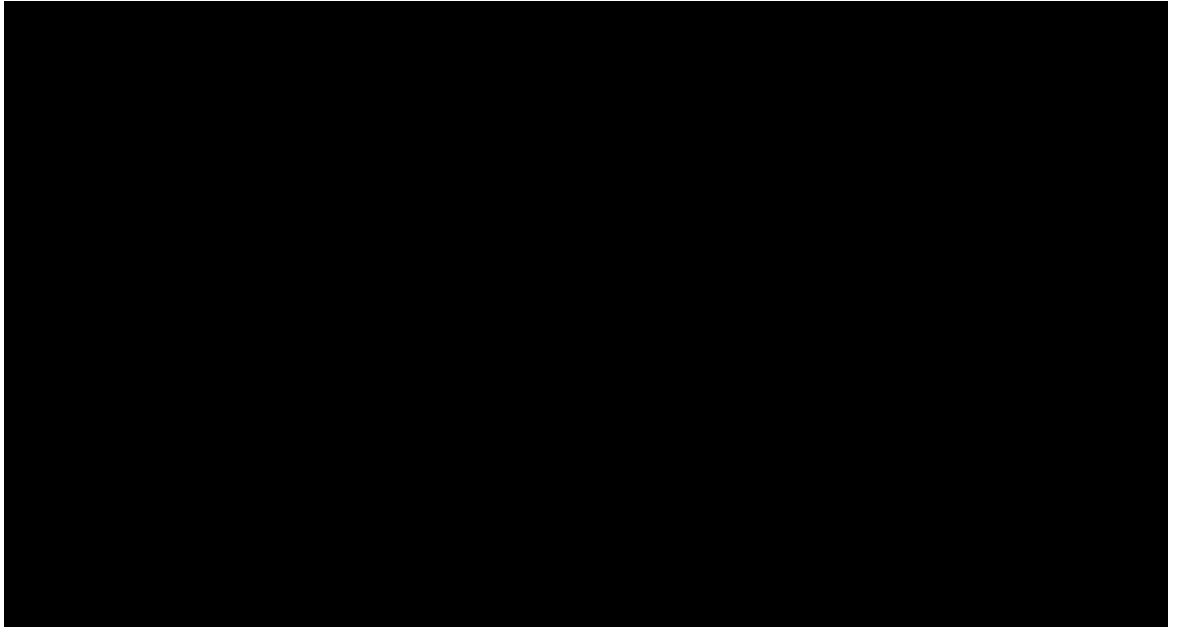
Figure 2.2 - *Tutto Dante 2006:* **Lights on stage change once Benigni starts reciting the canto by memory**
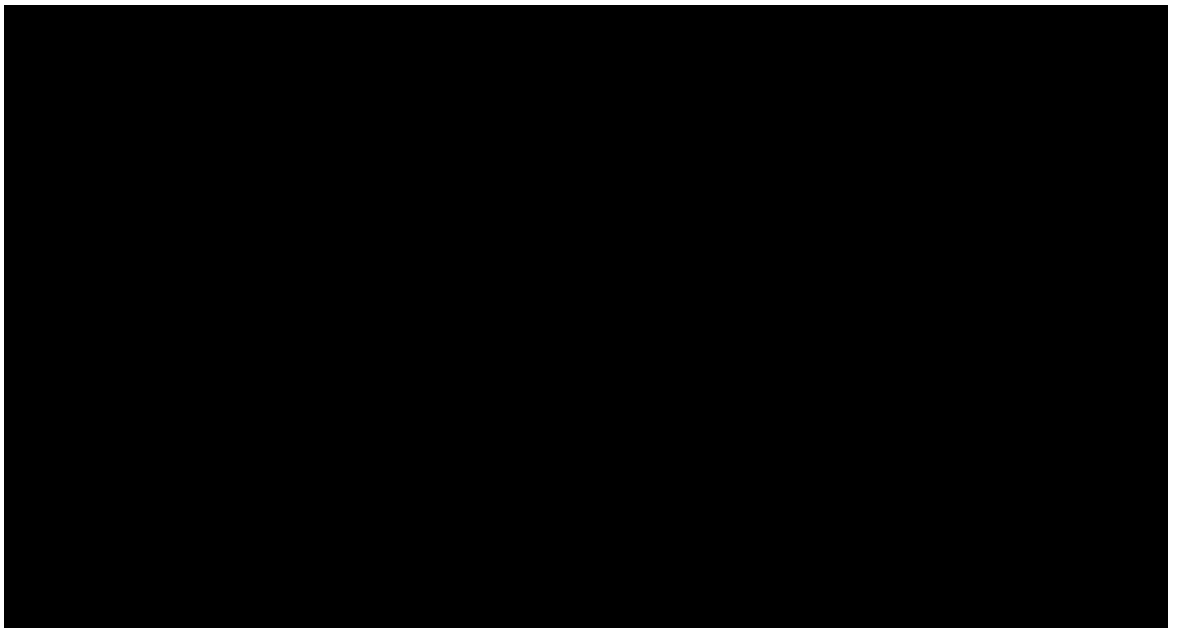
Figure 2.3 - *Tutto Dante 2006:* **Benigni's close-up when reciting the canto by memory**

In this way, the camera allows spectators from home to get closer to Benigni and enable them to empathise with his *lectura dantis* towards its climactic end. In particular, as the thirteen dates of 2006 in Florence have been broadcast on TV and

published on DVD, this visual parallelism linking Dante to Benigni has been brought to the attention of the mass audience and therefore creates a visual continuity between past and present, between the origin of the tradition and its contemporary circulation. (Figure 4)[161]
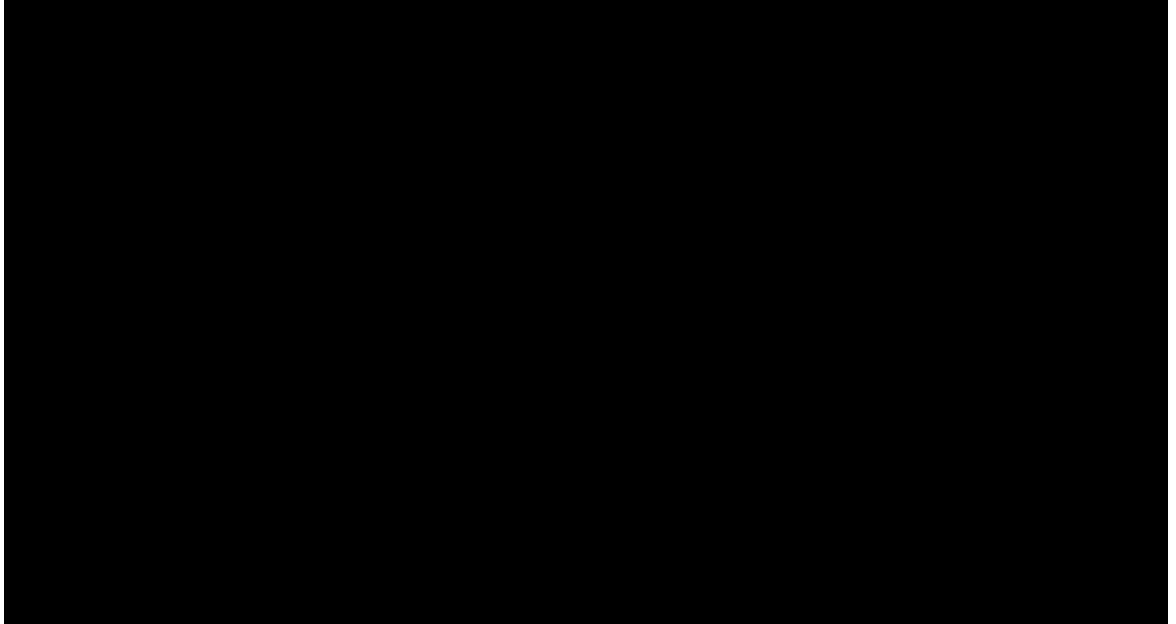
Figure 2.4 - Roberto Benigni and Dante's statue

Despite dynamics of *intermediality* and *remediation* being clearly at the heart of this performance, the popularity of the show in Italy and beyond was not exclusively related to aspects of "incorporation of one media 'envelope' within another".[162] Indeed, it might also be read in combination with elements of political satire - mainly addressed towards former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi – which are at the core of the first part of the show.[163] With the satirical parts intentionally

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[161] It is possible to assume that the DVD edition has been conceived specifically for the Italian territory, as the DVDs do not contain subtitles in any foreign languages.

[162] MacArthur M., Vilkinson, L. and Zaiontz, Karen, (2009). *Performing Adaptations: Essays and Conversations on the Theory and Practice of Adaptation*, ed., Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp.11-12.

[163] Between 1994 and 2014 Silvio Berlusconi was in charge as the Italian prime minister for four times: the first Cabinet lasted between May 10th, 1994 until January 17th, 1995. The second one ran between June 11th, 2001 and April 23rd, 2005. The third one covered the period between April 23rd 2005 and May 17th, 2006. The fourth and last Cabinet lasted between May 8th, 2008 and November 16th, 2011. During this time Silvio Berlusconi was involved in several court trials. Some of the on-going proceedings include: *The Unipol Case* (2005) where he is accused of Abuse of Office, and the accusation of Bribery of senators supporting the Prodi-government (2006). For more references on Silvio Berlusconi's political involvement and trial issues see Travaglio, M. (2009). *Papi, uno scandalo politico - Papi, a political scandal,* Milan: Chiarelettere, Travaglio, M. (2012). *BerlusMonti*, Milan:

left excluded from the national broadcasting of the show on TV and also from the DVD edition launched on the Italian market, but still present in the International tour, two questions arise: what is the role of the employment of political satire in the show? And how this can contribute to appealing to international audiences?

In relation to the employment of political satire as an integral part of the show, let us consider for instance the 2009 show at the Manhattan Centre of New York City, which led to a sold-out performance of *Inferno V*. On that occasion, several American newspapers reported that Benigni's popularity in the USA was mainly achieved in 1999 through his Oscar-winning movie *Life is Beautiful.* As a consequence, "for Americans, at least, the subject of Mr Benigni's latest project [was] almost incongruously new".[164] This is one of the main reasons why, in order to appeal non-Italian audiences, the show had to be *adapted* from the Italian version to each context in which it was performed. Benigni said: "I attempt to adapt to the audience I am addressing. For example, when I come to Montreal, I'll try to do a bit of the show in French, or in New York, I'll do a bit in English, simply to make the audience happy. However, the final canto is always in Italian, because it is like a song. [...] It's like combining Beethoven and Jimmy Hendrix, Bach and Duke Ellington".[165]

However, the success of the show was not only attributed to the "detailed explications of poetics and history in English" or the sole recitation of the "*canto* in Italian from memory",[166] but also to the positive response of the audience to the political satire performed in the first part of the show. Citing a link between the theme of the canto and the contemporary Italian political discourse, Benigni said:

Garzanti and Travaglio, M. (2010). *Ad Personam*, Milan: Chiarelettere,. In light of this, it is important to remember that *Tutto Dante* was originally created and performed between the end of Berlusconi third Cabinet (23/4/2005 – 17/5/2006) and the fourth one (7/5/2008 – 16/11/2011).

[164] In Sisario, B. (2009). 'Funnyman Takes on Dante's 'Comedy'', *The New York Times*, 22nd May. Full text available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/23/theater/23dant.html?_r=0

[165] In Riel- Salvatore, G. (2012). 'Interview with Roberto Benigni' *Panorama Italia* on 22nd June. Full text available at:: http://www.panoramitalia.com/en/arts-culture/theatre/tutto-dante-tutto-benigni-interview-roberto-benigni/939/

[166] Ibidem.

"This fifth *canto* relates to lust and sex, I don't know if it is linked with the present… I mean we would need something in Italy too about people and love stories related to women and sex… to link them… I don't know if it happens in Italy as well… Berlusconi! You see? Berlusconi is becoming more famous than pizza is. It's spectacular! […] Please don't let him fall, I have an entire show based on him!".[167]

Despite the fact that the reception of the image of former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi out of Italy would require a set of specific studies, Benigni has frequently underlined the positive response of the American audience to his satire against Silvio Berlusconi through the parallelism with Dante's *Commedia*. In fact: "Berlusconi is more famous than Dante, I just had to pronounce his name and the theatre burst out laughing… Silvio! You must perform your shows in New York. It would be a success, your show will be sold out!".[168]Whilst some segments of political satire were censored in the Italian TV broadcast on the national network and the DVD edition, these parts allowed foreign audiences to engage with the show and at the same time to promote the circulation of Dante's work worldwide.

As we see, the combination of satire, reciting performance, pedagogic explanation and the employment of the audio-visual supports the evidence of *intermediality* and *remediation* in the 21st century adaptation of the *lectura dantis*. The huge success of the itinerant tour has registered a positive response from the audience in Italy and further afield. In order to gain a wider perspective, three details of this reading of Dante's text should be stated . The first one is the pivotal importance of Benigni's charismatic personality. He is able to employ a peculiar comedic tone that, as Roberta Di Carmine (2012) pointed out "shifted from being a social satire to a bittersweet view of the Italians' weaknesses but without the

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[167] Original Italian: "In più in questo quinto canto che parla della lussuria, del sesso e non so se è legato al presente…ci vorrebbe che accadesse qualcosa anche in Italia di persone legate a storie d'amore che hanno donne, sesso…che per legare…non so se in Italia accade…Berlusconi! Tu hai visto? Sta diventando più famoso della pizza Berlusconi! E' una cosa spettacolare! Non facciamolo cadere […] Io ho tutto nou spettacolo basato su di lui!", from the interview released to the Italian TV news TG3 31st May 2009. Part of the interview is available at the YouTube link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vlc2Q853bn0

[168] Original Italian: "E' più famoso Berlusconi di Dante, bastava nominarlo veniva giù la sala dalle risate…Silvio! Tu devi venire a fare spettacoli a New York, qui è un successo assicurato, fai un pieno così!", from the interview released to the Italian TV news TG1 31st May 2009. Part of the interview is available at the YouTube link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vlc2Q853bn0

merciless tone that characterized 'Italian style' comedies".[169] Secondly, the the Italian mass media has dedicated increasing attention to the show, with a primetime TV broadcasting of many of the Florentine dates along with the the DVD edition of the first thirteen dates being sold on commercial release. Finally, it is important to address the link between the present Italian political situation and those vices which Dante described in the circles of his *Inferno*. All these aspects, along with the international tour that included performances in Italian, English and French have helped promote practices of adaptation of Dante's work at an international level. The *Tutto Dante* show and the previous example of Clive James's translation are adaptations stemming from the creativity of a single person or a reduced team of collaborators and sustained by anartistic industry. Can these practices of adaptation also arise spontaneously from fans? The following example on the role of online communities helps us to clarify this point and provides us a greater understanding of the complexity of this phenomenon.

2.3 Inside YouTube Fan Tributes of Dante's *Commedia*

Originally created in the 1960s for military purposes with the name *Arpanet,* the Internet as a system of interconnected computer devices using the same communication protocol has become operative in Western Countries and on a mass scale during the mid 1990s and accessed as an everyday technology during the first decade of the 21st century.[170] In this way, its military origin has been replaced by one of the most important civil projects: the creation of a potentially global and interactive web linking in real time all corners of the world. In the past few decades, the Internet has sustained the emergence of new participating communities that are associated with the interactive fruition of digital contents leading to what Pierre Levy (1997) has defined as *collective intelligence*, meaning "a form of universally

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[169] In Horton, A. and Rapf, J. E. (2012). *A Companion to Film Comedy*, Chennai, India: John Wiley & Sons Inc., p.469.

[170] As explained by Morley, D. and Parker, C. S. (2009). *Understanding Computers: Today and Tomorrow*, ed., Boston: Course Technology Cengage Learning, p.322 "Arpanet was created in 1969 by the U.S Department of Defence *Advanced Research Project Agency* (ARPA). One objective of the ARPANET project was to create a computer network that would allow researchers located in different places to communicate with each other. Another objective was to build a computer network capable of sending or receiving data over a variety of paths to ensure that network communications to continue even if part of the network was destroyed, such as in a nuclear attack or by a natural disaster".

distributed intelligence, constantly enhanced, coordinated in real time, and resulting in the effective mobilization of skills".[171] As a consequence, the collective knowledge is not built by accumulation, but, on the contrary, with a participative intent that redesigns the creation and the effects of social interaction. In the last few years the American scholar Henri Jenkins (2013) has developed his analysis on the role of fan communities which discuss, remediate and produce new material inspired by, for instance, TV series, pieces of literature or video games. In this broader context, fan communities are a liquid cohort of people who can be geographically distant but constantly linked through the employment of digital technologies such as the World Wide Web. In this way, fan communities promote a lively and independent proliferation of contents of exceptional cultural interest that might also be able to influence marketing strategies of major media companies.[172] YouTube is one of the main sharing platforms where online communities gather and share contents. Michael Strangelove (2010) has outlined how:

> "YouTube is one of the most visible manifestations of a widespread change in how the Internet and the plethora of related digital technologies are being used. At the centre of this change are individuals and their amateur video-making practices. This change is also part of a long-term transition in the nature of audience from relatively passive consumers to fully active producers of moving images".[173]

These considerations allow us to reflect on a few important aspects: first, the fan videos are generally created, shot and edited by non-professionally trained people. Moreover, fans share their work on one or more digital platforms that can lead to a potentially infinite audience. Finally, this new way of producing and consuming audiovisual images promotes an active process appropriation, manipulation and reworking of contents, leading to what Henri Jenkins (2013) has defined as a "hybrid model of circulation, where a mix of top-down to bottom-up

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[171] In Lévy, P., Bononno, R. (translated by), (1997). *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace*, Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, Cambridge: Massachussets, p.13.

[172] See e.g. Van Looy, A. (2016). *Social Media Management: Technologies and Strategies for Creating Business Value*, Ghent, Belgium: Springer, p.50: "Some examples of possible business objectives in which social media may play a role are … to acquire new customers … to increase costumers satisfaction and loyalty, to increase brand recognition and awareness, to increase brand engagement".

[173] Strangelove, M. (2010). *Watching YouTube: Extraordinary Videos by Ordinary People*, Toronto-Buffalo-London: Toronto University Press, p.X.

forces determine how material is shared" and finally culminating in the creative redefinition of "media content in ways which might not have been previously imagined".[174]

As a first example of how online fan tributes work for Dante's *Commedia*, let us consider *Barbie's Inferno,* created by the user *MugglebornSweetheart* in 2007 and *Lego Dante's Inferno*, created by the user *Allmanknack* in 2011.[175] It is interesting to note that both of the videos are clearly inspired by Dante's *Inferno*.[176] At the same time, they are both strongly characterised by the influence of American pop culture. In fact, both the videos are made by employing materials and characters that are taken from two of the most influential products the capitalistic toy industry has ever realised: that of Barbie dolls and Lego bricks.[177] How is Dante's *oeuvre* appropriated and remediated by fan communities within this capitalist scenario?

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[174] In Jenkins, H., Ford, S., and Green, J. (2013). *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, New York: New York University Press, p.p. 1-2.

[175] See MugglebornSweethart (2007). *Barbie's Inferno*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBMzUPmSS1k&t=36s (Accessed 30/01/2017); Allmanknack (2011). *Lego Dante's Inferno*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97_IhOr4dMc&t=33s (Accessed 30/01/2017) and finally alexgwaller (2007). *Dante's Inferno (Clay Animation 16mm).* Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XW8L7O8qGgg (Accessed 30/01/2017). See also e.g. Vy Nguyen (2013). *Barbie's Inferno. Available at:* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GM6lm_NWTlw (accessed 30/01/2017) and An Unwanted Companion (2010). *Lego Dante's Inferno.* Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I1OLCRAeaG8 (Accessed 30/01/2017). Although there are several other videos named in the same ways and uploaded by other users, I have decided to consider these two videos together by operating a comparative analysis between them, as they present similar issues in relation to the construction of the images and therefore help to provide a wider perspective on the appropriation of Dante's *oeuvre* from popular culture by employing digital audio-visual technologies.

[176] See the description of MugglebornSweethart (2007). *Barbie's Inferno*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBMzUPmSS1k&t=36s (Accessed 30/01/2017) "A short film retelling Dante's classic story featuring Barbie" and of *Lego Dante's Inferno*: "I made this Animation for a school project earlier this the year. We were reading Dante's Inferno in English."

[177] Produced by the American manufactory toy company Mattel, the first Barbie doll was first launched on the market on March 9th, 1959. As reported by their official website, since then Barbie had "close to 150 careers, represented more than 40 different nationalities and collaborated with more than 75 fashion designers. With one Barbie doll sold every 3 seconds somewhere in the world, Barbie remains the world's most popular doll and a powerhouse brand among girls of all ages. Through the decades, the Barbie brand has evolved with girls, extending into entertainment, online, and more than 45 different consumer products categories" Source: http://www.barbiemedia.com/. On the other side, Lego was born in 1932 in Billund, Denmark. Here are some of the relevant data (updated to 2011) about the popularity of Lego Bricks all over the world: "130 - The number of countries where Lego products are sold. [...] 7 - the number of Lego sets that are sold every second. During Christmas, almost 28 sets are sold every second. [...]40 billion - The number of Lego men who have been produced since the figures were first introduced in 1978. They all had yellow faces until 2003, when a skin-coloured range was developed. [...] 485 billion - Number of pieces of Lego which have been made since the company was started. [...] 4 - Number of Legoland theme parks - in Denmark, Germany, Windsor and California. [...] £1.84bn - Lego's sales in 2010, a 32pc increase on the previous year." Extract from the article 'Lego in Numbers', *The Telegraph*, 30/08/2011. For online version of the article see: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/retailandconsumer/8360246/Lego-in-numbers.html

In *Barbie's Inferno*, the opening follows the traditional script of the Dark Forest. However, in this video the protagonist is replaced by the blonde Barbie doll who is accompanied by her guide Virginia, a re-interpretation of Dante's guide, Virgil, who is here presented as "sent by Bernard, Barbie's childhood love, to guide her through a journey... a journey to Hell".[178] (Figure 5)
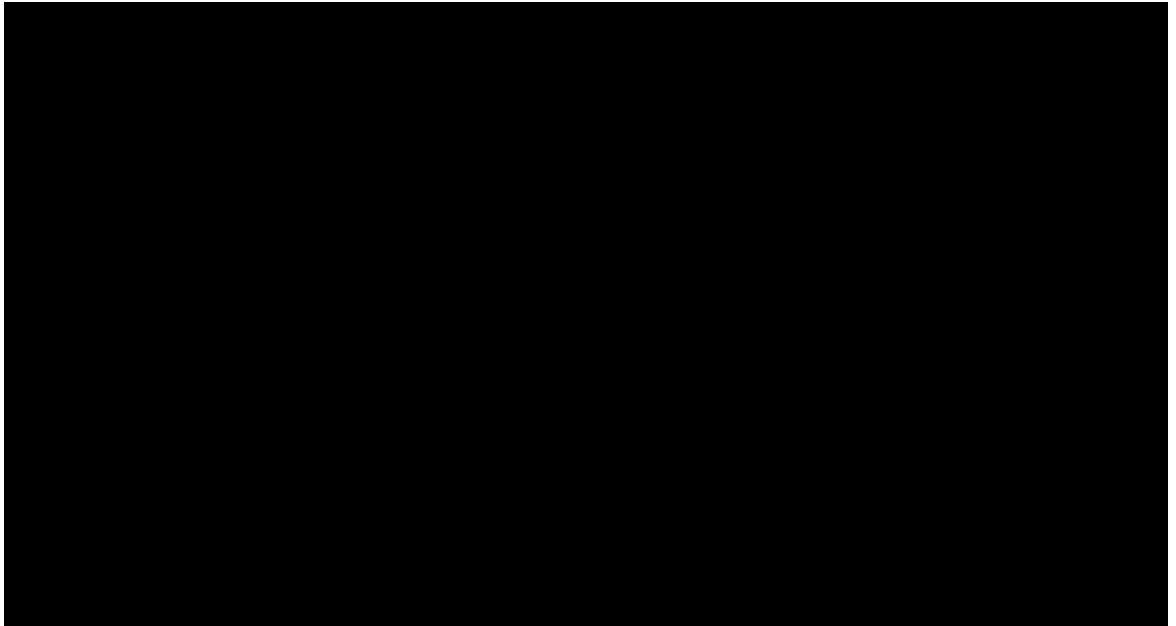
Figure 2.5 - *Barbie's Inferno (2007):* Barbie lost in the Dark Forest gets rescued by her guide Virginia

The video then continues with a group of selected episodes of Dante's *Inferno*. Each of them is presented by using descriptive captions on a black screen that carries the narrative in each episode. Here, other Barbie dolls embody several damned people by following the *Dantesque* mechanism of retaliation. There is no dialogue between the characters. However, some other descriptive captions in English flow on the screen to provide a more precise reading of the contents. In addition, every episode is accompanied by a wide range of music soundtracks covering several music genres, from classical and epic to popular music.[179]

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[178] In MugglebornSweethart (2007). *Barbie's Inferno*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBMzUPmSS1k&t=36s (Accessed 30/01/2017) min. 0:51 – 1.03.

[179] We recognise, for instance, the opening of Madonna's *Like a Virgin* (USA, 1984).

The first creative remediation of Dante's work is the following: the two male protagonists of Dante's *Inferno* are here replaced with two female characters. Apart from the shift of gender, it is important to remember that the characters of the video are also reduced to Barbie dolls. This is a precise choice of the uploader who we know from the opening titles is a woman which challenges the dynamics of the viewer's identification as it comes from a female point of view.[180] Moreover, this particular perspective is filtered by the employment of Barbie as a woman, or to be more precise, of Barbie as the objectified woman by definition. This way, Dante's main character is transformed into a stereotypical, plastic blonde girl who is a key symbol of the American capitalistic society rather than the 14th century original setting in Florence. Moreover, the aesthetics of the video reminds us of American box office movies, one of the most profitable industries in the USA. Some aspects of the video demonstrate the influence of the American Film Industry. First, the (unauthorised) employment of the certificate of the Motion Picture Association of America which generally authorises the distribution on the market of American movies. Secondly, the author presents her work as part of the fictional Hopelessly Hopeful Production. Finally, she concludes the video with some cinematic credits where Dante is quoted as the video's screen player.[181]

Meanwhile, *LEGO Dante's Inferno* is presented as a school project and is soaked with American box office cinema influences, exhibiting a clear bias for superhero sagas and action movies. In fact, as we can see in the 2:31-minute long video, all characters are represented with Lego bricks and, most importantly, they are dressed up like superheroes. In particular, Virgil is covered by a purple mantle and enters in frame literally by landing from the sky (Figure 6). Subsequently, we meet a Batman-Caron ferrying the two protagonists to the circle of the gluttons.

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[180] See "a film by Jessica Glade". In MugglebornSweethart (2007). *Barbie's Inferno*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBMzUPmSS1k&t=36s (Accessed 30/01/2017), min. 00:14 – 00:17.

[181] Ibidem min. 07.13.
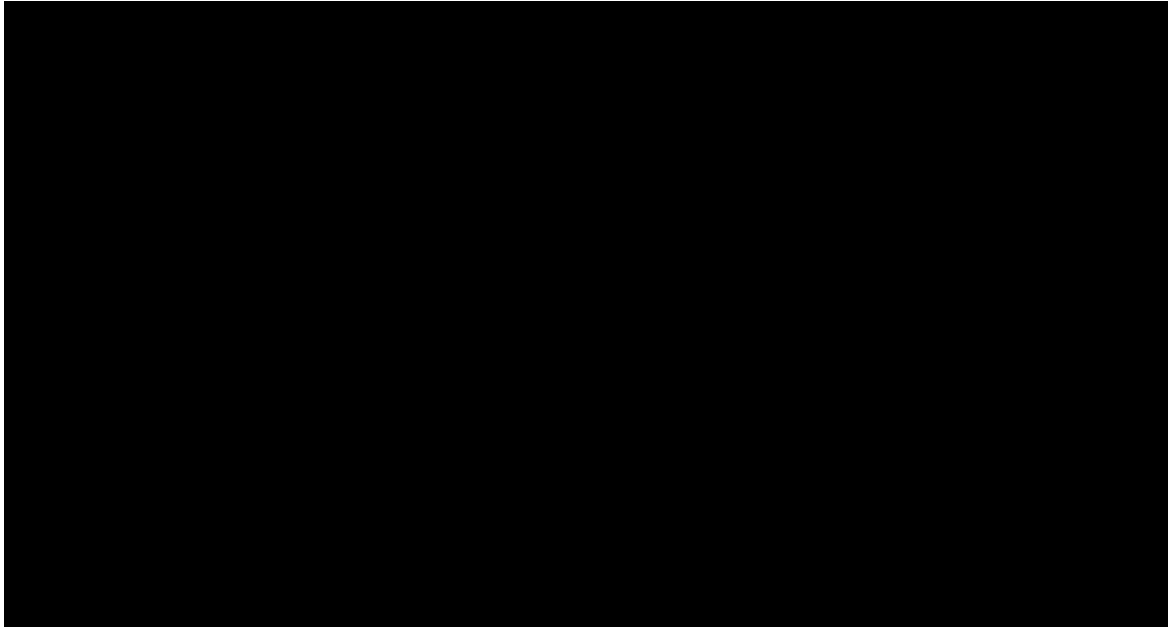
Figure 2.6 - *LEGO Dante's Inferno (2011)* - LEGO Dante lost in the Dark Forest gets rescued by his LEGO guide Virgil, who is dressed-up like a superhero

The links with American box-office cinema, much more than with comic books, is strengthened by the presence of a powerful distorted voice-over that recites, in English, some extracts taken from the 14th century's text.[182] This way, the contrast between past and present, between tradition and innovation is nourished by matching some original verses of Dante's *Inferno* with a Lego-Brick animated scenario that also involves adapting some famous superheroes costumes to the main *Dantesque* characters. Moreover, the cinematic style of the video, which includes the fluidity of the moving camera, the quick editing and some rudimental special effects help to strengthen this contrast. Finally, as we could see in *Barbie's Inferno*, in this video we find the employment of pre-existing music that is consequently used without adhering to the rules of copyright protection. The soundtrack employed here is *Battle Without Honor* by Tomoyasu Hotei and it is taken from Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill: Vol. 1*,[183] one of the most controversial movies on the employment of

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[182] E.g. in Allmanknack (2011). *Lego Dante's Inferno*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97_IhOr4dMc&t=33s (Accessed 30/01/2017) at min. 00:00-00.21 the voice-over recites: "Midway, upon the journey of our lives, I found myself in the dark wilderness, for I have wondered for the straights and true. How hard are things to tell about, that wilderness so savage, dense and harsh, even to think of it renews my fear". The passage is taken from Dante's INF I, vv. 1-6.

[183] *Kill Bill: Vol. 1*, (Q. Tarantino, USA, 2003).

violence in relation to pop aesthetics.[184]

These first two examples have helped us to understand how online fan communities rework and freely redesign infernal imagery in the 21st century through the employment of different media and techniques. Aside from the aesthetic level, might these forms of adaptation have both social roots and outcomes beyond the electronic screen? To this extent, let us consider Dante's Inferno *(Clay Animation 16 mm.)*.

Originally uploaded on 30th April 2007 by the user *alexgwaller* [185] on January 2015, this video fan tribute has over 147,600 views.[186] The description in the caption underneath *Dante's Inferno (Clay Animation 16 mm.)* is "A VERY abridged (and unfinished) movie of Dante's *Inferno*, depicting the pilgrim's journey from the dark wood to the Giants in *Canto* XXXI, just before their descent into Cocytus".[187] The video lasts five minutes and 46 seconds, even if, as the user *SinnFein4ever* points out in the comments, "it ends at 4:21".[188] This observation - if we exclude precise aesthetical choices - is correct: in fact the last minute and 25 seconds is composed entirely of blank screen. As the uploader reminds us in the description and the title, the film is shot in 16mm by using the *Claymation* technique[189] and then digitalised and uploaded on YouTube. The film does not include any dialogue or subtitles but the rhythm is provided by the clay-animated inscriptions of the title, "*Inferno*" (0:09 - 0:36) that opens the movie along with some other references from Dante's text that

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[184] On the relationship between Quentin Tarantino and pop culture see Erikson, S. (August 2004). 'Spaghetti Easterns – On the Rise of a New Film Archetype: the samurai cowboy' *Los Angeles Magazine*, p.145 and Sickels, R. C. (2013). *100 Entertainers who changed America – an Encyclopaedia of Pop Culture Luminaries*, Santa Barbara – Denver – Oxford: ABC-CLIO, LLC,, p. 560.

[185] Information available at *alexgwaller* YouTube channel link available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XW8L7O8qGgg

[186] Despite the fact that viewers can contact the uploader with a private message, I have decided not to interact privately and directly with the author of the video. This choice was intentionally made for a specific reason: that of considering and analysing the videos with the information that uploaders provide intentionally and publicly when they decide to publish their work on the Internet. In this way, the material already available to a random spectator comprehends the video itself, the possible information provided in the caption, and the list of comments (if this function is enabled) that is possible to consult below the video.

[187] Ibidem.

[188] Ibidem.

[189] According to the online version of Oxford Dictionary, *Claymation* is "A method of film animation using adjustable clay figures and stop-motion photography". Source: http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/claymation

are quoted in Italian in the video. This happens, for instance, with the inscription "Per me si va per la città dolente/per me si va nell'etterno dolore/per me si va tra la perduta gente"[190] (1:14 - 1:20) written on the gate of Hell, or "Non ti'inganni l'ampiezza nell'entrare" (1:44 - 1:47).[191] In addition, many characters of Dante's *Inferno* are here brought to the screen with accuracy and precision. For instance, at the beginning of the video we clearly recognise Dante getting lost in the Dark Forest (Figure 5). Later, we can recognise other characters such as Virgil with his head enclosed by laurel leaves, or Paolo and Francesca falling in love while reading a book or the threatening Minos and so on. The colours mainly employed are red, black and azure-grey. This chromatic juxtaposition helps to maintain the tension, along with the predominantly percussive soundtrack, created by Alexis Waller Music by Dhol Drum Foundation.[192]

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[190] INF. III, v. 1-3. English Translation by James, C. (2013). *The Divine Comedy – Translated by Clive James*, London: Picador, 2013

"From now on, every day feels like your last

forever. let that be your greatest fear.

your future now is to regret the past.

forget your hopes. They were what brought you here."

[191] INF V, v. 20. English translation by James, C. (2013) *The Divine Comedy – Translated by Clive James*, London: Picador:

"The width of Hell's mouth doesn't mean the dead Who get in ever get to go away."

[192] As remembered in the description of the video provided by the uploader. In alexgwaller (2007). *Dante's Inferno (Clay Animation 16mm).* Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XW8L7O8qGgg (Accessed 30/01/2017)
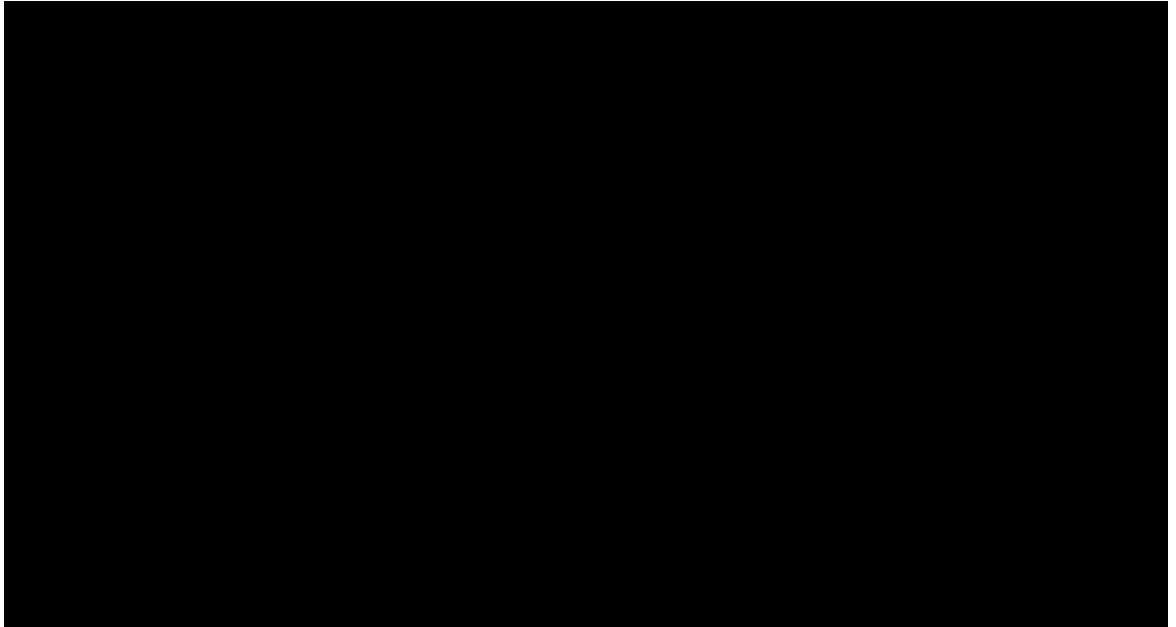
Figure 2.7 - *Dante's Inferno (Clay Animation 16mm.):* **Dante getting lost in the Dark Forest**

Further on in the description, Alexgwaller explains the reasons for creating this video: "This is what happens when you graduated with a major in Italian lit in today's world. Unemployment ensues, followed by acquisitions of 16mm cameras and months spent bringing exiled 13th century Florentine statesmen to life in plasticine. Enjoy the fruits of last year's joblessness".[193] From this caption, we are able to gain more information about the author: he holds a degree in Italian Literature and therefore knows Dante's work, he has spent at least one year after university without a job and consequently procured a 16mm camera to experiment on Dante's *oeuvre* with the filmic and the clay form. Then he shared the audio-visual results with the web community, by keeping in mind that this video is part of a bigger project, as "theoretically, Purgatorio and Paradiso will follow".[194] These elements allow us to understand that there is not only an aesthetic intention in the reworking of Dante's work through the employment of different media, but a possible implication in undertaking this creative activity and sharing it online in order to fight aspects of social alienation. In fact, the *Inferno* occupies not only the years that the user has spent at university, but most importantly the year of unemployment he

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[193] Ibidem.

[194] Ibidem.

suffered after that - the reference to the lack of a job is sarcastically mentioned twice in the 11 lines of the description – during which he decided to work on this project and share the first results with the online communities, even before the completion of his work. Here, online fan communities were fundamental in returning feedback and supporting his work. From the comments to the video, we can see the response is clearly positive, with comments such as "This is amazing!".[195] Other users tried to engage productively with alexgwaller by informing him that his video had become available on other social networks[196] or by inviting him to watch other similar contents produced by other users.[197] In this way, aspects of *remediation* are not exclusively limited to practices of media dialogue – from clay to filming in 16mm, from digitalisation to the Youtube circulation – exclusively in the reworking of the aesthetic feature. Indeed, they were also fundamental in redefining the social impact of these imageries off-screen. This is more evidence supporting the case that a merely aesthetical focus on these kinds of adaptation phenomena can no longer suffice.

2.4   Conclusion and Methodological Premises

As this chapter has shown, in the decade 2005-2015 the circulation of Dante's imagery has been characterised by a strong intermedial dialogue. More specifically, Clive James' translation of the text has provided a new English version of *The Divine Comedy* which adopted a more fluid verse and structure inspired by the cinematic style. To this extent, the media power of Roberto Benigni's *Tutto Dante* has reinterpreted the concept of *lectura dantis* and created an engaging interaction with both the Italian and the international public by linking past and present through the employment of political satire. In addition, the lively presence of Dante's *Inferno* fan

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[195] Comment left by the user *justeach.* In alexgwaller (2007). *Dante's Inferno (Clay Animation 16mm).* Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XW8L7O8qGgg (Accessed 30/01/2017)

[196] See for example the comment left by the user *Lord Crumb* referring to the availability of this video on Facebook: "This is honestly one of my favourite video's on Facebook, found it years ago and favourited it and I only re-watched it again today. This is truly inspiring and you really should do a final product in high quality, would be totally mind blowing!". In alexgwaller (2007). *Dante's Inferno (Clay Animation 16mm).* Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XW8L7O8qGgg (Accessed 30/01/2017)

[197] See for example the comment left by the user *rodd1000:* "Really enjoyed your movie, thanks for sharing, please check out mine." In alexgwaller (2007). *Dante's Inferno (Clay Animation 16mm).* Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XW8L7O8qGgg (Accessed 30/01/2017)

tributes on YouTube has shown how fan communities have appropriated Dante's *oeuvre* and reinterpreted it with many elements of pop culture. This did not lead to the proliferation of video tributes of Dante's *oeuvre* only, but also to the rise of new forms of social interaction. In this way, the circulation and the impact of Dante's *Commedia* in 2005 – 2015 has been possible especially thanks to the coexistence and dialogue among these media. Thus, the reception of Dante's *oeuvre* has been expressed not only through the literary form, but also through hybrid models which resulted from the combination of different audio-visual features. The following chapters provide a greater understanding of how digital technologies have contributed to enhancing adaptations through the cinematic screen. According to the previously discussed claims emanating from the academic world, practices of adaptations therefore "produce an intertextual, polyphonic, intermedial weave that is created by artists of many kinds, whether they be authors, play writers, film directors, musicians, actors or technicians, and completed for 'a moment in time' by us as we receive and respond to that creation".[198]

If we combine this perspective with the latest evaluations drawn in this chapter from the artistic context in which this research moves, it is now even clearer why a merely comparative model between the 'reference text' and adaptations cannot be sufficient enough to sustain a coherent study around this phenomenon and encourage us to "remove the emphasis from the original to the performative power of all media through the relationship of other media".[199] The claim for the end of the centrality of originality in adaptation studies is particularly relevant especially if we narrow the main focus down to the cinematic screen, where "cinema studies have long rejected aesthetics as its leading methodology in favor of analytical and theoretical critique" as their main methodological cornerstones have long gravitated around the "observation that all texts are intertexts".[200] This is pivotal to the discourse of Dante's adaptation, as according to the proliferation of adaptations

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[198] Cutchins, D., Raw, L. and Welsch, J. M., (2010), *Redefining Adaptation Studies*, Lanham: Scarecrow Press Inc., p.55.

[199] Kiràly, H. (2013). *The Medium Strikes Back – 'Impossible Adaptation' revisited* in Jorge, Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik, Eirik F. Hanssen, *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions*, ed., London-New York: Bloomsbury Academics, p.180.

[200] Ibidem, p. 163

currently arising and circulating in the modern times, "the twentieth and early twenty-first century have found in Dante a field of tension in which they can mirror, explore, and question the tensions within their own realities".[201] In this way, the circulation of the *Commedia* in historical and modern times does not lead to a sterile and passive process but, on the contrary, to an active and "productive reception".[202] This change of perspective allows us to overstep "the limits of reception as a type of cultural relationship based on a genealogical-historical model"[203] and restores a more active role to adaptors and the audience. In Luisa Calè's words (2007), Dante's adaptability is not only a "means of signification" but "a mode of production that tests boundaries, complementarities and metamorphoses of the arts"[204] and therefore considers the *Commedia* through the lenses of what Umberto Eco would define as an 'open work' (1962). As "the form of art gains its aesthetic validity precisely in proportion to the number of different perspectives from which it can be viewed and understood",[205] this perspective therefore restores a more active role not only to those who produce cultural objects but also to their audiences in practices of remediation and adaptation. For this reason, we are encouraged to reconsider these phenomena through a more comprehensive methodological framework.

For this reason, the necessity of dismissing a strict *text-centered* perspective in defining the theoretical basis of film adaptation does not arise only from recognising the relevance of the phenomenon of *intermediality* and *remediation* in the adaptation process. It is also a question of overcoming a tough *ideological setting* that organises the arts in a strict hierarchy where literary texts are put at the centre of the investigation, as the starting and as the returning point of all the enquiries that may arise. As a consequence, if we decide to adopt a kind of methodological approach based primarily on the supremacy of the 'reference text' the investigation would be

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[201] Gragnolati, M., Camilletti, F. and Lampart, F. (2010), *Metamorphosing Dante – Appropriations, Manipulations and Re-Writings in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries*, Wien-Berlin: Verglan Turia + Kant, p.9.

[202] Ibidem, p.11.

[203] Ibidem, p.12.

[204] Calé, L. and Braida, A. (2007), *Dante on View: the Reception of Dante in the Visual and Performing Arts*, ed., London: Ashgate, p.179.

[205] Eco, U. (1962) *The Open Work – Translated by Anna Cancogni*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p.3

reduced only to a sterile and poor soil. On the contrary, a new set of lenses that can equally consider the power of the media involved will more effectively enable us to understand the mechanism around the creation and the circulation of images and imageries, especially in the case of Dante's infernal ones and especially in the journey beyond the boundaries of literature, cinema and digital media. Moreover, as the visual perception is still at the base of the cinematic experience, a methodological shift of focus on the relevance of images and imageries in film adaptation seems to be necessary. This urgency is strengthened also by the centrality of infernal images in my specific investigation that will explore through the assessment of three relevant film case studies the ways these images are reworked and circulate on the cinematic screen.

Appreciating the differences as a *valuable* aspect, rather than as a negative outcome, this research investigates how infernal images are manipulated, reworked and encouraged to circulate through the cinematic medium. In this way, if we change the theory, preserving the historical importance of Dante's *Commedia* in the spreading of the afterlife imagery and considering at the same time its *intertextual* and *intermedial* dialogue within and beyond the boundaries of literature, we will be able to understand how the infernal imagery circulates and gains new perspectives "of socio-cultural and political phenomena – and of the medium itself – through transmedia process".[206] This is why for my research I am adopting a revised methodology passing from a predominantly *text-centered* perspective into an *image-based* one. But what does shifting from a predominantly *text-centered approach* to an *image-based approach* mean in practice? And how will this kind of methodology be applied to the forthcoming chapters?

First of all, *shifting to image* means a greater focus upon three main aspects. First, it means exploring the ways images circulate among different media. Second, it means investigating the mechanism through which images get remediated when circulating among different cultural contexts. Third, it deals with understanding how the remediation of images might also contribute to rework media boundaries. Consequently, *shifting to image* does not mean the complete elimination of the

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[206] Kiràly, H. (2013), p.180

'reference text' from the investigation, especially considering the popularity of Dante's *Commedia* over the past seven centuries: public lectures, paintings and illustrations, music, theatre and audio-visual media. Instead it means a critical employment of the criterion of fidelity in conjunction with other theoretical tools, following Dicecco and Hermansson's claims (2015) that we have previously discussed in the first chapter of this thesis.

In light of this, *shifting to image* also means a deeper exploration of the ways the infernal imagery communicates with the cinematic screen in the digital era, and involves the completion of certain stages. First, each chapter starts with a section dedicated to exploring the context in which the film was first produced. This helps us to understand the extent to which the historical and technological aspects influenced the remediation of infernal imagery in that specific film and to investigate how the cinematic screen has appropriated, manipulated and remediated this set of images. In this stage, the investigation develops mainly using the theoretical tools provided by film analysis such as – amongst others – film history, film aesthetics, iconography and psychoanalysis. Second, each chapter considers the employment of digital technologies in practices of film production if the film has been shot on digital, or restoration and conversion if the film has been previously shot on analogue. Finally, each chapter concludes with an evaluation of the impact of digital technologies in the circulation of the film considered in 2005-2015. In both these final stages of the research the investigation is supported with the analytical tools of reception, fandom and cultural studies.

CHAPTER 3. *INFERNO* (MILANO FILMS, ITA, 1911): DEFINING 'INFERNAL' ON THE SCREEN

Introduction

This chapter explores the importance of the movie *Inferno* (Milano Films, ITA, 1911) in the remediation and the circulation of Dante's infernal imagery through the cinematic screen. In particular, this film represents the first suitable case study of this research to practically show the insufficiency of the *text-centered* approach which has consistently dominated the theoretical debate of Film Adaptation Studies in the last few decades. In this way, I strengthen the necessity of adopting a more *image-based* set of lenses in exploring the ways infernal imagery inspired by Dante's *Inferno* circulate in the contemporary era (2005-2015) thanks also to the re-mediate power that digital technologies wield in the 21st century. For this reason, in this chapter I employ the *image-based* methodology that I have previously outlined and discussed in the earlier parts of this thesis.

The assessment of this film case study is organised around three main sections. Each one investigates a few relevant aspects of the production, the circulation and the reception of this movie between past and present. For this reason, this chapter develops as follows: the first part traces the importance of *Inferno* (Milano Films, ITA, 1911) in Italian film history. This will help us to explore the following aspects: why is it important to understand the context in which this film was first brought to life? After assessing the main considerations surrounding this question, the second section outlines the different aspects which foreground the restoration and the subsequent digitalisation of this movie in the 21st century. In particular, I include in this chapter a special interview that I have personally carried out with two members of Cineteca Bologna, the Italian film institute that produced the restoration of this film in 2007 and its relative DVD edition in 2011.[207] In this

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[207] Cineteca di Bologna is one of the most important film archives in Italy and it is based in the city of Bologna. As it states on their official website - www.cinetecadibologna.it - the institution hosts "more than 60.000 films, mostly in 35mm and 16mm, trying to cover the entire history of cinema: from the silent era until today, along with great auteur films and rare genre movies, passing through blockbuster and amateur films." In 2006 Cineteca Bologna carried out an extraordinary restoration work for Milano Films *Inferno* (1911) which ended up

way, it will be possible to understand the aesthetic, the technical and the ethical choices behind the restoration and the digital conversion of this movie. Subsequently, the third part investigates the ways in which part of the original footage of Milano Films' *Inferno* has been deliberately taken and employed in the sequence of the vision of Hell of the film *Go Down Death!* (Spencer Williams, USA, 1944), written and directed by the African-American director Spencer Williams. In this way, I show evidence of the inconsistency of the 'reference text', in this case of Dante's *Inferno* (1304), in the reception and the subsequent appropriation and manipulation of the infernal imagery by non-Italian communities. This last section assesses and explores the non-institutional presence and circulation of both Milano Films' *Inferno* and Spencer Williams' *Go Down Death!* through their availability on YouTube. In particular, here I outline and discuss the following question: in what way can a digital video-sharing platform like YouTube either improve or renew both free access to content and audience interest, and does this necessarily test the boundaries of copyright policies?

3.1   *Inferno* **(Milano Films, ITA, 1911) – Context**

The genesis of *Inferno* (Milano Films, ITA, 1911) cannot be easily summarised in just a few key points. On the contrary, its complex production, development and distribution which led to "a new standard for production quality"[208] consisted of several stages and involved the collaboration of many professional figures with different areas of expertise. As I am going to discuss, at the beginning of the 1910s, this new type of programmatic and organised approach helped the fledgling Italian film industry to consolidate itself as representing "the first serious artistic encounter between the nascent film industry and the Italian

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producing the very first DVD edition of this movie from the silent era. The organisation that took care of the whole process is named L'Immagine Ritrovata Lab aiming to "set-out on a journey through the wonders of the Seventh Art: newly restored classics enjoying their second life, rarities from film archives around the world, films in black and white and in colour, documents and documentaries, silent films with live musical accompaniment and film produced throughout the sound era, 35mm prints (still more than half of the programme) as well as brand new digital restorations." In order to better understand the process of restoration of *Inferno* (Milano Films, ITA, 1911) I interviewed Dr Alessandro Marotto. Subsequently, I interviewed Mr Andrea Meneghelli for more insights about the digitalisation and distribution of this film. The whole interview is available in Appendix.

[208] Welle, J. P. (2004). *Dante's Inferno of 1911 and the Origins of Italian Film Culture*. In A.A. Iannucci, *Dante, Cinema and Television*, Toronto-Buffalo-London: University of Toronto Press, p.26.

literary tradition".[209]

The idea of shooting a film based on Dante's *Inferno* with an unprecedented budget in Italian film history was first conceived at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. Tom Gunning and André Gaudreault (1986) have identified this precise historical moment as a pivotal turning point for the development of the cinematic medium in Western countries. In fact, these are the years where the prevalent exhibitive components of the "cinema of attractions" head to a sensitive "transition toward narrative integration".[210] As Antonella Braida writes in her *Dante's Inferno in the 1900s: from Drama to Film* (2007) about the birth of the cinematic medium: "while the new art was increasingly accused of providing cheap entertainment, of stealing actors from the stage, actors and film-makers tried to redress the balance both by responding to the accusations and by trying to change the nature of the viewers' experience".[211] Braida specifically divides this process into two phases: the first one is named 'from stage to set' (1900-1910) and includes early film productions which are characterised by the theatrical tendency to depict Dante's material with political and ideological connotations, sometimes put together to attempt a reconstruction of the Middle Ages. The second phase of movies, named 'from stage to film' (after 1911) rework Dante's material using the cinematic tools which became accessible from that time. This phase coincides with the era in film history when form changed from being based on 'attractions' to 'narrative' and this is precisely where Milano Film *Inferno* situates itself: on the cusp of this transition.

Considering the Italian technological and social context during this transition, we find a progressive disappearance of mobile exhibition sites at the same time as a proliferation in cinema theatres which represented a more institutional and

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[209] Ibidem, p.36.

[210] For further readings about the transformation the cinematic medium experienced in the 1910s see Gunning, T. (Fall 1986), 'The Cinema of Attractions – Early Film, its Spectator and the Avant-Garde', in *Wide Angle*, Vol 8, (n.3/4), pp. 64-67: "What precisely is the cinema of attraction? First it is a cinema that bases itself on the quality that Léger celebrated: its ability to *show* something. Contrasted to the voyeuristic aspect of narrative cinema analysed by Christian Metz, this is an exhibitionist camera. [...] What happened to the cinema of attraction? The period from 1907 to about 1913 represents the true *narrativisation* of the cinema, culminating in the appearance of feature films which radically revised the variety format. Film clearly took the legitimate theatre as its model, producing famous players in famous plays".

[211] Braida, A. (2007). *Dante's Inferno in the 1900s: from Drama to Film.* In A. Braida an L. Calé, *Dante on View,* London: Ashgate, p.18.

permanent place where spectators could purchase a proper ticket to watch a dedicated film screening. As Aldo Bernardini (1991) has pointed out, between 1904 and 1907 "film theatres opened to the larger public when some forward-thinking exhibitors decided to lower the price of admission (from 50 to 20-30 cents), taking care at the same time to update and to improve the equipment in the theatres and the projectors".[212] This phenomenon mostly hit "the cities of the centre-south (above all Rome and Naples), where the of life was lower and the social struggles were less accentuated and virulent".[213] Consequently, the cinematic experience was converted into a profitable business that could potentially increase the income of the new private film companies. In this way, the cinematic experience was no longer confined to just a few random spectators who enjoyed the magic of the cinematograph in their local city fair, but instead grew into a well-organised and institutionalised form of public entertainment, ruled by the newly founded private film companies. These visionary professionals acted as trailblazers: they were "professionally prepared and filled with an entrepreneurial spirit that was missing among the cineastes of the very first period. Producer, filmmakers, businessman, and, at times, exhibitors, these pioneers of the 'second generation' had the historic merit of creating the bases and the conditions for the development of national cinematography".[214] In the light of this ground-breaking and business-based perspective, the first challenge film companies faced was to assure cinema theatres of a recurrent clientele that would keep up their interest as they kept revisiting and paying for the film screenings. One of the main options was to approach the plethora of well-known popular stories with the tools of the cinematic medium. This was made possible by balancing the known narrative components of the story with the unexpected visual effects of the cinematic experience. The group of stories which were common knowledge could arouse the interest of a cross-class audience as these different types of spectators were equally aware of the same stories brought on the screen as these stories were all part of the popular tradition. At the same time, this interest could be strengthened by the novelty of watching these stories on the cinematic screen for the very first time. As

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[212] Bernardini, A. (1991) *Sperduto nel buio: il cinema muto e il suo tempo (1905 – 1930)*. Bologna: Cappelli Editore, p.24. Quoted also by J.P. Welle. (2004), *Dante's Inferno of 1911 and the Origins of Italian Film Culture*. In A.A. Iannucci, ed., *Dante, Cinema and Television*. Toronto-Buffalo-London: University of Toronto Press, pp.21-50.

[213] Ibidem, p.24

[214] Ibidem, p.28

Davide Gherardi and Giovanni Lasi (2007) have brilliantly pointed out:

> "the motto 'entertain and educate' became at the time a fashionable slogan for film companies, and features, such as the *Inferno*, and would suit perfectly a 'class-conscious' cultural vision, for which cinema should court the taste of more educated and learned audiences, on the one hand, and on the other hand, prepare the ground for 'educating' the 'lower' strata of the population".[215]

As I have widely discussed in the previous chapters, Dante's *Commedia* was popular among different social classes in the early 1900s. Moreover, Dante's text was a suitable source of inspiration for the cinematic medium as the self-conclusive narration of each canto and episode preserves its narrative with a bold and solid internal structure. This aspect, combined with the strong visual components of the *Inferno,* could provide material with which to experiment in relation to the productive tension between literature and the cinematic medium.

It was in the light of this productive context that the SAFFI-Comerio film company took its first steps towards the realisation of a movie based on Dante's *Commedia*. This idea was encouraged, and given a place at the inaugural World Cinema Competition of Milan in 1909.[216] This unprecedented opportunity offered the city further international visibility and a greater voice in world cinema as the event aimed to "raise the level of the cinema industry *tout court*, towards an artistic dimension, with organisational solutions (an 'excellent' jury, attendance by civil and religious authorities, well-chosen spectators) in order to give legitimacy to the marriage between films and works of the intellect".[217] With this in mind, the SAFFI-Comerio group started to produce its film for the competition, named *Dante* or *Saggi*

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[215] in Gherardi, D. and Lasi, G. (2007) "*Inferno": Ambitious Art Film by Milano Films*. In *Cinegrafie n.20, Matarazzo – Popular Romances and "Inferno", Milano Films 1911*, Bologna: Le Mani, p.386.

[216] At the beginning of the 20th Century, the city of Milan became an important economical and cultural centre of Italy. As Christine Poggi points out: "The Futurist myth of the modern metropolis coincided, to a large extent, with Milan self-promotion as the nation's capital of industrial production and commerce. In the years following the unification in 1861, the rising tide of economic growth had transformed Milan from a still largely agricultural and artisanal city to one with numerous factories, along with its ever-expanding periphery as well as the beginning of the infrastructure required to support modernization. During this period, the city and its surrounding regions experienced a dramatic increase in population, attracting those seeking work in the new industries as well as the allure of urban life". In Poggi, C. (2008). *Inventing Futurism: The Art and Politics of Artificial Optimism*, Woodstock: Princeton University Press, p.70.

[217] Gherardi, D. and Lasi, G. (2007), p.387-388.

del Poema Dantesco, which aimed to transpose part of the *Inferno* – more specifically, the first ten cantos of the 'reference text'. The reception of this anthological movie was exceptional, as proved by the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce's award of their gold medal to *Saggi del Poema Dantesco.* This prize encouraged the SAFFI-Comerio group to conceive a more ambitious project: that of the completion of the entire *Inferno* starting from the film *Saggi del Poema Dantesco* which was already in existence*.* However, completion of the movie faced a series of unexpected obstacles that led to the procrastination of the project for several months. In particular, following from the end of the World Cinema Competition of Milan the SAFFI-Comerio group ousted its leader, Luca Comerio. Subsequently, the company changed its name to Milano Films. In the following months, Milano Films started growing fast by including in its editorial group the collaboration of several important intellectuals. In order to complete their film on Dante's *Inferno,* the film company decided to strengthen and implement its main creative team. For this reason the first new member the company decided to hire was the writer Adolfo Padovan, who would join the already confirmed leading actor Salvatore Anzelmo Papa and artistic directors Giuseppe De Liguoro and Francesco Bartolini. Last but not least, the team was enriched by the collaboration of the Italian poet Gabriele D'Annunzio who was commissioned to produce the titles and the captions of the whole movie for Italian distribution.[218] After gathering together the most brilliant intellectuals and the most important experts in special effects the film production could officially start again. The aim was to produce the very first and biggest film based on Dante's *Inferno*.

In order to do so, Milano Films counted upon the unconditional support of the literary society *Dante Alighieri* (DA)*.* This collaboration was particularly important, as it was a partnership which aimed to distribute the film at both a national and international level. This opportunity was made possible thanks to the solid and territorial presence that the DA society played in Italy and across four continents with "285 committees, 212 of which were in the [Italian] Kingdom and 73 abroad in the early 1910s".[219] In this way, the idea of an international distribution

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[218] For extended readings on D'Annunzio's work on the captions see Raffaelli, S. (1995), *La Lingua Dantesca nel Cinema Muto Italiano – Dante's Language in Italian Films of the Silent Era*. In G. Casadio, *Dante e il Cinema – Dante and Cinema*, Ravenna: Longo Editore, pp. 59-75.

[219] Gherardi and Lasi (2007), p.394.

became possible, as "the opportunity to popularise Dante's poem among millions of Italian emigrants living abroad, and to promote the highest example of Italian culture in the world at large" was an important factor of the project.[220] Consequently, the power of *Inferno* lied in creating a movie with a strong, pragmatic organisation and employing the diverse skills of a group of productive professionals determined to work in unison. The set used experimental techniques and special effects made possible by the technological advances of the cinematic medium. Furthermore, the sizeable budget that supported the entire realisation of the movie demanded a strong, concerted marketing strategy that could guarantee an adequate income from the distribution of the film, both at a national and international level.

The first traces of a programmed advertising campaign related to the movie date back to 1910 when Milano Films had to face the competition of a similar Dante-based film project produced by a rival film company. This movie, also named *Inferno,* was a low budget production distributed by Psyche Helios film group in 1910, a few weeks before Milano Film's *Inferno* as an attempt to steal a march on ticket sales. In fact, Psyche Helios's *Inferno* was created in just three weeks as it did all it could to hinder the very first Italian colossus which was to be completed and launched only a few weeks later. The Psyche Helios group could complete their movie at such a pace only because their costs and lengths were comparatively modest (400mt for Psyche Helios's effort; 1000mt for Milano Films' *Inferno*). Back in 1910 this kind of competition was considered extremely unfair and perceived as a serious threat to the income that might be earned by the upcoming distribution of Milano Films' *Inferno.* This unexpected rivalry eventually took the Milano Films' film group to advance the request to "Milano Prefecture to register the film in the Registry of protected works

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[220] Ibidem p.394. Milano Films' idea of promoting Dante's *Inferno* through its movie as a symbol of the Italian cultural identity needs to be read also in the light of the political context in which the film was brought to life. For instance, consider the censorship applied in 1914 to the last 'tableau' of the movie, known as the Monument to Dante in Trento: "As recalled by Sergio Raffaelli, the manifest patriotic claim of the closing tableau of the film, initially welcomed by notables and politicians with enthusiasm, a few years later was to be stigmatised by the same authorities, which enforced its abolition. When in 1914, on the eve of the outbreak of the war, the film was re-released on the market [...] the censors authorised its circulation provided that 'tableau n.59 [sic for 54] is eliminated: Dante's Monument in Trent'. If in 1911 the attack against a somewhat embarrassing ally was tolerated, this scene, so clearly hostile towards Austria, became unacceptable after Italy's decision in favour of neutrality, instead of taking side with the Triple Alliance" In Gherardi, D. and Lasi, G. (2007). "*Inferno": Ambitious Art Film by Milano Films*. In *Cinegrafie n.20*, *Matarazzo – Popular Romances and "Inferno", Milano Films 1911*. Bologna: Le Mani, p.396. For extended reading see also Canosa, M. (2007). *Celluloid and Bronze – A Monument to Dante: "Inferno" by Milano Films*. In *Cinegrafie n.20*, *Matarazzo – Popular Romances and "Inferno", Milano Films 1911*, Bologna: Le Mani, pp.432-456.

in order to receive the protection granted by articles 14 and 23 of the copyright law: [Milano Films'] *Inferno* is the first film in Italy applying for copyright protection".[221]

After facing the rivalry of Psyche Helios, Milano Films's *Inferno* could be finally completed and it was first premiered a few months later at Teatro Mercadante, Naples, in Italy on March 1st, 1911. The audience included an assortment of important contemporary intellectuals including the philosopher Benedetto Croce. In the weeks following the premiere, the film was screened in many other Italian cities. It is widely reported that the screening was also accompanied by several other non-filmic components such as oral readings from a selection of verses of Dante's poem, an innovative set of lights, a live instrumental soundtrack and a brochure specifically tailored to the city where the film was screened.[222] This shows once more the intermedial interest in Dante's *Inferno* in that sensitive historical moment where the cinematic medium was progressively trying to affirm its independent dignity. The Italian reception of the film after its first screening was extraordinarily positive, as testified, for instance by the "prolonged applause"[223] of the audience in Milan and the "constant assent and unanimous clapping of hands, repeated at the closing of each act"[224] in Rome.

3.1.1 The Film – Between Tradition and Innovation

Having detailed the context related to the genesis of Milano Films' *Inferno*, let us consider its main technical and aesthetic features in order to understand the reasons why many critics have defined this film as an "unprecedented feat" which could change the history of cinema to such an extent that, after its release, "cinema

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[221] Gherardi and Lasi (2007), p.399. For extended readings on the rivalry between Milano Films' *Inferno* and Psyche Helios' *Inferno* see e.g Benni, V.C. (2004), *The Helios-Psiche Dante Trilogy*. In A.A. Iannucci, ed., *Dante, Cinema and Television*, 1st ed., Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp.51-73. See also Bernardini, A. (1995). *I Film dall'Inferno Dantesco nel Cinema Muto Italiano – Film Based on the Inferno of the Italian Silent Era*. In G. Casadio, ed., *Dante e il Cinema – Dante and Cinema*, Ravenna: Longo Editore, pp. 29-34

[222] We know that "for Milano Films' *Inferno* of specific booklets were prepared both for the screening in 1911 and its 1914 re-release, in Italy and abroad". For a comparative reading about the different booklets available in the cities where the film was screened see Canosa, M. (2007). 'Celluloid and Bronze – A Monument to Dante: "Inferno" by Milano Films', in *Cinegrafie n.20, Matarazzo – Popular Romances and "Inferno", Milano Films 1911*, Bologna: Le Mani, pp.432-456. Quote in pp.434-435.

[223] Gherardi and Lasi (2007), p.392.

[224] Ibidem, p.393.

won't be the same anymore".[225] The main reference for this analysis is the 2011 restored copy of the original 1911 Italian version curated by Cineteca Bologna that I am going to assess in more depth in the third section of this chapter.

First of all, as it is possible to acknowledge from the documents provided by the 2007 restoration process, when Milano Films' *Inferno* was released in its final cut in 1911, the Italian audience could attend the screening of more than a 1000 meters of film. Its screening length was around 66 minutes. If we consider the original 1911 version tailored for Italian distribution, we see that the movie is composed of 70 different shots, further interspersed by 61 explanatory captions. In order to understand the relevance of this film in its historical context, it is important to keep in mind as a comparison that it was a full four years later, in 1915, that a similarly immense project like David Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, an equivalent effort in the United States, was produced, eventually overcoming the two hour screening time.[226]

If we compare the film to the 'reference text' of Dante's *Inferno*, the movie covers the entire *cantica* from the dark forest until the exit from Hell. In this way, the film inherits the episodic narrative that is a primary feature of Dante's *Inferno*. The journey across Hell that Dante makes escorted by his guide Virgil, articulated through the theme of damnation, sees them journey through infernal circles, each one populated by people obliged to eternally suffer a proportional and corporeal punishment for their respective sins. This plot structure naturally lends itself to the narrative form of a few well-defined episodes where Dante can face the gravity of the specific sin through the encounter with many infernal demons and characters who come out of the sinners' crowd to temporarily talk to him. From this, we understand that clearly Milano Films' *Inferno* has maintained the structure of its 'reference text'. However, if we focus on the differences between the poem and the movie we would better understand the ways the cinematic medium was employed in its experimental and remedial nature. Therefore, this approach will help us to re-assess the potential of film adaptation in the light of a greater awareness of the intermedial dialogue

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[225] Canosa, M. (2011). 'Più Bello di come lo si Figura - Better than you can Imagine', booklet attached to the DVD edition of *Inferno*, Bologna: Edizioni Cineteca di Bologna, p.5.

[226] *Birth of a Nation* (D. W. Griffith, USA, 1915)

among the different arts involved in the adaptation process. Although the movie preserves the episodic structure of its 'reference text', the cinematic medium opened up a set of completely brand new possibilities in the reworking of the narration and the infernal imagery. The challenge of re-creating the infernal imagery on the screen encouraged the troupe to experiment with the visual potential of the cinematic medium. Antonella Braida (2007) reminds us that:

> "For the new film medium the cinematographer Emilio Roncarolo produced a virtuoso adaptation of the poem's traditional iconography as typified by Doré's illustrations. The film includes a series of special effects, with double and even triple exposures, inspired by Georges Méliès's workshop. [...] Other special effects are based on theatrical illusionist techniques, such as the use of a black background and black clothes to simulate invisibility and ropes to support or transport characters at different heights. [...] In addition to these more evident technical aspects, an artificial background was used for many of the scenes set in lower Hell".[227]

On the other hand, the film shows how the narrative potential of the cinematic medium was employed. Milano Film's *Inferno* presents an innovative narrative component of the early 1910s: that of the presence of three different flashbacks. Despite the fact that literature too can employ the flashback technique, Dante's *Inferno* does not present any alteration in the unities of place, time and action. More specifically, when Dante meets the sinners and talks to them, each one narrates their stories to him *viva voce* and in real-time without any alteration of time and space where the main storyline takes place. In contrast, while the unity of space, time and action is generally maintained throughout the movie, Milano Film's *Inferno* uses the flashback technique in three parts of the story. As I am going to analyse in more depth in the next section, each of these flashbacks is remediated in a different and creative way. However, all three sequences still take the characters out of the infernal setting for a few moments as each flashback brings them back to the exact moment of their sin.

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[227] Braida, A. (2007). *Dante's Inferno in the 1900s: from Drama to Film*, in A., Braida, and Calé, L., ed., *Dante on View – the Reception of Dante in the Visual and Performing Arts*. London: Ashgate, p.48. For an example of multiple exposure see Figure 24 when Dante and Virgil face the infernal storm in the Circle of the Lustful (Shot n.13). For an example of employment of black backgrounds to simulate invisibility see Figure 1 when Dante and Virgil meet Paolo and Francesca (Shot n.14). For an example of artificial background in the lower Hell see Figure 11 when Dante and Virgil meet Ugolino della Gherardesca in the lake of ice in the Cocytus (Shot n. 58).

3.1.2 The Flashbacks

The first flashback appears at shot 15, when Dante finds himself in the circle of Lust and meets Paolo and Francesca.[228] Much like in the poem, Francesca comes out of the crowd of the damned people and gets closer to Dante. However, in the film her narration of her love with Paolo is expressed in a completely different way from the 'reference text'. In fact, whilst in the poem we read of Dante listening to Francesca's story directly from her mouth, here in the movie their love story is expressed through the cinematic language, through the flashback technique (Figure 1). The flashback showing the kiss between the two lovers gets introduced by title n.13 reporting "Francesca's tale. 'One day we reading were for our delight,/of Launcelot, how Love did him enthral/ Alone we were, and without any fear" (Figure 2). The flashback corresponds to the subsequent separate shot: n.15 where we see Paolo and Francesca kissing (Figure 3). After that, title n.14 takes us to the main storyline, taking place inside the *Inferno*: "Dante is so taken by pity from Francesca's tale that he faints. 'I swooned away as if I had been dying'" (Figure 4).

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[228] The episode of Paolo Malatesta and Francesca da Rimini is narrated in Dante's *Inferno* V. The two young lovers fell in love when they were already married to other people. Once their affair got discovered, they got killed by their respective families. For extended readings see Havely, N. (2007). *Francesca Observed: Painting and Illustration c.1790-1840*. In A., Braida, and Calé, L. ed*., Dante* on View – *The Reception of Dante in the Visual and Performing Arts*. London: Ashgate, pp.95-108 and Iannucci, A. A. (2007), *Francesca da Rimini: The Movie*. In A., Braida, and Calé, L. ed*., Dante* on View, London: Ashgate, pp.153-162.
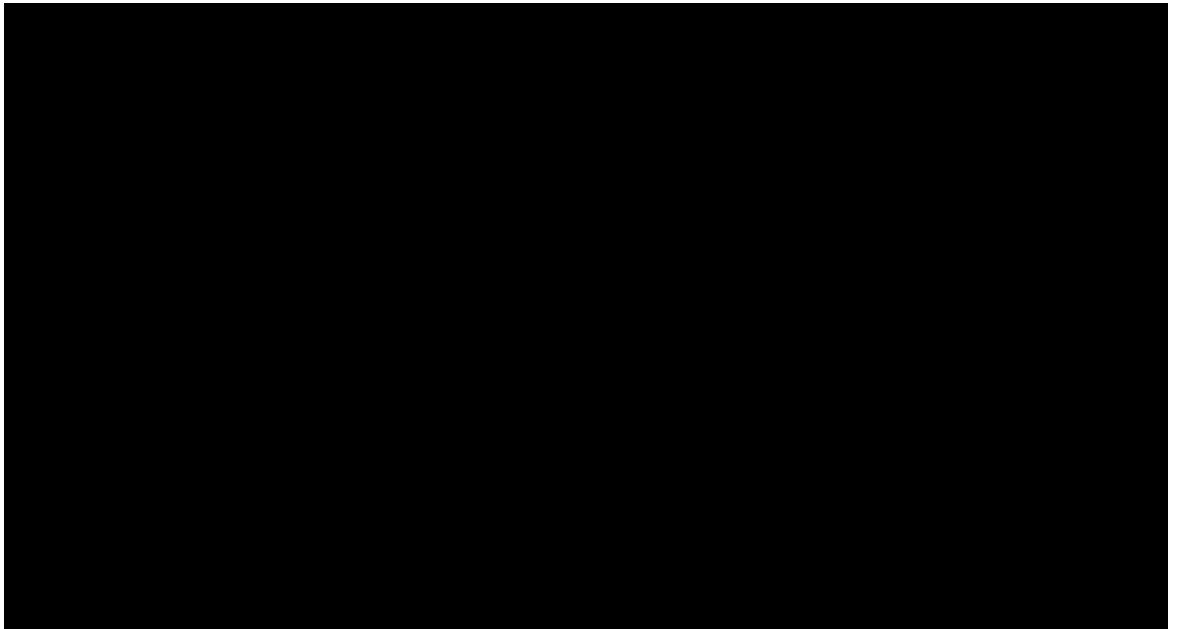
Figure 3.1 - Dante and Virgil meet Paolo and Francesca (Shot n.14)
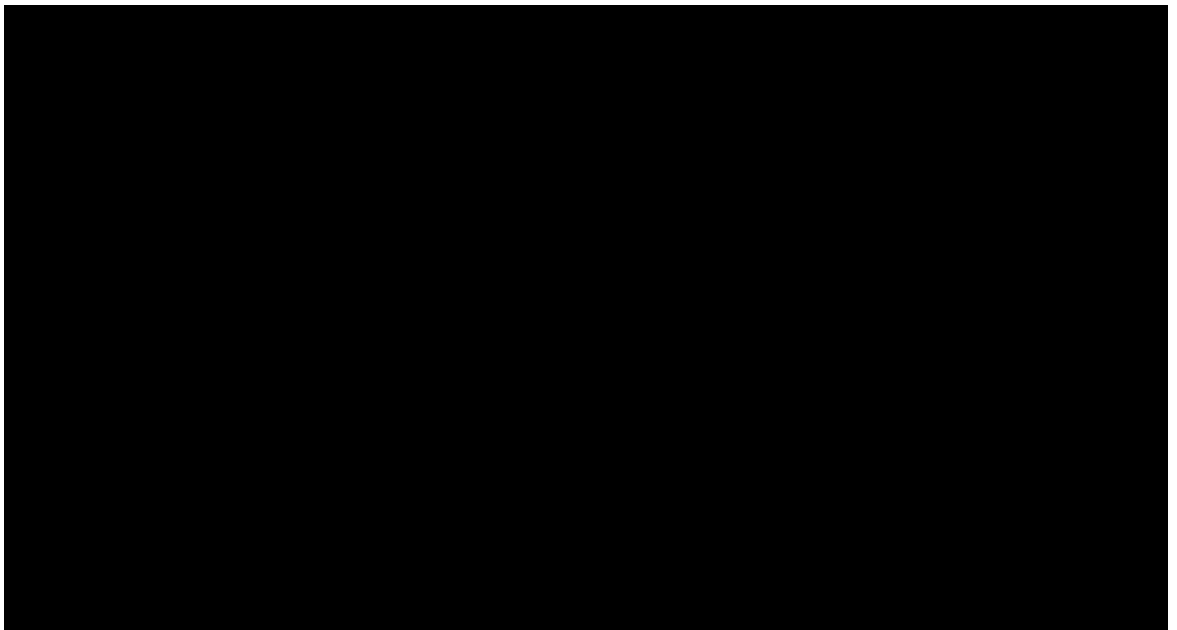
Figure 3.2 - Title n.13 introduces Paolo and Francesca's flashback
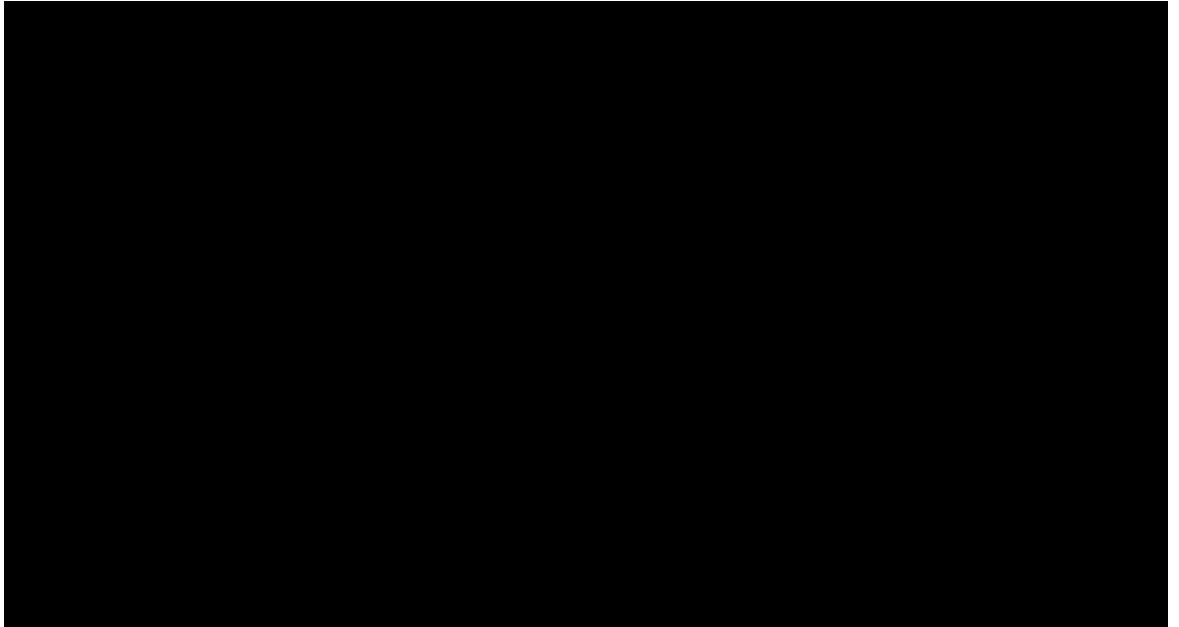
Figure 3.3 - Paolo and Francesca's Flashback – the moment before the kiss (Shot n.15)
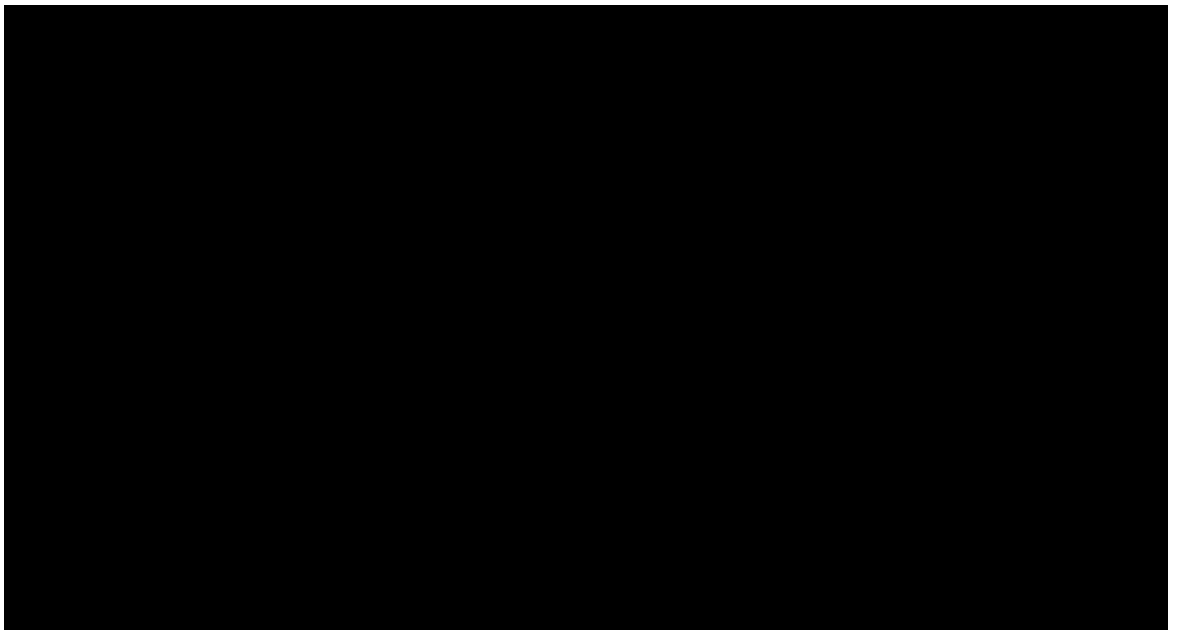
Figure 3.4 - Title n.14 ends Paolo and Francesca's Flashback

The second flashback appears at shots 32a and 32b when Dante finds

himself in the seventh circle, containing those who have been 'violent against themselves', which is to say those who committed suicide. Here the poet meets Pier Della Vigna who is reduced to a bleeding and bare tree as a form of retaliation for taking his own life (Figure 5).[229] The flashback is first introduced by Title 29 reporting: "Pier Della Vigna, accused of treason, is blinded by Frederick II's order" (Figure 6). Then the flashback starts in shot n.32a where we see Pier Della Vigna getting blinded in prison (Figure 7). Following Title 30, "After torture, he kills himself" (Figure 8), the first part of the flashback is shot n. 32b where we see Pier Della Vigna committing suicide in prison (Figure 9). We therefore understand that the episode has fully concluded as the following Title n.31 relates to a new group of sinners and thus to a new topic: "The squanderers of their wealth, chased and torn by she-dogs. 'Behind them was the forest full of black/She-mastiffs, ravenous and swift on foot'" (Figure 10).
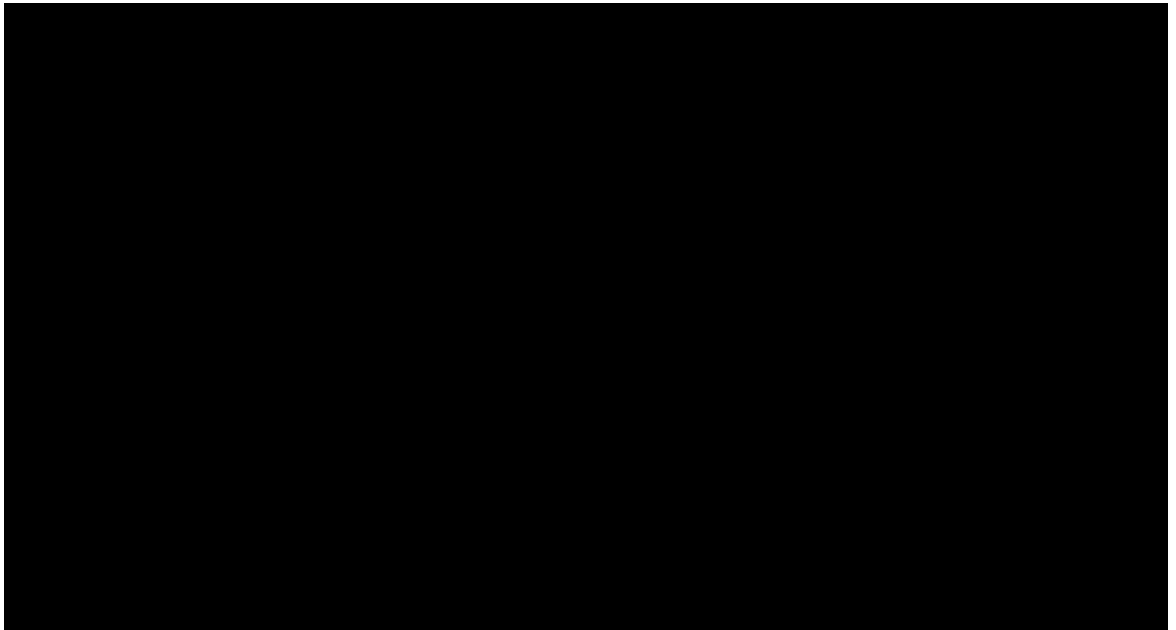
Figure 3.5 - Dante and Virgil meet Pier Della Vigna reduced to a tree in Hell

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[229] The episode of Pier della Vigna is narrated in Dante's *Inferno XIII*. He was an Italian politician and notable intellectual who lived between the 12th and 13th century. He was imprisoned after being accused of treason and later committed suicide. For extended readings see Emmerson, R. K. (2006). *Key Figures in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia*, New York-London: Routledge, p.533.
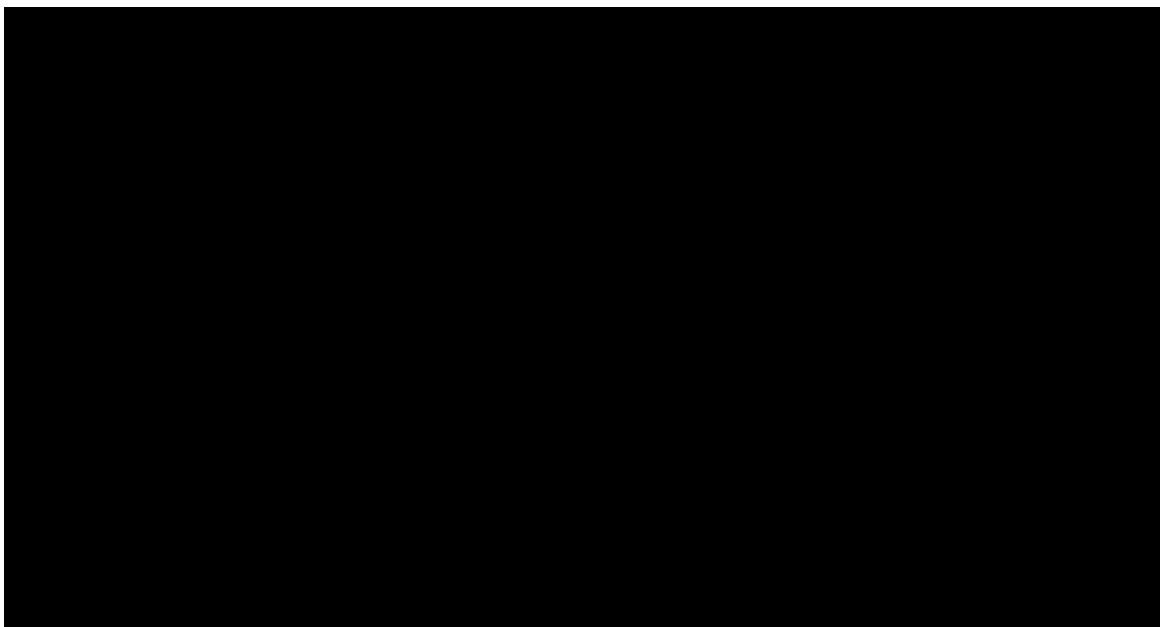
Figure 3.6 - Title n.29 introduces Pier Della Vigna's flashback
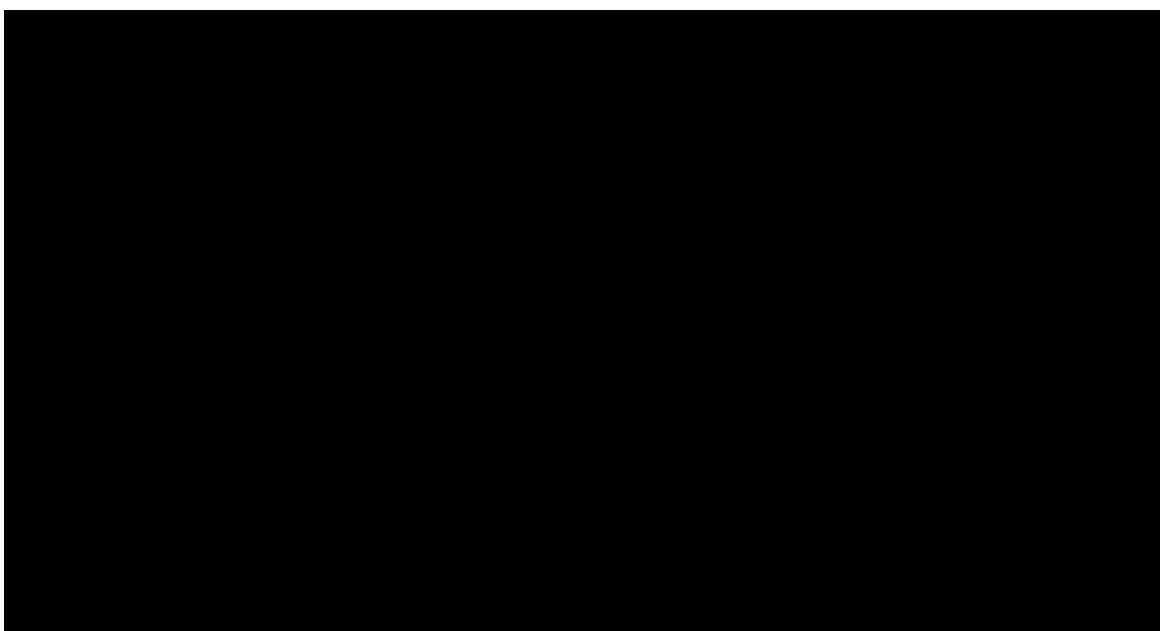
Figure 3.7 - Pier Della Vigna gets blinded (Shot n.32a)
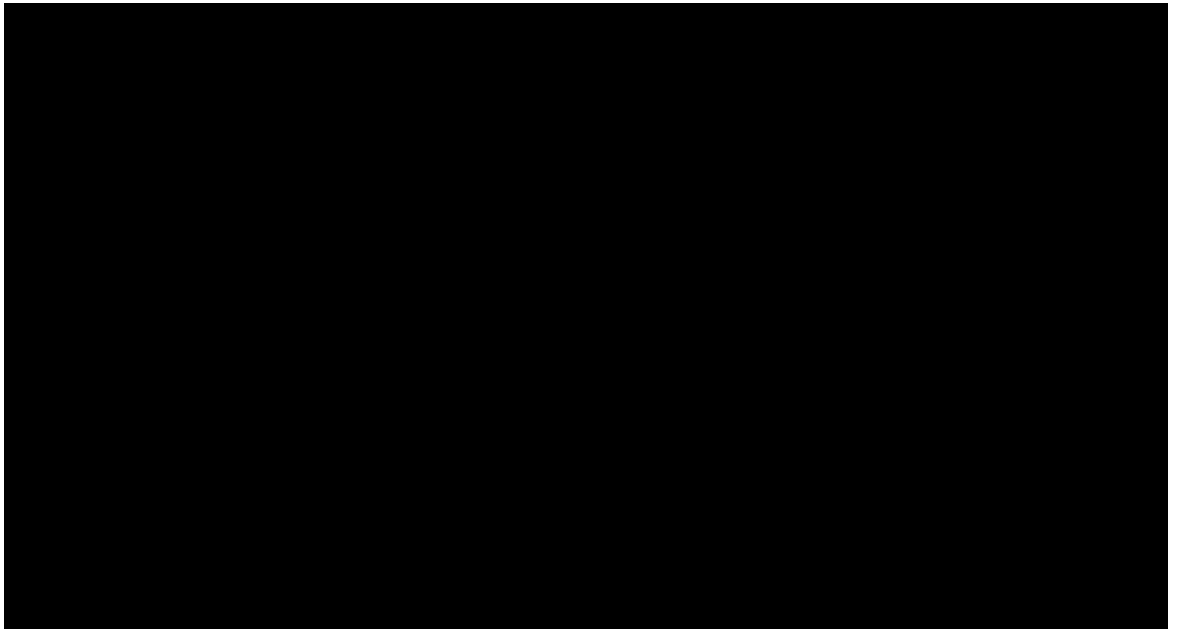
Figure 3.8 - Title n.30 explains that Pier della Vigna decides to commit suicide
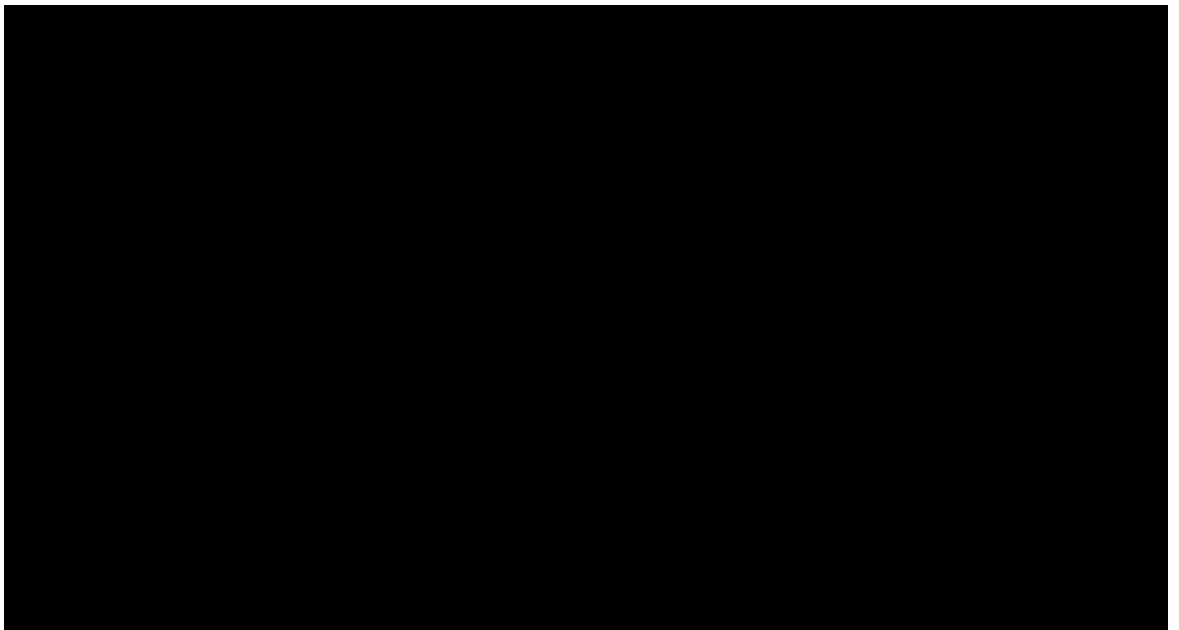
Figure 3.9 - Pier Della Vigna commits suicide (Shot 32b)
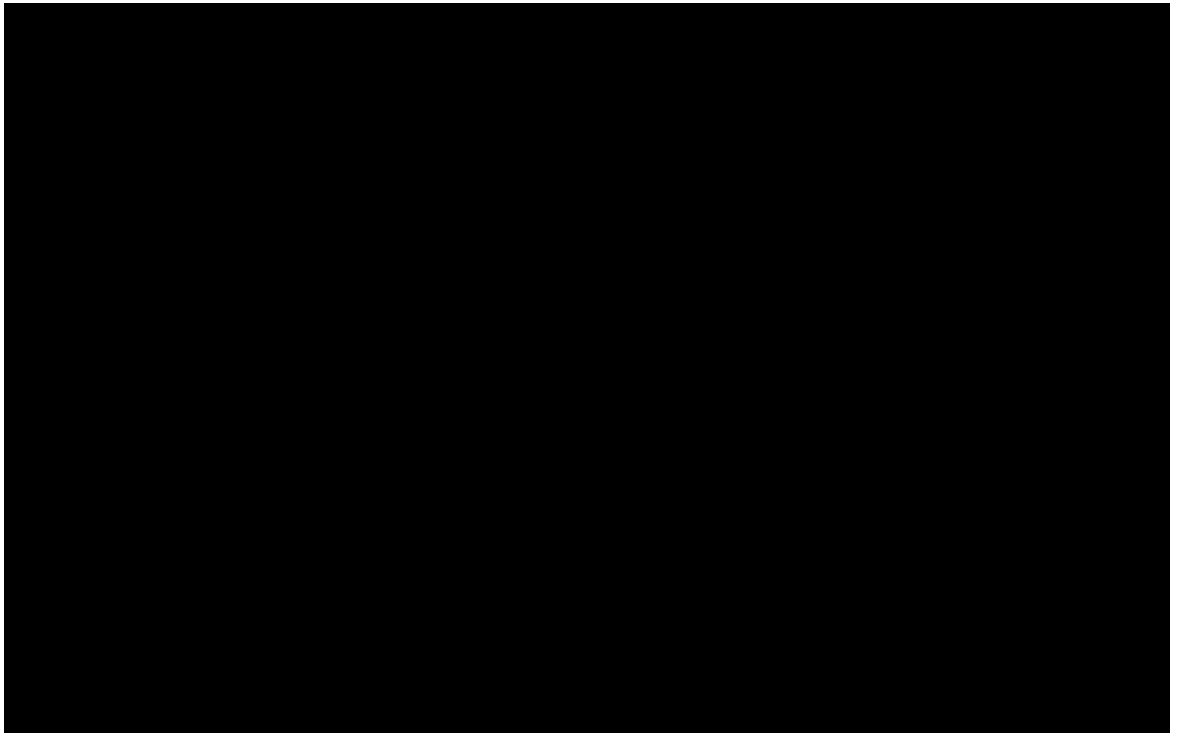
Figure 3.10 - Title n.31 introduces another sequence and we understand Pier Della Vigna's flashback

Finally, the third and longest flashback appears at shots n. 61-62-63 when Dante finds himself in the Circles of the Traitors where he meets Ugolino Della Gherardesca, condemned to starve to death while locked inside the tower of Pisa with all of his children.[230] After recognising Ugolino, who is savagely eating the nape of Archbishop Ruggieri (Figure 11), the flashback is introduced by Title n.56 reporting: "Count Ugolino recounts his and his children's death in the tower of Pisa. 'and I began/Already blind, to groping over each/and two days called them after they were dead/Then hunger did what sorrow could not do'" (Figure 12). Then in shots n.61-62-63 we first see Ugolino and his children held prisoner in the tower (Figure 13). Next, a messenger locks the door from the outside (Figure 14) and Ugolino watches his sons slowly die (Figure 15). The flashback ends with the subsequent shot n.64, where the spectator is brought back to the infernal setting and we are able to watch again the same Ugolino going back to eating Archbishop Ruggieri's nape

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[230] The episode of Ugolino della Gherardesca is narrated in Dante's *Inferno XXXIII*. He was an Italian politician who lived in the 13th century and ended up being imprisoned in the Tower of Pisa with his kids after being accused of treason. For more reading see Hollander, R. (July 1984). Inferno XXXIII, 37-74: 'Ugolino's Importunity'. In *Speculum* 59(3), pp.549-555.

(Figure 16).
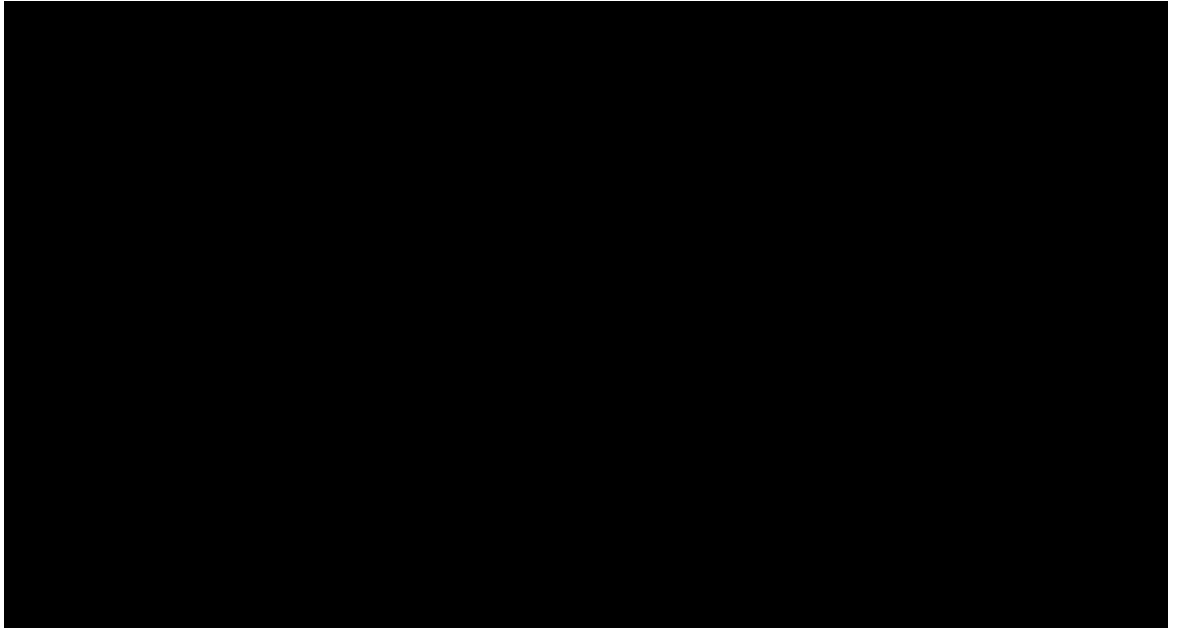
Figure 3.11 - Dante and Virgil meet Ugolino Della Gherardesca in Hell (Shot n.58)
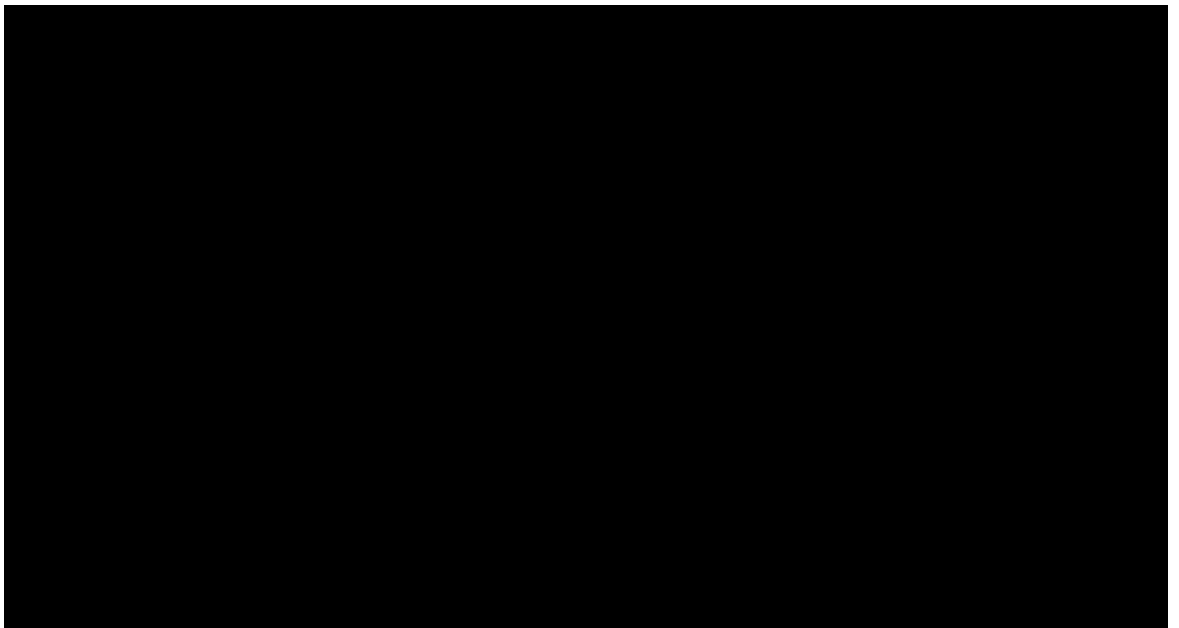
Figure 3.12 - Title n.56 introduces Ugolino's flashback
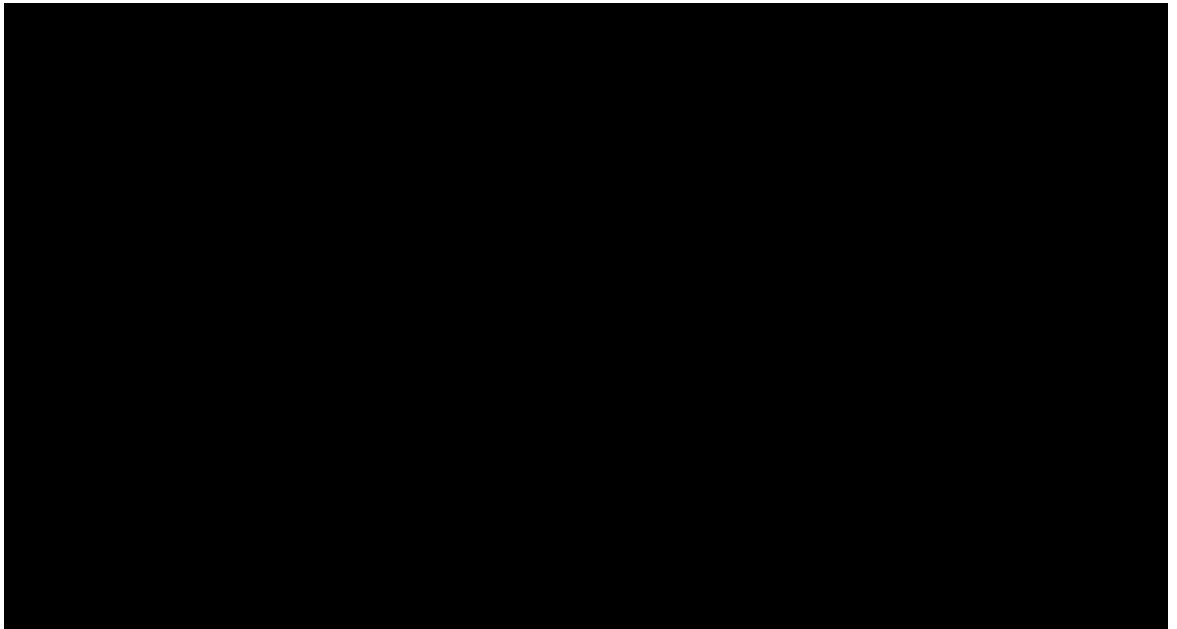
Figure 3.13 - Ugolino and his kids imprisoned inside of the Tower of Pisa (Shot n. 61)
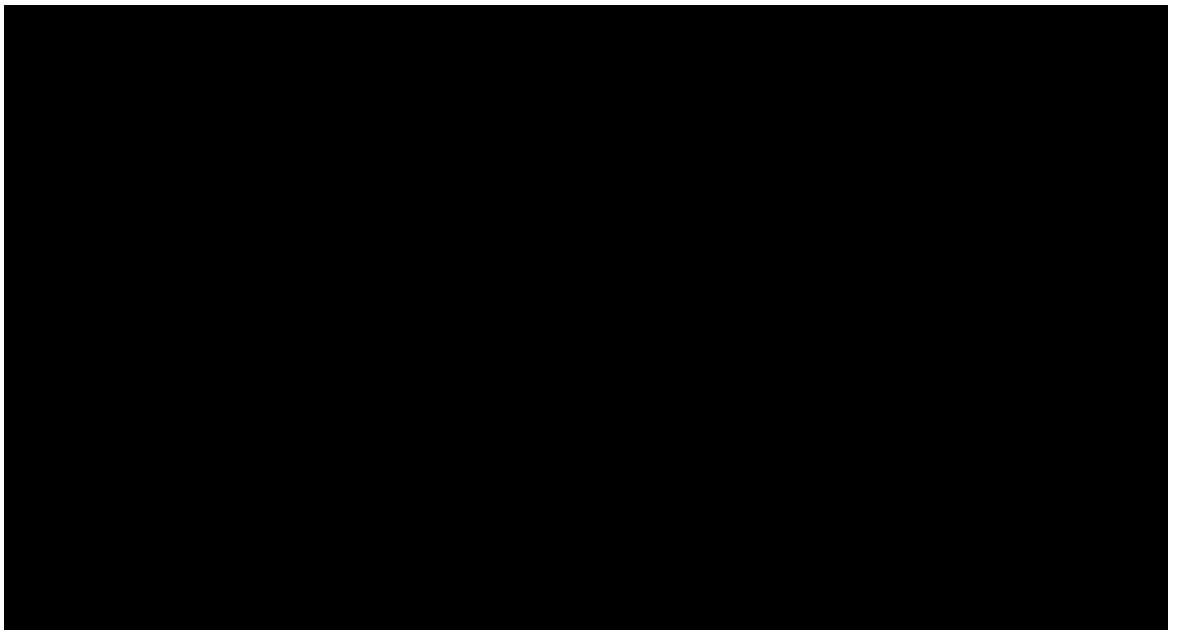
Figure 3.14 - Simultaneously an officer from the outside orders locking the tower for good (Shot n.62)
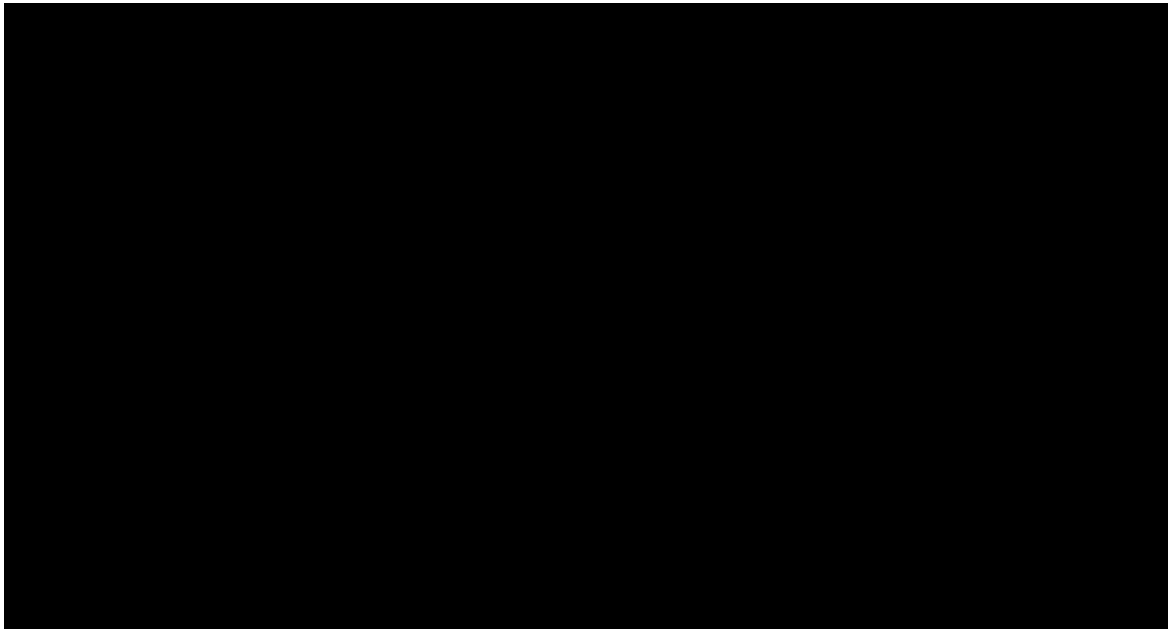
Figure 3.15 - Ugolino and his kids die of starvation (Shot n.63)
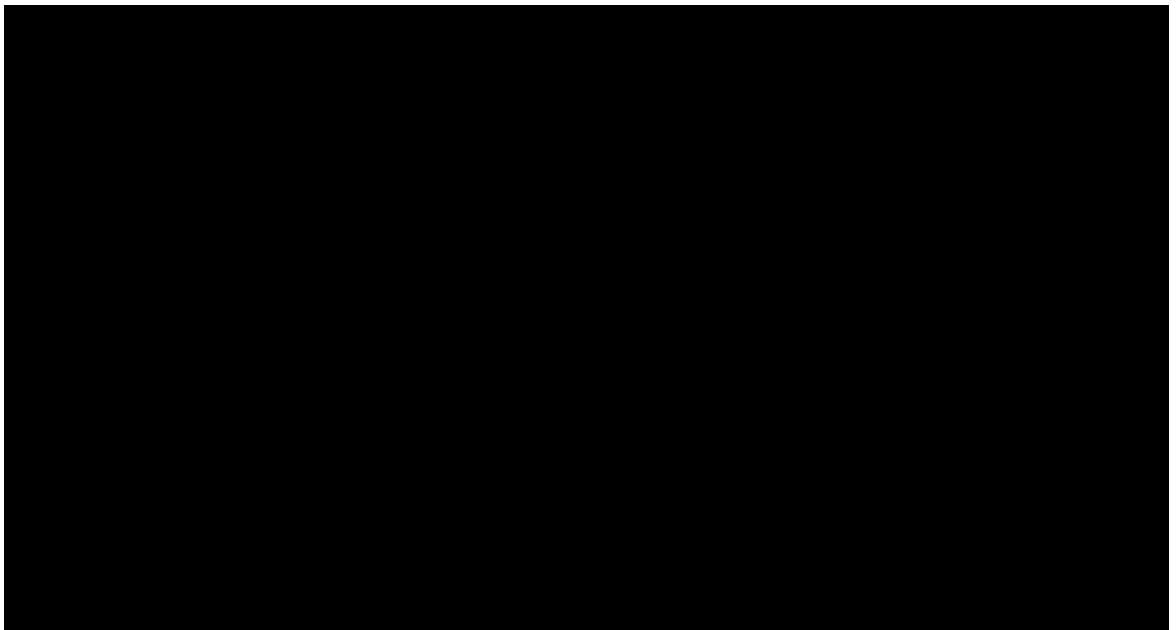
Figure 3.16 - End of the flashback, we are back to Hell again with Ugolino eating from Archbishop Ruggieri's nape (Shot n.64)

After these preliminary considerations, one question in particular arises:

what are the main similarities and the main differences between the 'reference text' and film within these sequences? In the light of this, to what extent has the cinematic medium been employed in its creative and re-mediate power? A much-needed comparative analysis of these sequences will help us to outline the ways Dante's infernal imagery is remediated through the cinematic medium.

The first question can be responded to with the following observations. First, as already pointed out, all these three sequences are flashbacks. In particular, this narrative technique involves a temporary diversion from the main storyline – in this case, the infernal journey that Dante and his guide Virgil are making across the various circles – and projects the diegesis into another spatial and temporal dimension. The first flashback related to Paolo and Francesca brings the spectator back to the moment they fell in love while reading a book together. The flashback is composed of a single take with no internal editing and with the camera remaining completely still. It lasts around 30 seconds (min. 15.40 – 16.09) and shows Francesca first listening to Paolo reading *viva voce* from a book and then getting closer to him until the two are about to kiss. We can clearly see that the view point is now placed inside a private room (probably a noble property) and the change of clothes of the two lovers refer to the time when they were alive. This change of setting is also clearly evident in the second flashback, related to Pier Della Vigna (min. 32.03 - 35.10). We are now brought inside a prison. We understand the setting has been specifically reconstructed from the infernal space to allow this action taking place. This flashback is also composed of a single take and the camera remains completely still while the action takes place right in front of it. The action is composed of three dramatic moments. First, Pier Della Vigna is inside of the prison completely isolated (min. 32.03 – 32.27). Second, the guards step inside from the back door and torture him (min. 32.28 – 33.38). Then a title interrupts the images and explains that the protagonist kills himself after the torture (min. 33.39 – 33.42). The flashback continues with Pier Della Vigna alone again in the prison where he commits suicide and dies on the floor (min. 33.43 – 35.10). In this sequence, the employment of a separate caption containing the title and the change of colours in the video (light green in part 1, yellowish in part 2, green again in part 3) help to create a visual 'movement' across the three moments – a form of internal editing that heightens the

pathos and triggers emotional participation from the spectators. Finally, we again identify a change of setting from the infernal environment in the last flashback, the one related to Ugolino Della Gherardesca. The flashback is composed of three moments where we can identify two different locations: the inside of the Tower of Pisa and the area right outside the tower, that of an external location. In the first part of the third flashback (min. 57.41 – 58.19) we see Ugolino already imprisoned with his children inside of the Tower of Pisa. Then a visible cut in the editing takes the spectator to the second moment of the flashback (min. 58.20 – 59.08). We are now out of the tower of Pisa: an officer riding a horse arrives at the prison and orders the guards to lock the only door for good. The colours here are mainly blue. Another cut brings us back inside the prison for the third time in the flashback, divided in two parts by a visible internal cut. The first part of this third moment takes place between min. 59.08 – 59. 40: his clamouring for food surround Ugolino. A violent internal jump cut (min. 59.40 – 1.01.15) triggers the last part of this flashback sequence: now we see all Ugolino's children lying on the floor - they are slowly dying of starvation.

Another common aspect present in all the flashback sequences is the theatrical setting of the images and the acting. This influence is made evident in different ways. First of all, we can see that many of the internal locations are reconstructed with the help of scenography backcloths and props (Figure 17).
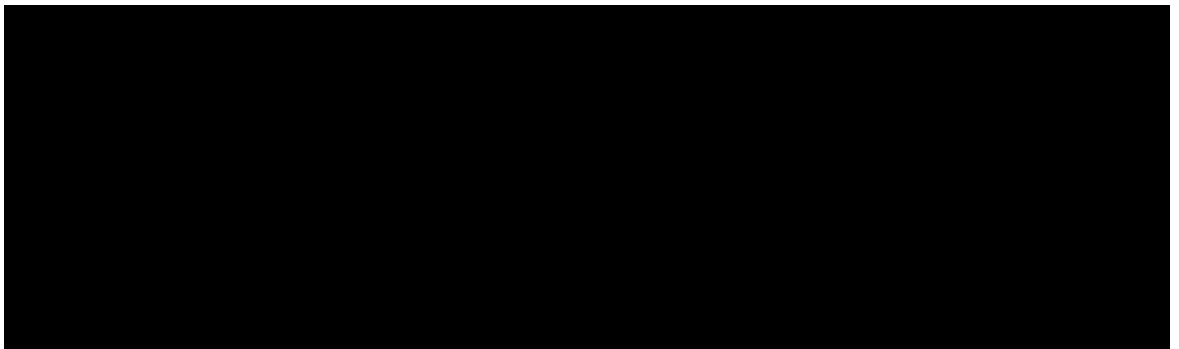
Figure 3.17 - Examples of scenography backcloths and props in all three flashback sequences

We can see that all actions take place with a frontal shot that reveals a relatively finite space across which the actors can move. Secondly, another theatrical element is the hyper-dramatic acting style. Cinema possessed "the significant

presence [...] of actors coming from a traditional theatrical background".[231] In addition to this, the absence of the diegetic sound means that the understanding of the scene relies entirely upon its visual components. Consequently, the physical gestures were still the main channel through which the actors could express the action, along with the help of the explanatory titles.

However, the theatrical setting and acting style were not the only source of inspiration for the aesthetics of Milano Films' *Inferno*. We previously saw the influence of Gustave Dore's illustrations of Dante's *Commedia* in the *mise-en-scène* of several sequences of Milano Films' *Inferno*. This also applies to flashback number 3, relating the story of Ugolino Della Gherardesca. If we compare Dore's illustration of Canto XXXIII with a frame of the movie (Figure 18) we see that the light source comes through a barred window on the left-hand side of the image.
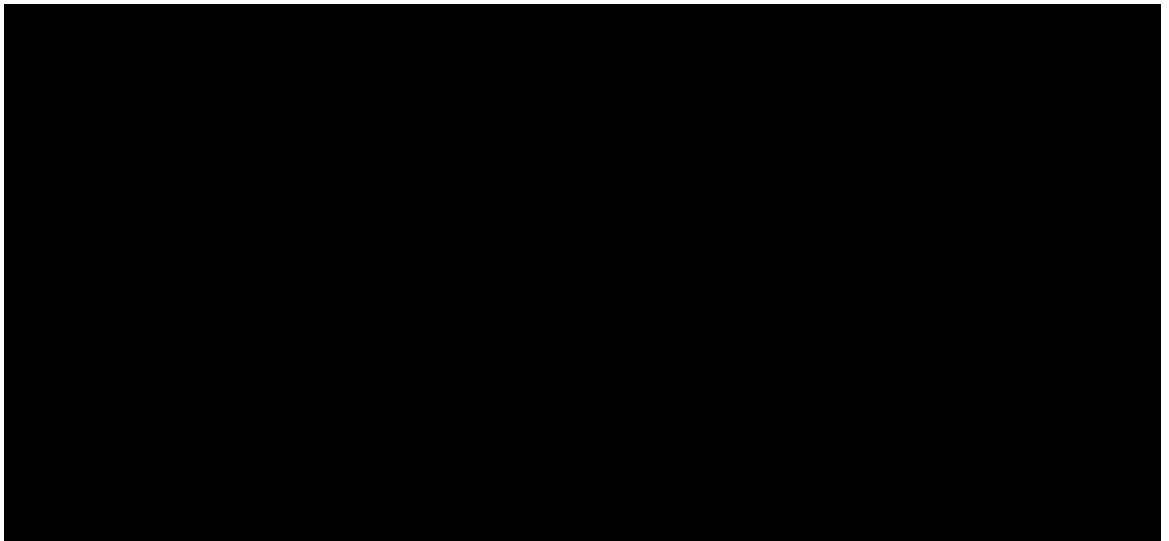
Figure 3.18 - Frame from Ugolino's flashback and Gustave Doré's illustration of Canto XXXIII

Moreover, the entire scenography conceived for this sequence recalls the bare stoned-wall of Doré's illustration. However, the position of the children around Ugolino is considerably different from the scene in the film. While in Dore's illustration all the sons are gathered around their father in a contemplative request for help, in the film the dynamic forces work in the opposite direction. This

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[231] Braida, A. (2007), p.47.

repositions the human presence, bringing a greater sense of repulsive separation. In addition, in the film sequence the central perspective allows us to identify the vanishing point of the composition as the bottom wall which, in this case, is occupied by a black window that deprives the prisoners of any possible attempt of escape.

In light of the common aesthetic features considered, how can we identify the experimental and re-mediative nature of the cinematic medium? First of all let us concentrate on the ways the narrative is constructed. This will help us to understand in which ways these key passages of Dante's *Inferno* were *remediated* to the screen in a productive way, where the cinematic medium could fulfil its own potential. As previously discussed, all three stories of Dante's *Inferno* are narrated directly by the characters that Dante meets in his journey. The reader learns about the sinners' stories in a form of verbal report that happens *viva voce* with Dante and Virgil listening and intervening in the dialogue. Dante's *Inferno* never employs analepsis as a way to access the past. In the first *cantica* of the *Commedia*, the infernal setting remains Dante and Virgil's background for their entire journey through Hell. In contrast, Milano Films' *Inferno* presents three different moments where analepsis is employed, and it therefore temporarily suspends the main storyline of Dante and Virgil's journey through the various infernal circles. The presence of three different flashbacks in the film thus allows the spectator to access the three stories in a different way than the reading experience. This cinematic experience is manifested primarily visually rather than verbally, as I have already argued. Most importantly, all flashbacks are built in a peculiar way where the two characters of Dante and Virgil - who are the main protagonists of Dante's *Inferno* - are not included in the action we see on the screen. We do not see them any longer; we just see the sinners alone, in the precise moment they sinned in life and for which they are now condemned to suffering in Hell. Moreover, each flashback does not belong to the main characters of the film, Dante and Virgil, but to three secondary characters whom Dante meets only once in the whole movie. These flashbacks can be taken as a good example of the experimental narrative which the cinematic medium enables. In Francesca's flashback the whole action is captured with a single still, frontal shot. The episode starts and dissolves without any trace of editing. Meanwhile, in Pier Della Vigna's flashback, the narration twists as there is an internal title that explains what we are

going to be shown in the following segment: the character's suicide. Finally, in Ugolino's flashback, the narration utilises the alternate montage. In this way, the spectator can contemporarily be witness to a specific event that is happening inside the Tower of Pisa whilst another simultaneously occurs outside the Tower. The starkest evidence of this technique comes when Ugolino and his children are already imprisoned and the officer goes outside and gives orders to lock the entrance.

The analysis of these sequences allows us to focus on a main outcome: that of the re-mediative power of the cinematic medium as it connects with other arts and media. The specific case of Milano Films's *Inferno* represents a suitable example in the decades of the progressive institutionalisation of the filmic form. As previously pointed out, Milano Films' *Inferno* sees the direct influence of different arts: from its 'reference text' to the theatrical settings and acting brought to life through Gustave Doré's illustrations. This influence is not only expressed in terms of random inspiration, indeed here several media components are freely employed in new narrative and visual ways. Literature, for example, in its relationship with a few passages with Dante's text, is here remediated in the form of titles and explanatory captions. Its form is often of a dual nature: the direct quote and the rephrased meaning. To take an example, Title n.56, the episode of Ugolino, features one of Dante's *terzine* being faithfully quoted while below it we are presented with a few explanatory lines giving us insight into what we are watching. It is important to clarify that all titles always precede the visual sequence, so the narrative episodes the spectators are watching are always introduced and explained beforehand. In this way, the literary components, the theatrical settings and the film aesthetics which were partly influenced by previous illustrations of Dante's text co-operate and integrate, producing the re-mediation of their expressive boundaries and helping to bolster the potential of the cinematic medium. These dynamics left a lasting legacy. Milano Films' *Inferno* is a key example of the passage from the 'cinema of attraction' into 'narrative cinema'. However, this in itself shows once more the insufficiency of a theory of film adaptation based primarily on the centrality of the 'reference text'. As in this case, the adaptation process terminates with the production of something new and never seen on the screen before. The most distinctive outcome of this process was indeed to experiment with the cinematic medium by appropriating,

incorporating and manipulating other visual, dramatic and performative components that were previously reserved to other arts. In this passage, the aspects of the incorporated media help to build a new and different function for the cinematic medium. To support this, Antonella Braida (2007) provides us with an illuminating extract from the journal *Cinematografo*, where we find an interesting exploration of the ways literature, theatre and cinema interrelated in Milano Films' *Inferno:*

> "Theatre and cinema share the same starting project, but then proceed to different and even opposite directions [...]; while cinema lacks the powerful tool represented by the written word, it has the advantage and privilege of setting its art against the beautiful scenes offered by nature".[232]

In addition, this passage shows how the re-mediative power of the cinematic medium does not only imply the reshuffle of a set of already-existing components, but, more importantly, it leads to the creation of something new, something that is able to deal with matters of conservation and innovation which, in the end, is the main essence of *adaptation* in its broadest sense. But how does this re-mediative power work in the digital era?

3.2   *Inferno* (Milano Films, ITA, 1911): the Restoration and DVD Edition Curated by Cineteca Bologna

Understanding the re-mediate power of digital technologies in practices of film restoration and conservation, in 2007 Cineteca Bologna produced an accurate restoration of Milano Film's *Inferno* which was subsequently distributed in DVD format in 2011. The work carried out on Milano Films' *Inferno* has two important details. The first relates to practices of conservation and protection of one of the first main films that the Italian film industry has produced in the Silent Era. This is one of the main reasons for restoring the film to be as close as possible to the version the audience experienced in 1911, before the proliferation of a number of copies produced by American distributors and before the intervention of the censorship that eliminated the sequence dedicated to the monument to Dante in Trento. Secondly, it is important not to underestimate the technological shift that causes the

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[232] L'Illustrazione Cinematografica, (8–10 December 1912), as quoted in Braida A. (2007), p. 46.

transition from a film-based support into a digital one. This has opened up potentially infinite access to this movie. In order to understand the reasons behind the restoration which was carried out almost 100 years after the first distribution of Milano Films's *Inferno*, along with investigating the implications and the practical problems that this process involved, I considered the potential of the digital conversion and I interviewed two members of Cineteca Bologna. In particular I spoke to Dr Alessandro Marotto, who worked on the technical aspects of the restoration and digitalisation of the movie, and Andrea Meneghelli, the curator of the resulting DVD edition that subsequently took care of its distribution. The project was mainly funded by Cineteca Bologna for all processes related to the restoration and digitalisation of this movie. Later, Edison Studio contributed to the realisation of the following DVD edition.[233] As I gleaned from this interview, the budget provided was in the "tens of thousands" of Euros.[234] This was mainly spent on the restoration phase, as the digitalisation was then a "less expensive process".[235] Also, the reasons for restoring this film in particular, among the plethora of Italian films available from the Silent Era, are based on the idea that this project implies an "ethical responsibility",[236] as Milano Films' *Inferno* stands as a main "cornerstone"[237] in Italian film history. As a matter of fact, this film can be easily considered "the most important Italian movie of the whole Silent Era".[238] Marotto reminds us that "this film changed everything back in the days: it revolutionised the idea of cinema itself, in both its production and distribution dynamics".[239] Focusing on the restoration process, Marotto outlined several different stages, starting from the varied collection of copies available: a total of fourteen coming from Europe, USA and Canada.

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[233] As the official website states: "Founded in 1993 by Mauro Cardi, Luigi Ceccarelli, Fabio Cifariello and Alessandro Cipriani. Edison Studio is internationally recognized in the electro-acoustic music scene thanks to the numerous prizes and awards it has received for its works. [...] The Studio's activity is based on the production of collective live electro-acoustic works. [...] Edison Studio recovers the old tradition of silent movies with live music, including the re-invention of sound environments and voices of the characters". For further references see http://www.edisonstudio.it/en/chi-siamo/

[234] Marotto, A. In *Appendix – Interview to Alessandro Marotto and Andrea Meneghelli: Cineteca Bologna and the restoration of Milano Films' Inferno (ITA, 1911)*, question n.3.

[235] Ibidem, Marotto, question n.3.

[236] Ibidem, Marotto, question n.2.

[237] Ibidem, Meneghelli, question n.2.

[238] Ibidem, Marotto, question n.2.

[239] Ibidem, Marotto, question n.2.

Furthermore, Marotto and De Santis has subsequently pointed out that:

> "The survival of several prints is a sign of the film's success [...] as a testimony of the world-wide distribution of the film. Of the examined prints, five are nitrate positives, while the remaining nine, all printed on a safety base, we have found both positive elements and duplicate negatives. Of the five nitrate prints, however, only one is a first generation print, namely struck directly from the 'camera negative'. The other four prints are at least second generation and refer to a later distribution in the US in the Twenties".[240]

Subsequently, the methodology applied to the evaluation of these fourteen copies, involved a restoration team carrying out a "comparative analysis of the photographic elements of all the film tapes that were available",[241] a stage that was then followed by the "critical choice of the selected photographic material to be employed in the restoration process".[242] This material was then duplicated "in order to reconstruct the negative of the restored edition".[243]

This first stage of the restoration process involved the collaboration of several Western film institutes such as "the British Film Institute of London, the Danish Film Institute of Copenhagen, the Bulgarska Nacionalna Filmoteka of Sofia, USA, Montreal and Rome".[244] Each of them "belonged to the FIAF network, to which Cineteca Bologna belongs as well".[245] However, all the available fourteen copies contain a few differentiating details as well as some narrative and photographic gaps. As Meneghelli points out, "before our restored edition, you could only find a few and incomplete copies around the world, which were different from the film screened in 1911. Moreover, these copies were all black and white and the quality of the prints

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[240] in De Sanctis, M. and Marotto, A. (2007), *Return to Hell – The 'Inferno' of Milano Films: Documentation of the Restoration of 1911 Italian Edition*. In *Cinegrafie n.20, Matarazzo – Popular Romances and "Inferno", Milano Films 1911*, Bologna: Le Mani, p.403-404.

[241] Ibidem, Marotto, question n.1.

[242] Ibidem, Marotto, question n.1.

[243] Ibidem, Marotto, question n.1.

[244] Ibidem, Marotto, question n.4.

[245] Ibidem, Meneghelli, question n.4.

was generally very poor".[246] These aspects also contributed to the perceived requirement of producing a new and restored version of Milano Films' *Inferno*.

After the collection and the comparative analysis of the material the subsequent phases of the restoration process were "entirely carried out in Bologna, at the film laboratory named *L'Immagine Ritrovata*. There, [their] team of experts and technicians was composed of 5-7 people".[247] Each of them "might have then asked other experts for advice or consultancy".[248] In particular, Marotto explains that he in person worked on the Bulgarian copy in order to firstly recover and reconstruct, and then digitalise all titles available in Italian. After this was completed, the team moved on to printing out the positive copies in 35mm. This allowed the team to restore the film "with a photochemical procedure"[249] just before its digitalisation. The negative countertype was scanned with the help of an APRI scanner. This last operation was "realised by scanning the restored edition, then the colours were subsequently reconstructed on the restored 35mm positive copy by working at the colour correction post".[250] In particular, this passage involved two different steps, namely *imbibition* and *toning*, and was directly applied "on the digital draft by following the restored 35mm copies".[251] The resulting digitalised movie was then converted into a DVD edition that was subsequently distributed in 2011, four years after the completion of the restoration process. On this matter, Meneghelli points out that the digital conversion can be considered a relatively easy procedure thanks to the high quality of the restored copy provided by *L'Immagine Ritrovata Lab*. When producing the DVD edition of Milano Films' *Inferno*, Meneghelli acted as a curator. Due to the interactive nature of DVD extras, this edition was enriched by several bonus features, such as a gallery of the main posters and librettos related to the 1911-first screening and, most importantly, two short-films that were produced in the same period as Milano Films' *Inferno*: the comedy *Come fu che l'Ingordigia*

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[246] Ibidem, Meneghelli, question n.2.

[247] Ibidem, Marotto, question n.4.
[248] Ibidem, Marotto, question n.4

[249] Ibidem, Marotto, question n.1.

[250] Ibidem, Marotto, question n.1.

[251] Ibidem, Marotto, question n.5.

Rovinò il Natale a Cretinetti – Greediness Spoiled Foolshead's Christmas (Andre Deed, FR, 1910)[252] and the fable *Il Diavolo Zoppo – The Lame Devil* (Luigi Maggi, ITA, 1909).[253] Both short-films were also digitalised after their previous restoration. The reason for including these two films in the DVD of Milano Films' *Inferno* derived from the idea that "these two short films can be considered as a 'variation' of the infernal theme".[254] This editorial choice shows once more the interest expressed by several film companies of the Silent Era in adapting Dante's infernal imagery on the cinematic screen. After carrying out the restoration and digitalisation the team had to deal with a key question: what kind of soundtrack should they include in the DVD edition? We know Milano Film's *Inferno* was produced and first distributed entirely during the Silent Era, therefore back in the 1910s the film was completely mute. However, despite knowing that the first screening was originally introduced by live music, its original music sheets are unfortunately unavailable to us.[255] Moreover, as the DVD edition was conceived for the audience of the 21st century, who are well accustomed to sound in films, the option to include a film soundtrack in the DVD was therefore considered as both natural and inevitable. As we can see in the 2011 DVD edition, we are allowed to choose among three different sound options: the first allows the spectator to watch the movie without any soundtrack. Secondly, the film can be watched with the "piano soundtrack composed by Marco Delpane" or, as a third option, with a more "experimental" soundtrack "produced by Edison Studio".[256]

After considering the main technical aspects involved in the restoration process and the birth of the DVD edition, we must question: to what extent do digital

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[252] *Come fu che l'Ingordigia Rovinò il Natale a Cretinetti – Greediness Spoiled Foolshead's Christmas* (Andre Deed, FR, 1910), is a 13-min French short film written, directed and performed by Andre Deed. It is part of the series of comedic short-films about the character of Foolshead.

[253] *Il Diavolo Zoppo – The Lame Devil* (Luigi Maggi, ITA, 1909), is a 14-min Italian short-film directed by Luigi Maggi, based on *Le Diable Boiteux* by Alain-René Lesage. This film can be previewed at Cineteca Bologna official website, at http://cinestore.cinetecadibologna.it/video/dettaglio/3562

[254] Ibidem, Meneghelli, question n.5.

[255] "The show started with the orchestra playing a fantastic prelude by Maestro Caravaglios, renewed and highly esteemed Italian composer, conductor of Concerto Comunale of Napoli" from *Il grandioso successo della 'Divina Commedia' della 'Milano Films al R. Teatro Mercadante di Napoli – The huge success of Milano Films' Inferno at Mercadante Theatre, Naples*, in "Lux", weekly, Napoli, n.87, 5 March 1911, p.1, quoted in Gherardi, D. and Lasi, G. (2007). *Inferno: Ambitious Art Film by Milano Films*. In *Cinegrafie n.20, Matarazzo – Popular Romances and "Inferno", Milano Films 1911*, Bologna: Le Mani, p.401.

[256] Ibidem, Meneghelli, question n.5.

technologies influence practices of film conservation, especially in films belonging to the Silent Era? These practices appear to have changed radically in 2005-2015. When it comes to Milano Film's *Inferno* it is important to keep in mind that the restoration process was mainly carried out "analogically, that of from film-tape to film-tape"[257] and only digitalised after the restoration process was entirely completed. It is clear that back in 2007 the employment of any possible digital tools was perceived in a more "experimental"[258] way, rather than as a "unified range of aware methodologies".[259] However, if we decide to analyse the impact of digital technologies in retrospect, the restoration approach would have been completely different. As Marotto has observed:

> "If - back in 2007 - we could use the set of digital techniques and technologies available today in 2015, it would have helped us in making all the photographic material employed for the final restored copy more homogeneous. In fact, in order to approve the final version of the restored copy, we originally had to employ several frames coming from different copies of the 1910's (and that was possible only because all these copies came from the same negative). Of course, the photographic definition of the different copies is very heterogeneous. Consequently, this set of differences is visible and audible in our restored edition. With the set of digital technologies available in 2015 we could have minimised these differences".[260]

Digital technologies have been considerably improving the restoration process in 2005-2015, due mainly to those steps involving the employment of footage coming from different copies, using a variety of new technologies. The power of digital software in aligning and minimising these differences when producing a single version of the restored film helps the restoration team to save time and financial resources, along with helping in the mapping and cataloguing of all photographic and narrative variations.

After its restoration and digital conversion Milano Film's *Inferno* was ready

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[257] Ibidem, Meneghelli, question n.6.

[258] Ibidem, Marotto, question n.6.

[259] Ibidem, Marotto, question n.6.

[260] Ibidem, Marotto, question n.6.

to be distributed. Two strategies were then adopted: the first one was the home-video distribution of the DVD edition previously realised. The second one aimed to promote the restored film through a series of special screenings. As Meneghelli reports, the number of DVDs sold reached "2.500 copies circa". In particular, their distribution "was to just a few Italian film stores".[261] However, the original DVD can still be purchased on the Internet from several different countries, but unfortunately Meneghelli could not provide more information about international orders.

Cineteca Bologna agreed to present Milano Films' *Inferno* in its brand new restoration during a few special events dedicated to Dante's *Inferno*. Consequently, they decided not to distribute the film at a mass-scale level in cinema theatres. Meneghelli reminds us that the restored movie was first presented at "Cinema Ritrovato Festival in 2007" and subsequently screened both nationally and internationally in "Berna, Zurich, Florence, Canberra, Rome, Milan, Paris, South Brisbane, Bruxelles, Mumbai", followed by a "series of cine-concerts"[262] organised in collaboration with Edison Studio which included a "live sound sync"[263] orchestra performing the soundtrack they had composed. The choice of promoting the restored movie only in a series of limited events derives from the theory that this film could "interest only film experts"[264] and intellectuals rather than a "wider and more popular audience"[265] gathered together in film theatres. However, this idea contrasts with the volume of unauthorised copies currently circulating on the Internet.[266] When asked about this fringe circulation, Marotto admits that they don't "deny the possibility that there might be other pirated copies of [their] restored edition currently circulating on the Internet".[267] With regards to the possible strategies adopted by Cineteca Bologna to contrast this phenomenon Marotto and Meneghelli

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261 Ibidem, Meneghelli, question n.9.

262 Ibidem, Meneghelli, question n.7.

263 Ibidem, Marotto, question n.8.

264 Ibidem, Marotto, question n.8.

265 Ibidem, Marotto, question n.8.

266 To this extent, at October 2015 we can identify at least two copies of Milano Film's *Inferno* (ITA, 1911) circulating on Youtube. For more details see the following links https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oP-wgPyawsQ [accessed March 2017] or
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VoCnN1qCCb8&list=PL5BA0D14445FDCF2B [accessed March 2017]

267 Ibidem, Marotto, question n.10.

both agreed that the Italian Film Institute didn't adopt any particular protection. The main reason behind this choice is the idea that "*Inferno* is not a box-office movie and relates only to a specific and selected audience. It doesn't therefore generate any high income".[268] Moreover, "pirated downloading and streaming are both physiological factors and the current no-piracy strategies are evidently ineffective".[269] In addition, in relation to the main links available on Youtube Marotto explained that "all copies available from the links provided are American, and, more specifically, they relate to the re-distribution of the film in the 1920s in the US".[270] He also added that these copies "are taken from the ones discovered at the beginning of [their] research" even if he could not precisely confirm "whether they are exactly the same".[271] Moreover, the American copies coming from this re-distribution generally "present very inaccurate captions and titles, they generally have a very bad photographic quality and contain several gaps, because they were, obviously, all reproductions".[272] Consequently, the copies currently circulating the Internet do not relate to the first distribution of the movie in 1911, and therefore differ from the edition curated by Cineteca Bologna. However, in relation to assessing the ways digital technologies may be utilised to preserve and promote Milano Film's *Inferno* worldwide as a cornerstone of the Italian film industry, Meneghelli agrees with the idea that "digital technologies are an extraordinary tool to spread cinematic culture, and this should be one of the main aims of every film institute. Digital technologies open up new distributional and developmental perspectives that were not possible until a few years ago".[273] Nonetheless, in relation to practices of film conservation, his view turns slightly more sceptical and especially in decrying the totalitarian "effectiveness"[274] of digital technologies. In fact, the circulation of unofficial, unauthorised and non-restored copies on the Internet support this statement, as the Internet uploaders generally do not provide any useful information about the exact

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[268] Ibidem, Marotto, question n.10.

[269] Ibidem, Meneghelli, question n.10.

[270] Ibidem, Marotto, question n.11.

[271] Ibidem, Marotto, question n.11.

[272] Ibidem, Marotto, question n.11.

[273] Ibidem, Meneghelli, question n.12.

[274] Ibidem, Meneghelli, question n.12.

origin of the film copy. However, Marotto does not underestimate the unique power of digital technologies in making these movies "more accessible"[275] to a potentially worldwide audience.

3.2.1 Outcomes

From this interview we can identify a few key considerations about the importance that digital technologies played in the restoration and the subsequent digital conversion of Milano Film's *Inferno*. First of all, in the decade between 2005 and 2015, digital technologies have progressively changed their role in the practices of film restoration. As we found from the previous section, the restoration team could not apply digital techniques directly on the film reel. On the contrary, in order to reconstruct the film and bring back the original colours, the restoration team had to work manually on the film tape, frame by frame. All these kind of interventions have been applied manually with the help of mechanical techniques. As evidence of this constant change, it is important to remember that nowadays it is possible to apply these changes to the images directly onto a computer screen using specialist software. In the 2007 DVD edition of Milano Films' *Inferno* the digitalisation of the film was applied after the entire restoration process had taken place. But whilst the technological development is recognised as a helpful hand in practices of film restoration, there seems to be different opinions regarding the role that digital technologies play in practices of film conservation and diffusion. If digital technologies had opened up a potentially infinite mine of film fruition, Meneghelli does not exclude the possibility that this new form of film circulation might stand only as a transient form of conservation which could disappear over time, despite the fact that the perception of digital itself in 2015 was still well-acclaimed and acknowledged as a revolutionary medium that was able to change the way people interact and share content on a worldwide scale. In conclusion, as it is possible to understand from the dialogue between these two voices, a precise definition of 'digital' is not strictly possible, even in 2015. The potential and the capacity of this extraordinary medium has probably still not been entirely understood and would require a deeper investigation into its potential in the areas of film production,

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[275] Ibidem, Marotto, question n.12.

conservation, circulation and reception.

3.3 Spencer Williams' *Go Down Death!* (USA, 1944) and Dante's *Inferno*: from the 1940s to 21st century digital communities.

As we explored in the previous sections, the experimental aesthetics and narrative modes and the innovative production strategy of Milano Films' *Inferno* created a landmark of Italian cinema in the digital era. However, its legacy was not limited to just the original distribution of the film in Italy in the early 1910s, but continued through the subsequent decades up until the 1940s, and especially in the United States. This makes Milano Films' *Inferno* (ITA, 1911) a sensitive example to show how different communities of audience can appropriate, manipulate and incorporate cultural objects in order to construct and explore their own cultural identity.

Antonella Braida (2007) has investigated the reasons and the effects of the circulation of this film in the Italian and the American contexts:

> "[Its] success enabled the industry to employ a further method of elevating the performance – that is to say, raising ticket prices so as to bring them closer to those of theatre shows. With a length of about 1,250 metres (3,937 feet) and a viewing time of more than one hour, the price of tickets could be increased, which resulted in the exclusion of the lower classes. This effect was more accentuated in the United States where the success of the film had it moved to the major theatres with a consequent rise of the ticket price to $2.50".[276]

In addition to this, Gerben Bakker (2005) proposed an interesting insight into the importance of the screening of Milano Films' *Inferno* in America after its first distribution in Italy:

> "From 1911 onwards, several relatively small Italian companies

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[276] Braida, A. (2007), p.47. See also Bernardini, A. and Martinelli, V. (1995). *Il cinema muto italiano 1911, prima parte, - Italian Cinema of the Silent Phase 1911, part I*, Turin and Rome: Nuova ERI, CSC, p. 247.

introduced the long historical spectacle films in America started with *The Fall of Troy* (Itala Films) and *Dante's Inferno* (Milano Films). The films contained expensive historical sets and mass-scenes, and the films lasted three to four times as long as the standard American film, 45-60 minutes. Production costs were high, but tickets were also higher, and the films became hugely popular (Cherchi Usai, 1996). In New York and Boston, for example, *Dante's Inferno* played for two weeks, while the average American MPPC-film lasted only two days. Moreover, it was played in rented 1000-seat legitimate theatres, at the ticket price of 1$, while American films normally played in Nickelodeons with a few hundred seats for 5-10 cents. (Gomery, 1996:46). The increase in budget, length and ticket price all became characteristics of the feature film as it emerged in the American market".[277]

These considerations show the remarkable, key role that Milano Films' *Inferno* played in the transformations that the medium of cinema was experiencing in the early 1910s and that ended up with reinforcing and institutionalising forms of film production and consumption. The increasing financial capabilities of private film companies that were trying to settle themselves in this new industry contributed to enriching the mutual influence among film experimenters, the employment of new technologies, the remediation of technical, visual and performative elements coming from different arts and new marketing strategies in order to attract the audience both at a national and international level. This phenomenon is also particularly relevant to this research for two main reasons: first, it shows once more the lucrative potential of Dante's imagery outside of Italy, and especially among non-literary based media several centuries after the *Commedia*'s first publication. Secondly, it proves once more that the 'reference text' does not necessarily occupy the starting and returning point of the whole practice of film adaptation. On the contrary, as the wide circulation of Milano Films' *Inferno* shows, the infernal imagery was able to circulate outside Italy thanks to its remediation by other media and international communities.

The productive remediation of Dante's *Commedia* in American film history and, more specifically, in African-American culture has been widely analysed by Dennis Looney (2004) in his essay *Spencer Williams and Dante: An African-American*

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[277] Bakker, G. (2005), *America's Master*, in M. Pokorny and J. Sedgwick, ed., *An Economic History of Film*, London and New York: Routledge, p.29.

Filmmaker at the Gates of Hell.[278] This study focuses on the reception of Dante within the context of African-American "slavery, abolitionism, and reconstruction in the nineteenth-century, to segregation in the South during the first half of the twentieth century, to the Black Revolution of the 1960's, to the tensions between the urban ghetto and the suburbia of our own day".[279] Looney explores the appropriation of Dante's work in African-American cinema, with a specific focus on the work of Spencer Williams, an African-American director who operated in Hollywood between 1920s and 1950s. In Williams' movies, Dante's own life and text are taken as a symbol of freedom and as a "powerful model of emancipation"[280] in order to acknowledge the daily existence of segregation of African-American people in the first half of the 20th century. Moreover, Looney identifies the process of Dante's appropriation with the history of African-American emancipation from slavery to the conquest of equal rights is identified through four specific phases, each one corresponding to the progressive abolition of discrimination: that of "the coloured Dante"; "the Negro Dante"; "the Black Dante", and the "African-American Dante".[281] With this in mind, the eidetic power of Dante's allegory on the screen can be seen, for instance, in *Go Down, Death!* (USA, 1944), which is the story of an African-American barman who ends up at the Gates of Hell. The movie incorporates footage taken from Milano Films' *Inferno* (ITA, 1911) and makes liberal use of it in order to make the protagonist experience the vision of the afterlife. This creates a parallelism between the journey experienced by Williams' protagonist and Dante's protagonist, and once more it shows the profound impact of Milano Films' movie on the American audience. As a matter of fact, Looney's studies on the African-American reception of Dante's *Inferno* open up a new perspective about the circulation of the *Commedia* outside Italy thanks also to the re-mediation of another film and not of its 'reference text'.[282] Williams' *Go Down Death!* shows once more how the adaptation process

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[278] Looney, D. (2004), *Spencer Williams and Dante: An African-American Filmmaker at the Gates of Hell*, in A.A. Iannucci, ed. *Dante, Cinema and Television*, Toronto-Buffalo-London: Routledge, pp.129-144.

[279] Ibidem p.130

[280] Ibidem p.130

[281] Ibidem p.130

[282] Looney remembers also the impact of Dante in African-American in popular names: Dante, in one of the several versions of the spelling of his name, is still nowadays an extremely common name among African-American people. More references in Iannucci, A. A. (2004), ed. *Dante, Cinema and Television*, Toronto-Buffalo-London: Routledge, p.141, footnote 3.

cannot be read only through the lenses of a strict *text-centred* approach, as this specific encounter between the *Commedia* and African-American communities in the 1940s owes more to the circulation of the cinematic images, and not through the direct contact with the text. This aspect is particularly relevant to show the ways through which the cinematic screen has supported the circulation of the infernal imagery, eventually leading to subsequent acts of changing identification for African-American communities. These communities in the 1940s were living in social conditions of exclusion and marginalisation and could not benefit from the direct contact with the 14th century poem, written as it was in vulgar Italian.[283] After addressing these preliminary considerations two key questions need to be considered: what are the main aspects of the cultural appropriation of both Dante's and Milano Film's *Inferno* in Spencer Williams' *Go Down Death*! and what is the impact of this phenomenon in the decade between 2005 and 2015 on digital communities?

Firstly, some prior considerations about the nature of movie and its director are necessary. Spencer Williams' *Go Down Death!* (USA, 1944) represents a pivotal film in the long conquest of equal rights led by African-American communities during the historic period of World War II. The movie was made by the African-American director Spencer Williams (1893-1969), who became fairly popular to audiences by starring as a leading actor in the television sitcom *Amos 'n' Andy* between 1951 and 1953.[284] However, in the previous three decades Spencer Williams wrote, directed and/or starred into several movies that were entirely performed by black actors with no professional acting background. These films mainly focused on exploring the eternal fight between Good and Evil in the Christian African-American communities of the Southern states, just before the great migration that saw thousands of people

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[283] For further references on the impact of the *Commedia* in African-American culture see Looney, D. (2011). *Freedom Readers: the African-American reception of Dante Alighieri and the Divine Comedy*, Paris: University of Notre Dame Press.

[284] *Amos 'n Andy* was born as a radio sitcom set in Manhattan's African-American communities of Harlem. The show was originally written and voiced by the white actors Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll who were also used to perform several characters in the same episode. The show was turned into a TV sitcom between 1951 and 1953 and it was broadcasted by CBS. The TV cast mainly involved actors with black origins and included also Spencer Williams. For extended readings see McLeod, E. (2009). *The Original Amos 'n' Andy – Freeman Gosden, Charles Correll and the 1928-1943 Radio Serial*, Jefferson-London: McFarland & Company Inc.

move into the urban cities of the North in search of better jobs.[285] Despite the fact that Williams' movies did not became very popular with contemporary white audiences, all his films were produced and distributed in the 1940s thanks to the financial support of the Jewish entrepreneur Alfred N. Sack. The producer helped Williams to "pursue his own artistic vision and to address topics, including African-American Christian experience and identity [*while he did not*] interfere in the creative process".[286] Despite the lack of a financial income coming from the wealthy white audience, the long lasting collaboration – nine films in total – between them still provided him a good income as the movies were distributed in several cine-theatre rooms of the South.[287]

The main theorist of African-American studies in relation to the reception of Dante in the USA, Dennis Looney (2004), describes how "*Go Down Death!* (USA, 1944) is a race movie, made by a black director with an all-black cast, meant for black audiences primarily in the segregated theatres of the South. But one white presence in the film stands out: Dante".[288] This film is set in a small village of the South in the 1940s and depicts a realistic portrait of the social life of African-American communities engaged both in everyday activities and in building up a common religious identity. At the same time it relates to the 14th Century Italian poet. How can this be possible? The answer that links the African-American focus of *Go Down Death!* (USA, 1944) to Dante's *Inferno* and its circulation among black communities is revealed mainly in the last sequence of the film. Here Spencer Williams creates a deliberate parallel montage between the main black character and footage taken from Milano Films' *Inferno* (ITA, 1911) which was distributed in the USA with the title *Dante's Inferno*.[289] I am now going to analyse in more depth how

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[285] Some of these films include *Harlem of the Prairie* (Sam Newfield and Jed Buell, USA, 1937), *The Bronze Buckaroo* (Richard C. Khan, USA, 1939), *Harlem Rides the Range* (Richard C. Khan, USA, 1939), *The Blood of Jesus* (Spencer Williams, USA, 1941). Fore extended readings see Berry, S.T. and Berry, V.T. (2009). *The A to Z of African American Cinema*, Lanham-Toronto-Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press Inc.

[286] Weisenfeld, J. (2007). *Hollywood Be Thy Name: African American Religion in American Film*, 1929-1949, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, pp. 93-94.

[287] See e.g. Looney, D. (2004): "[…] *The Blood of Jesus*, for example quickly recovering the $15.000 it had taken to make it", p. 132.

[288] Looney, D., (2004), pp. 137-138.

[289] To this extent see Ballo, T. (1985). *The American Film Industry*, 2nd edition, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, p110. "The influx of features actually began in 1911 as independent tested the waters with European

Dante's footage is inserted into Williams' last sequence and how this material is put into dialogue with the entire movie. In this way, it is possible to understand how the adaptation process involving Dante's infernal imagery did not have its roots in the 'reference text' but, on the contrary, in the use of pre-existing cinematic footage.

The sequence occupies the final part of the story. We have followed the adventures of the bartender of the local *juke joint* Big Jim Bottoms, who is also at the head of the local criminal organisation. However, Big Jim's business has been threatened by the arrival in town of the new Christian and puritan preacher. Because of the preacher's sermons in the local church, Big Jim had to face the loss of many customers who suddenly repented and started a new and sober life. For this reason, Big Jim decides to take revenge on the preacher by embroiling him in a sex scandal. Aunt Caroline discovers Big Jim's trick but when she tries to stop him she dies accidentally in a fight against the protagonist. Later, at Aunt Caroline's funeral the entire community gathers around her coffin while Big Jim decides not to attend the function. On the contrary, he remains in his bar alone, spending his time drinking alcohol from a bottle and smoking nervously. The last sequence starts from here; we hear the sound of Big Jim's consciousness in voiceover, reminding him that he is a murderer and therefore his soul will be lost and damned forever. For this reason, the voice orders him to leave the town as soon as possible.

The most evident link with Dante's infernal imagery commences from this exact point: when Big Jim starts running out of town in the middle of the desert, while the voice keeps on persecuting him. He continues to run until he falls down (Figure 19). Here, alone and in the middle of nowhere he experiences the vision of Hell. This vision lasts no more than one minute but it is crucial to understand the influence of Dante's imagery in Spencer Williams' film. In particular, the way this vision is constructed is clean and precise: the character raises his head up and sees a gate for the afterlife with the inscription, in English, "The Gates of Hell – Abandon

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imports. [...] Dante's Inferno, a Milano Films production imported by Pliny P. Craft, enjoyed two-weeks runs in New York, Washington and Boston where it played legitimate houses and commanded a ticket price of seventy-five cents". See also Keil, C. and Singer B. (2009). *American Cinema of the 1910s: Themes and Variations*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, p.72. "Monopol Film established the viability of these distribution strategies with Milano's five-reel *Dante's Inferno*".

Hope all Ye who Enter here"[290] (Figure 20 and Figure 26). The inscription was realised by Williams for this specific purpose and does not feature in the 1911 movie *Inferno.* However, all the other pre-existent material inserted into the vision of Hell is taken from the 1911-film *Inferno* and subsequently linked with the protagonist's personal situation with the help of the montage. In Big Jim's vision we recognise Dante and his guide Virgil coming across the circles of the Lustful – the same one where Paolo and Francesca belong – where a group of naked damned people are convicted to be hit by a never-ending whirlwind (Figure 24). Other footage refers to the circle of the traitors where we recognise hundreds of naked damned people drowning into the River of Cocytus (Figure 25), while a giant and monstrous Lucifer is literally chewing a dead person, also naked, who in Dante's *Inferno* corresponds to the figure of Judas (Figure 21 and Figure 22). Moreover, the voiceover in Big Jim's head keeps commenting on the vision and finally condemning him to die. In the very last scene of Williams' movie, the pastor comes closer to Betty Jean and tells her that Big Jim was found dead at the mouth of Buck's Canyon.
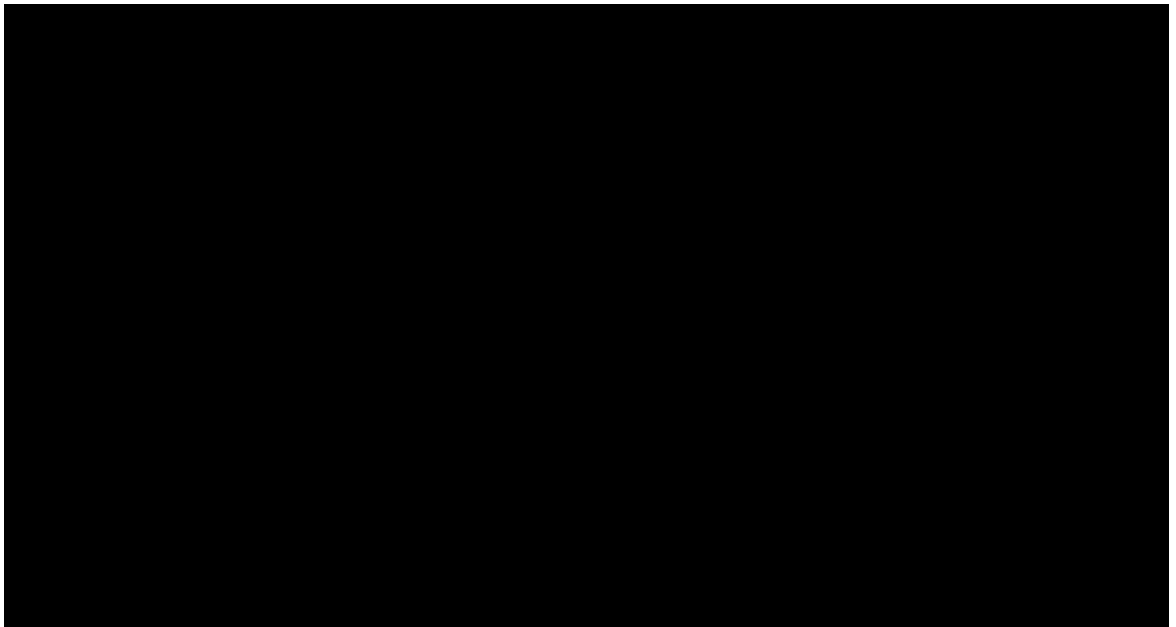
Figure 3.19 - Big Jim falls down in the desert

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[290] Min. 51.09. The copy of the film I am considering is the one uploaded by The Riverbends Channel on Youtube at the link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSoUctLslis

Figure 3.20 - Big Jim's vision starts with the image of the Gates of Hell
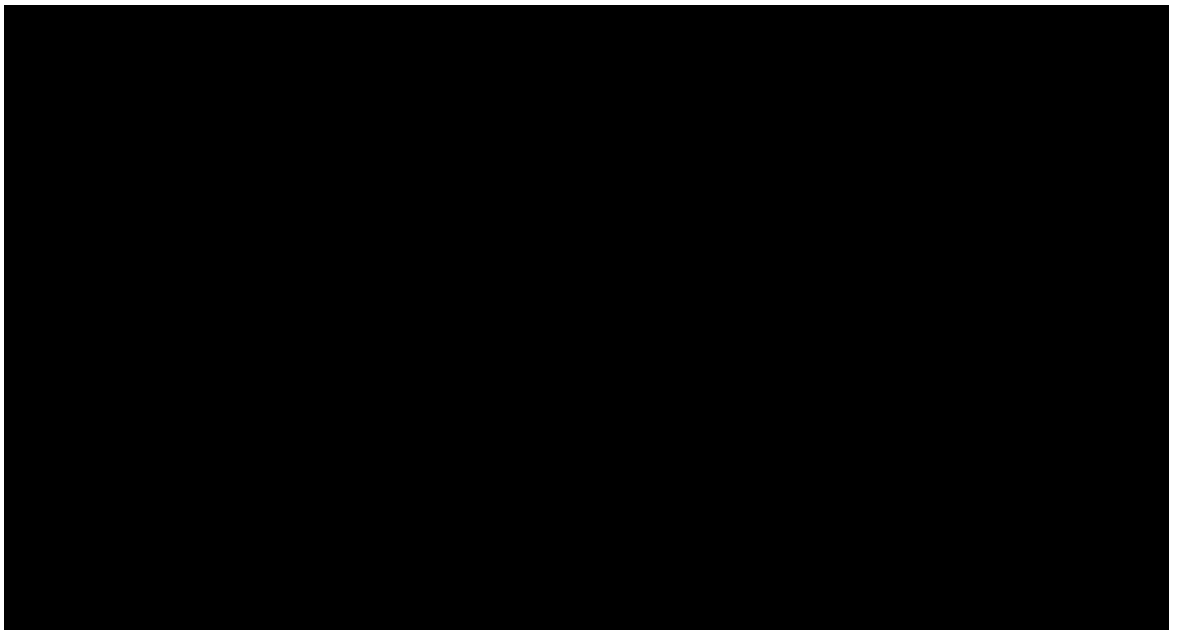
Figure 3.21 - Footage taken from Milano Films' *Inferno* (ITA, 1911) - Lucifer chewing Judas
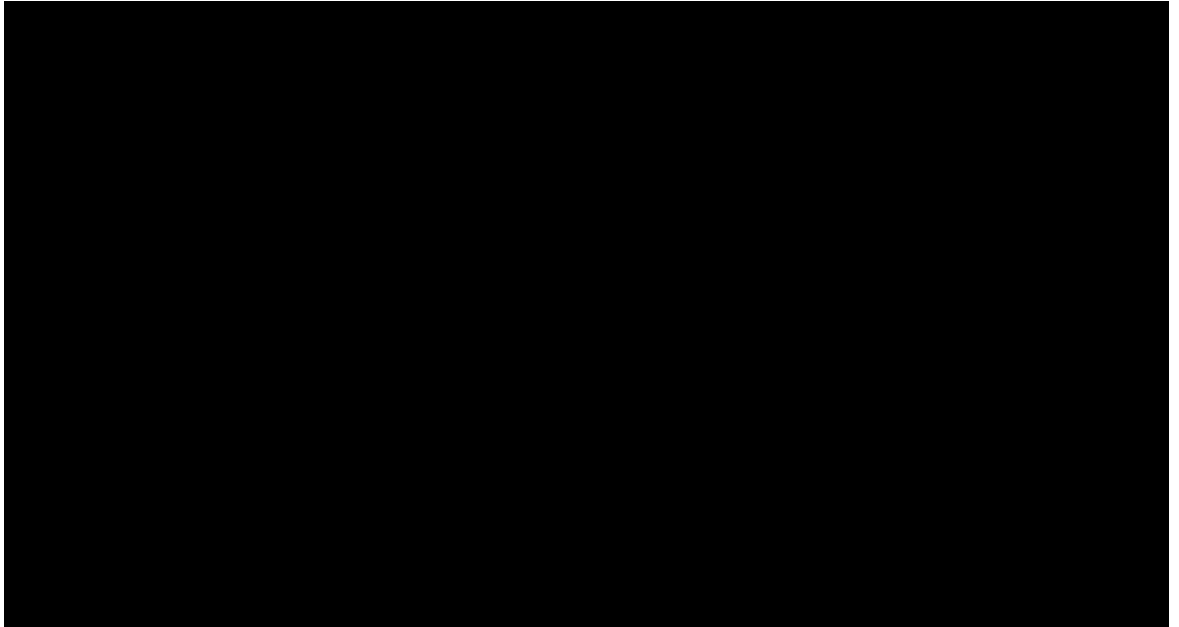
Figure 3.22 - Footage taken from Milano Films' *Inferno* (ITA, 1911) – Dante and Virgil get closer to Lucifer
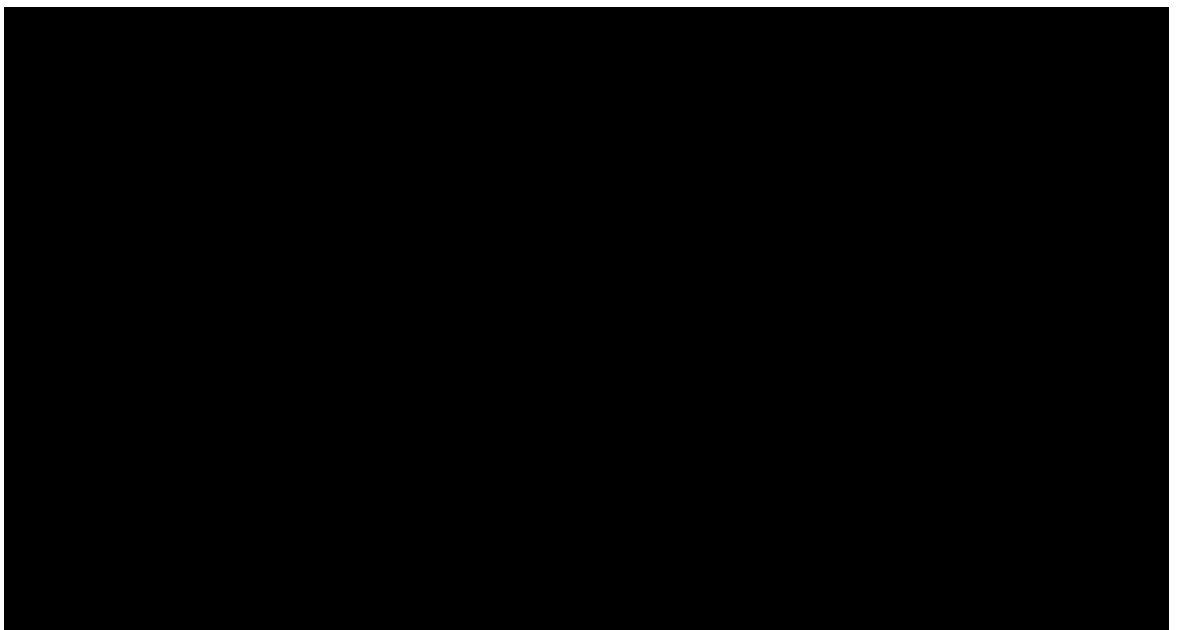
Figure 3.23 - Close-up on Big Jim's face in alternate montage with the vision of Hell
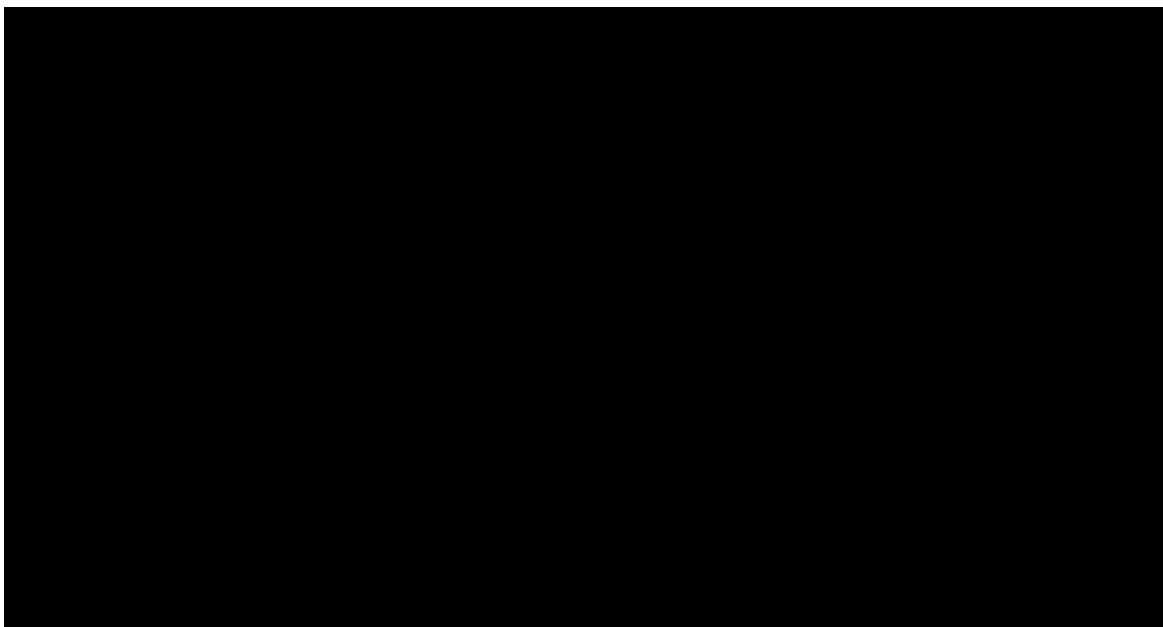
Figure 3.24 - Footage taken from Milano Films' *Inferno* (ITA, 1911)
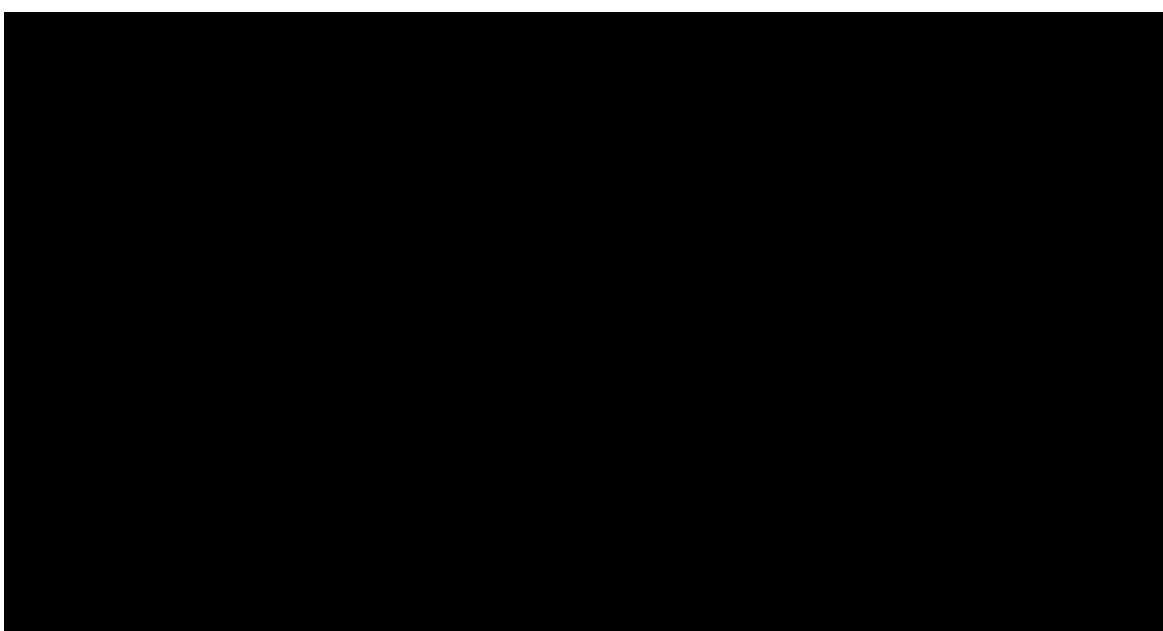
Figure 3.25 - Footage taken from Milano Films' *Inferno* (ITA, 1911)
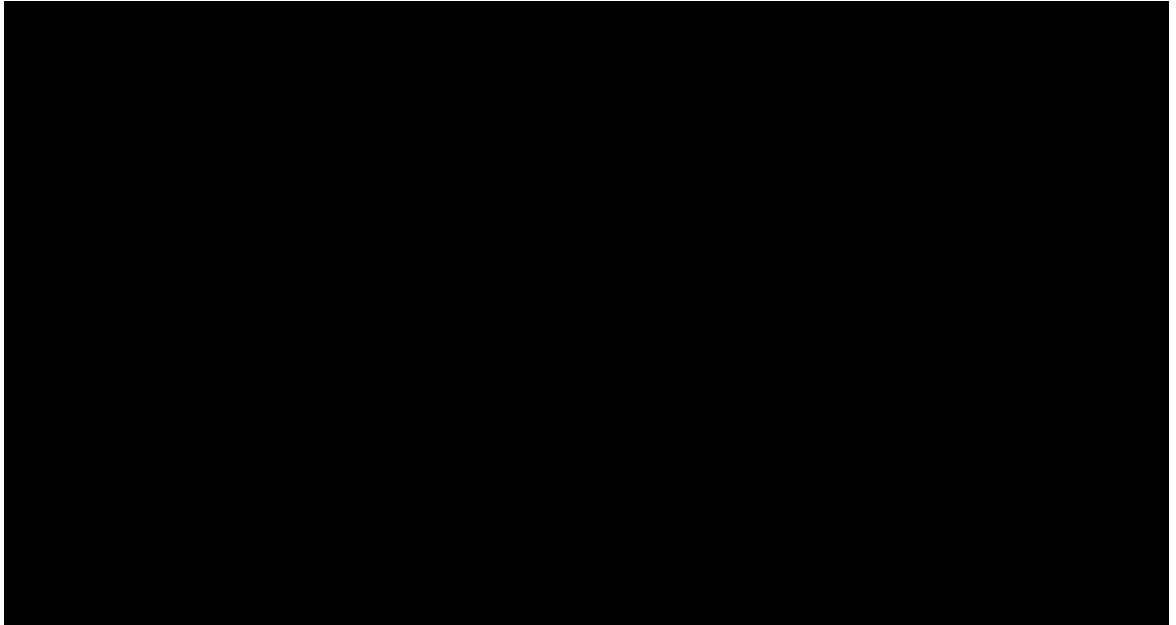
Figure 3.26 - The Gates of Hell close and Big Jim's vision terminates

After describing the sequence linking Spencer Williams' *Go Down Death!* (USA, 1944) to Milano Films' *Inferno* (ITA, 1911), some considerations on the nature of the film adaptation process are now necessary. First of all, as Dennis Looney points out (2004), we may safely assume that Spencer Williams did not take this material from the version distributed in the United States, however he was still "in a position to acquire a copy of the Italian original, which, with inter-titles in Italian, would have been less valuable to an American distributor".[291]

As previously discussed, Milano Films' *Inferno* aimed to adapt Dante's first *cantica* on the screen with a faithful approach but it still preserves "the tricks and special effects characteristic of the earlier cinema of attractions, while it also begins to experiment with the narrative elements made possible by the multi-reel format".[292] The employment of special effects such as many double or even quadruple exposures, along with superimpositions and morphing techniques, played

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[291] Looney, D. (2004), p.136.

[292] Welle, J. P. (2004). *Dante's Inferno of 1911 and the Origins of Italian Film Culture*. In A. A. Iannucci, ed., *Dante, Cinema and Television*, Toronto-Buffalo-London: University of Toronto Press, p.42

an important role in the circulation of the movie to territories beyond Italy. Italian audiences were more conscious of the content and the structure of Dante's *Inferno*. Abroad, the brand new employment of special effects along with a clever film narrative of independent episodes helped to shift the focus from the centrality of the 'reference text' to the spectacularisation of the infernal imagery of the film. Both the non-linear narrative and the spectacular special effects helped Williams to freely extract some relevant footage from the 1911 film and to remediate it in *Go Down Death!* (USA, 1944), thereby strengthening the allegorical components of his movie. By doing so, Williams orchestrates Big Jim's vision with quick and creative editing of several fragments taken from Milano Films' *Inferno* (e.g. Figure 21, Figure 22, Figure 24, Figure 25). The footage belongs to Canto V (circle of the Lustful), Canto VI (circle of the Gluttons), Canto XVIII (circle of the Panders, the Seducers and the Flatterers), then Canto XIX (circle of the Simoniacals), Canto XXI (the Bedlam of the Barterers), Canto XXII (the Demons) and the main images correspond to Canto XXXIV, which is inhabited by Lucifer and the Traitors. Here, the director creates a visual parallel between the character of Judas being literally eaten by Lucifer, the quintessential image of the traitor, and Big Jim, who also has betrayed a member of his family and therefore is condemned to perpetual damnation. The movie culminates with Big Jim's brutal death. Contrary to Dante, there is no salvation for Williams' protagonist. In this way, the religious and moralistic memento of Dante's *Commedia* is transformed by Spencer Williams' *Go Down Death!* (USA, 1944) into a modern parable. But how is this identification triggered through the help of the cinematic tools?

In *The Uncanny* [293] (1919), Sigmund Freud explored the sense of anxiety and instability arising from apparently '*familiar*' situations that might be perceived both as not entirely real and linked to the fear of death. More specifically, uncanny is defined "in connection with the omnipotence of thoughts, instantaneous wish-fulfillments, secret power to do harm and the return of the dead."[294] In this regard, Freud outlines that in the modern times this system of belief has been adjusted in favour of more rational thinking. However, "we do not feel quite sure of our new set

[293] Freud, S. (1919). 'The Uncanny'. In *Imago*, Bd V. Full text available at: http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/freud1.pdf, pp.1-21.

[294] Ibidem, p.17.

of beliefs, and the old one still exists within us ready to seize upon confirmation […]. For the whole matter is one of 'testing reality', pure and simple, a question of the material reality of the phenomena".[295] This feeling is clearly perceived by Big Jim in the sequence of the infernal Vision. fter Aunt Caroline's funeral the protagonist starts running towards the canyons: he is alone and scared and tormented by a mysterious voice which is getting more and more persistent. This is the first element that swings between aspects of materiality and immateriality, between the physical and the psychical sphere. This voice does not belong to any of the characters, Big Jim is in fact escaping without being chased by anyone. This voice instils in the protagonist the fear of death. It first reminds the him that "the Lord has no mercy on killers"[296] and that it is now "going to show [him] where [he] is going home to, Jim".[297] As a consequence of this torment, Big Jim falls down and cannot move anymore. Before his very eyes, an infernal vision commences: a vision of death and damnation, suspended between reality and fantasy. Despite Big Jim being awake and clearly scared during the vision, he cannot interact with the infernal images – he is lying on the ground with the inferno manifesting itself right in front of him. But the protagonist is not involved in any form of action except an inconsistent and terrifying vision. So is this really happening?

It is important to point out that Big Jim's vision of hell appears after the protagonist makes an exhausting escape through the desert: there is no human presence apart from Big Jim in the canyons and no urban space or artificial architectures. When the gates of Hell appear, a close-up of Big Jim's scared face connects these two levels: the level of the diegetic escape in the desert and the vision of hell. We understand that what Big Jim is currently experiencing is a *vision* in the true sense of the word. Firstly, the entire movie is shot with no alteration to the main storyline - for example we do not register the presence of any flashbacks, or dreams or alterations of the space/time/action unity. Secondly, the vision of hell is introduced by the fading opening gates and concluded by the fading closing gates with a junction to the main storyline on Big Jim's close-up (Figure 24 and Figure 27).

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[295] Ibidem, p.17.

[296] min 48.40

[297] min. 51.00

Thirdly, this vision appears at the end of the following running sequence: the protagonist is scared, sweaty and shocked and the vision starts after he falls down where he lies paralysed on the ground. The desert itself brings with it a tradition of mirages and hallucinations. Consequently, the vision scares the protagonist, who - in this passage - awakens and doubts whether the things he is seeing are real or not. The content of the images are related to the idea of death – for example the giant Lucifer chewing Judas's body whilst still alive, and this is also widely explored in Freud's idea of perturbing images where "many people experience the feeling in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts. [...] Our unconscious has as little use now as it ever had for the idea of its own mortality. Religions continue to dispute the importance of the undeniable fact of individual death and to postulate a life after death".[298] In relation to this:

> "According to early Lacanian film theorists, the spectator inhabits the position of the child looking in the mirror. Like the child, the spectator derives a sense of mastery based on that position that the spectator occupies relative to the events on the screen [...]. Being absent as perceived and present as perceiver allows the spectator to escape the sense of real absence that characterizes life outside the cinema".[299]

As already discussed, during the vision Big Jim is laying on the ground with a clear incapacity to make any move, possessing only the ability to watch and experience the vision that is unfolding right in front of his eyes. This passive physical position is accompanied by his scopic activity that can be therefore taken as the position of privilege which the cinematic spectator enjoys. Through the process that Lacan defines in *The Mirror Stage* (1949), the identification between the vision and the observer now becomes possible.[300] What makes Big Jim's vision even more peculiar than other cinematic examples is that his vision is a meta-cinematic *mise-en-*

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[298] Freud, S. (1919), p.13.

[299] McGowan, T. (2007), *The Real Gaze – Film Theory after Lacan*, NYC: State University of New York Press,p.2

[300] See Lacan, J. (1949), *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytical Experience.* In J. Lacan and B. Fink. (1977) ed., *Ecritis – a Selection*, New York-London: WW Norton, p.2: "We have only to understand the mirror stage *as an identification*, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image – whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term *imago*."

abyme. On the one hand his passive physical position in this sequence recalls the spectator's position when experiencing the cinematic vision. On the other hand, Big Jim's vision is composed of previous footage belonging to a previous film that is here freely employed and edited. In this way, the images taken from Milano Films' *Inferno* shift from their original position, purpose and set of meanings and gain new linguistic possibilities.

However, the remediation of Dante's *Commedia* does not lie only in this last sequence, but also the wider cultural context of the years leading up to the release of Williams' film: "The narrative of the *Inferno* becomes a device to catapult his character, Jim, into Hell, anticipating the way the later African-American writers such as LeRoi Jones and Gloria Naylor use Dante's poem to shed light on the moral inadequacies of their respective characters".[301] Indeed Christian moralisation is clearly intended in both Dante's poem and in Williams' film. Consider for instance the beginning of Dante's infernal journey: here the main character gets lost in the allegorical dark forest after he had "lost the right path".[302] The dark forest becomes the allegorical image of the distance from God's grace and it recalls strong religious and moral associations. Williams' protagonist is experiencing Dante's spiritual encounter. As the last sequence shows, as soon as he realises that he is not behaving in a holy manner, he starts his desperate run in the canyon, which many scholars have identified as the American equivalent *topos* of the European dark forest.[303]

These few parallels show some similarities between Dante's infernal imagery and *Go Down Death!* (USA, 1944) and therefore help us to understand in which directions Spencer Williams was inspired by the *Inferno*. However, the case of *Go Down Death!* plays a key role in understanding the process of film adaptation from a non *text-centered* perspective. The following two reasons provide an explanation.

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[301] Ibidem, p.139

[302] See Dante Alighieri, INF I, v.3 "ché la diritta via era smarrita".

[303] The dark forest represents one of the most important symbolical and allegorical *topoi* in European myths. See e.g. Dante's *Inferno*, along with plenty of Richard Wagner's operas such as the *Tristan und Isolde*, the Grimm Brothers' tales such as *Little Red Riding Hood*, and more in general the French chivalric romances. For a wider perspective on the allegorical meaning of the Canyons in American Cinema see Bertetto, P. (2011) *The Monument Valley and its Media Image*. In A. Minuz, ed, (2011) *L'Invenzione del luogo – Spazi dell'immaginario cinematografico - Inventing Places – Spaces of the Cinematic Images*. ETS: Pisa (ITA), pp.25-39.

First of all, despite the evident presence of Dante's *Inferno* in Williams' film, we may assume that the director was not inspired directly by the reading of Dante's text, but on the contrary, by watching the Italian film of the same name that was released in 1911 and re-released in the 1920s and had a wide circulation in American cinemas. At the same time, Milano Films' *Inferno* too cannot be considered as the very first adaptation of Dante's *Inferno* on the screen as the film itself is influenced by the circulation of the *Commedia* among other media which have been discussed in an earlier chapters of this thesis. Secondly, the centrality of the 'reference text' starts fading as Spencer Williams decides to interact creatively and freely with Milano Films' *Inferno*. As we know, he first chose the material he preferred, then he edited it into a non-linear sequence in order to incorporate this brand new and re-elaborated material it in his own film and generate dialogue with his own story. The way this new material becomes part of Williams' movie is strengthened by three factors: firstly the vision is anticipated by the cardboard of the Gates of Hell that Williams specifically put both at the beginning and the end of the character's hallucinations. Secondly, the vision of Hell is visually linked to the main protagonist in two moments (min. 51.38-43 and 52.02-06 as seen in Figure 23) before returning to the vision of Hell after a few seconds. In this way, Williams alternates his own material with Milano Films' one. Lastly, the voiceover which has been tormenting Big Jim since the beginning of his run in the desert keeps on speaking when the protagonist is experiencing the vision of Hell. In this way, Spencer Williams is remediating Milano Film's *Inferno* (ITA, 1911) and creates a double cultural bridge: the first one between Italian cinema and African-American cinema, the second between Italian literature and the construction of the African-American identity in the 1940s.

In order to better understand the ways this imagery communicates with literature and cinema, we need once more to allow a shift from the *text-centered* perspective into the *image-based* one. This is necessary to understand that the adaptation process does not involve only the preliminary screenwriting work, but also the subsequent circulation of the movies and/or their fragments into other audio-visual media. It also acknowledges the mutual importance of different media in the adaptation process, including several literary and cinematic components. The 'reference text' may lose its centrality but it does not, however, completely dissipate

during the adaptation process. Instead, the 'reference text' needs to be considered as one of the possible steps that allow images to circulate and imageries to emerge. The shift from a *text-centered* to an *image-based* perspective in the adaptation process means that the literary medium is no longer dominant, and must instead be considered to be of the same level of the other media, each of them contributing to the generation and circulation of images and imageries among different times and cultural communities. In light of this, how was this dialogue continued in 2005-2015 and to what extent did digital technologies intervene in promoting this circulation?

If we search on YouTube the words "Go down death! Spencer Williams" we find that a copy of the whole movie lasting 53:56 is available on the sharing platform for free. The uploader is *The Riverbends Channel*, which, in July 2015 has around 2,600 subscribers.[304] The film is available in English with no subtitles and the original film copy seems to have been digitalised without a significant restoration.[305] The video was originally uploaded on 25th of March 2012. At October 2015, it has around 6,500 views and three comments left by Internet users.[306] These comments provide more information about Spencer Williams and other actors' artistic career.[307] It is important to underline that the purpose of *The Riverbend Channel* is "to promote do-it-yourself genealogy and history, with an emphasis on the digitalization of family history. We are nonprofit, independent, and online. [...] Riverbends specializes in African-American genealogy and history, but everyone interested in researching and sharing information about their family histories will

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[304] See The Riverbends Channel (2012). *Go Down Death! (1944) Spencer Williams Film*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSoUctLslis&t=61s [Accessed 01/02/2017]. At October 2016, the channel has increased its followers to over 6.300 subscribers. Following, At February 2017, the channel has further increased its followers to over 7,000 subscribers.

[305] The audio preserves its monomorphic characteristic and it is often disturbed (e.g. throughout the whole movie we can clearly distinguish a non-diegetic background noise). Moreover, the only option available for the quality of the video is the automatic 240p.

[306] At October 2016 the total views has increased up to almost 9.500. At February 2017, the total views has further increased up to over 10.400 views.

[307] see e.g. *kitthevideoman*'s comment: "Spencer Williams was a terrific actor. He succeeded in very tough times. He was great at comedic roles as well". Along with *MaryDILF Hunter*'s comment: "Myra Davis Hemmings, founder of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. plays his aunt" and *MrGospelHousemusic*'s one: "Spencer Williams was the "Andy" of the "Amos and Andy " radio series. He was a deeply devout Christian. The jitterbugging in this film is the BEST ever captured on film. Thanks for uploading" At October 2016 no other comments has been left.

find value and inspiration here at Riverbends".[308]

The corporation's manifesto clearly shows that their main intention is to trace the steps of the African-American cultural identity in film history. Digital technologies may be one of the main instruments through which their research and cataloguing becomes possible. The channel also defines itself with an important ethical stance: "we have the technology to do so, and we have the responsibility".[309] It is relevant to note that neither governments nor public institutions finance their initiative. On the contrary, this online database results from the spontaneous commitment of several heterogeneous online communities that are not necessarily characterised by a common African-American origin. As can be understood from the official website, the corporation does not only organise numerous seminars and workshops exploring the relationship between their cultural heritage and new technologies, but their YouTube *Riverbends Channel* also provides access to a collection of videos and films aiming to document the construction of the African-American identity in the 20th Century non-Hollywood film industry. Spencer Williams' *Go Down Death!* is inserted into the *African-American Film Playlist*, a chronological roster of around forty films.[310] In this way, Spencer Williams' film does not stand on its own, but it is conceived with a strong intertextual approach that therefore promotes a vibrant dialogue between preceding and subsequent 'race movies'.[311] In this way, Milano Films' segment too is part of this dialogue and helps to create a cultural bridge between Italian and African-American culture in different decades. As Dennis Looney (2004) pointed out, African American communities originally took Dante as "a powerful model of emancipation" both as a historical and

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[308] See http://riverbends.org/wp/

[309] see http://riverbends.org/wp/about-riverbends/

[310] It is important to note that originally the playlist counted 68 different movies, but, at July 2015, the YouTube team has eliminated around thirty of them as the uploading of films on a free-sharing platform breaks the copyright rules. This allows us to reconsider the complex relationship between the higher level of accessibility to rare movies that digital platforms such as YouTube may provide and the Copyright laws that regulate this accessibility only after the payment of a fee, which is still fundamental to support the activity of the film industry.

[311] See the description of the African-American Film Playlist: "The 'race movie' or 'race film' was a film genre which existed in the United States between about 1915 and 1950. It consisted of films produced for an all-black audience, featuring black casts. In all, approximately five hundred race films were produced. Of these, fewer than one hundred remain. Because most race films were produced outside the Hollywood studio system, they have been largely forgotten by mainstream film historians. In their day, race films were very popular among African American theatre goers. Their influence continues to be felt in cinema and television marketed to African Americans". in https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL7085E0A284A1F5FB

fictional figure. Subsequently, this prolific contact has generated "an unexpected crossing over" between Dante's legacy and the African-American communities that eventually led to the creation of what the scholar calls the 'Black Dante'.[312] The importance of this cultural crossover can be considered in the light of the process of film adaptation. If we are to do this, we must dismiss once more the previous perspective that put the text at the exact centre of the whole investigation. Indeed we need to adopt the shift to the *image-based* perspective in order to explore the circulation of images among different communities. The example provided by Spencer Williams' *Go Down Death*! (USA, 1944) demonstrates how Dante's infernal imagery has passed through the initial Italian 14th-century context into the African-American frame of reference of the 1940s and then into the potential worldwide 21st century setting. In recent years, the remediation of the infernal imagery is being renewed and strengthened by the employment of digital technologies that have enriched the adaptation process with a circular influence among different times, media and recipient communities.

Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, Milano Films' *Inferno* (ITA, 1911) played a key role in defining the infernal imagery inspired by Dante's *Commedia* on the cinematic screen. Along with this, the experimental cinematic techniques employed and the very first programmatic advertising campaign at a national and international level helped the movie to be distributed abroad and therefore extend its influence among a variety of recipient communities. Spencer William's *Go Down Death!* (USA, 1944) demonstrates how Dante's infernal imagery could then circulate, and then be appropriated and remediated far beyond that of its country of production. In addition, the renewed circulation of these movies, either in the institutional restoration and digitalisation of Milano Films' *Inferno* (ITA, 1011) curated by Cineteca Bologna between 2007 and 2011, or the non-institutional availability of Williams' film on the online platform Youtube, have helped us to explore the pivotal role that digital technologies in their broadest sense play in contemporary times in either practices of film restoration, conservation and distribution. This is the main

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[312] Looney, D. (2004), p.130

reason why, in conclusion, a strict *text-centered* approach shows the theoretical insufficiency of exploring the phenomenon of film adaptation. In addition to this, the greater focus on the genesis and circulation of images adopted in this chapter has helped us to investigate the re-mediate power of the cinematic medium among different eras and recipient communities and in the light of a productive interaction among a variety of arts and media. In light of these premises, the following chapter provides a further evidence of this set of phenomena through the assessment of the key case study of Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò – 120 Days of Sodom* (ITA, 1975).

CHAPTER 4. PIER PAOLO PASOLINI'S *SALÒ – 120 DAYS OF SODOM* (1975 – 2015): THE INFERNAL BODY

Introduction

The previous chapter established that practices of adaptation and remediation of infernal imagery through the cinematic screen have been renewed and implemented by the influx of digital technologies between 2005 and 2015, further promoting new forms of circulation and survival for films previously produced in the analogue era. In light of these considerations, this fourth chapter tests the boundaries of this investigation with the following question: what is the impact of the digital in providing unrestricted access to films? In order to demonstrate the ambivalent potential of digital technologies to counteract or to promote practices of film censorship, this chapter assesses the key case study of Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò – 120 Days of Sodom* (ITA, 1975), a controversial film that has been formally seized several times since its first release, in both Italy and many other European countries. This complex phenomenon invites us to reconsider this movie in order to also evaluate the impact of digital technologies in shaping the current status of Pasolini's reputation in Italy when we consider both institutional culture and its popular reception. This seems like an apposite time as 2015 saw the 40th anniversary of both *Salò*'s first distribution and Pasolini's brutal murder, occurring only a few weeks before the official release of the film in 1975.

In order to investigate these aspects, this chapter develops as follows: the first section provides a contextual summary of the controversial historical, social and political environment in which the film was first conceived and released. With this in mind, the second section investigates the remediation of Dante's infernal imagery in Pasolini's *Salò* in order to re-discuss the dynamics of film adaptation in the light of the *image-based* approach that foregrounds this thesis, along with identifying and analysing the most relevant sequences based on the infernal principles of retaliation, punishment and violence. Following this, the third section provides a comparative analysis of the history of *Salò*'s censorship and banned status in both Italy and the UK, with a particular focus on the months following its first distribution up to 2015.

Finally, the fourth and fifth sections explore the initiatives in Italy in 2015 for the film's 40th anniversary and with a particular focus on the brand-new and digitally restored edition of *Salò*, curated by Cineteca Bologna and CSC in 2015.[313] These sections discuss the relevance of the special screening of this film version that took place on November 2nd, 2015, in the same city in which Pasolini was murdered exactly forty years before. I personally attended this exceptional event and these last sections have been reported in the first person in order to better investigate the rejuvenation of Pasolini's reputation in Italian culture forty years after his death. The details of this screening have been explored with the analytical tools provided by both audience and reception studies, in order to provide an overview of the material, cultural and technological obstacles that my research faced at the time of the re-release of *Salò* in Italian cinemas.

4.1 Producing Pasolini's *Salò – 120 Days of Sodom* (ITA, 1975): the Italian Context of the Early 1970s.

When considering the genesis of *Salò – 120 Days of Sodom* in the early 1970s we need to take into account its political and social hallmarks on which Pier Paolo Pasolini often commented from the pages of *Corriere della Sera*, one of the main national newspapers for which he collaborated as a main contributor. When the wave of the 1968 cultural revolution led by the working class, the students' unions, the feminist groups in pursuit of gender equality, and labour rights against the consolidation of the capitalistic power, progressively hit different countries in the West, Italy was governed by the Christian Democracy (DC) party. In the years between the onset of the protest in 1968 and Pasolini's death and the controversial distribution of *Salò* in the second half of the 1970s, the DC party passed three new legislations: the DC Fifth Legislation (1968 - 1972), the DC Sixth Legislation (1972 – 1976) and the Seventh Legislation (1976 – 1979). In this decade, Italy saw a carousel of different Prime Ministers including Aldo Moro, Giovanni Colombo, Giulio Andreotti and Mariano Rumor.[314] Within parliament the Italian Communist Party (PCI)

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[313] This brand-new restoration premiered at the 72nd Venice Film Festival in September 2015 and was later released in Italian cinemas on November 2nd, 2015.

[314] In particular: Aldo Moro (DC) February 23rd, 1966 – June 24th, 1968. Following, Giovanni Leone (DC) held

represented the only real opponent to the overbearing power of Christian Democracy. In particular, Pasolini considered the arising of the PCI the "only salvation for Italy and its poor democratic institutions"[315] in the light of the social and cultural transformations which the Italian society was going through. Pasolini was adamant that the PCI provided the only hope for Italy to survive gentrification. He defined the PCI as a: "*clean* Country inside a *dirty* Country, an *honest* Country inside a dishonest Country, a *clever* Country inside an *idiotic* Country, a *cultured* country inside an *ignorant* Country, a *humanistic* Country inside a *consumerist* Country".[316] The fundamental importance of the PCI during parliamentary debate was considered by Pasolini as a necessary political battle to be fought, especially inside the institutional premises in order to "deal with the factual power, which is corrupt, inept, degraded: however, it is possible only in diplomatic relationships, almost at a nation-to-nation level".[317] The outcomes resulting from the encounter of these two almost opposing political views may have "saved Italy from its complete collapse: a 'compromise' would actually be an 'alliance' between two neighbour

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the Prime Ministry between June 24th, 1968 – December 12th, 1968. He was followed by Mariano Rumor (DC) for three terms named Rumor I (December 12th, 1968 – August 5th, 1969), Rumor II (August 5th, 1969 - March 27th, 1970) and Rumor III (March 27th, 2970 – August 6th, 1970). The office was then held by Emilio Colombo (DC) between August 6th, 1970 and February 17th, 1972. He was followed by Giulio Andreotti (DC) for other two terms named Andreotti I (February 17th, 1972 – June 26th, 1972) and Andreotti II (June 26th, 1972 – July 7th, 1973). Mariano Rumor (DC) again was in charge of the Prime Ministry for two other terms named Rumor IV (July 7th, 1973 – March 14th, 1974) and Rumor V (March 14th 1974 – November 23rd, 1974). He was followed by Aldo Moro (DC) again for two other terms named Moro IV (November 23rd, 1974 – February 12th, 1976) and Moro V (February 12th, 1976 – July 29th, 1976). He was followed by Giulio Andreotti for other three terms named Andreotti III (July 29th, 1976 – March 11th, 1978), Andreotti IV (March 11, 1978 – March 20th, 1979). During these months, Aldo Moro was kidnapped, tortured and killed by the terroristic group of the Brigate Rosse on May 9th, 1978. Andreotti completed his fifth legislation between March 20th, 1979 and August 4th, 1979. For extended reading see Dunnage, J. (2014). *Twentieth-Century Italy: A Social History*, New York: Routledge.

[315] Pasolini, P.P., (1974). 'Cos'è questo Golpe? Io so. – Is this a coup d'état? I Know', *Corriere della Sera*, 14th November. Full text available at *Corriere della Sera* official online archive http://www.corriere.it/speciali/pasolini/ioso.html Original Italian: "È certo che in questo momento la presenza di un grande partito all'opposizione come è il Partito comunista italiano è la salvezza dell'Italia e delle sue povere istituzioni democratiche. Il Partito comunista italiano è un Paese pulito in un Paese sporco, un Paese onesto in un Paese disonesto, un Paese intelligente in un Paese idiota, un Paese colto in un Paese ignorante, un Paese umanistico in un Paese consumistico. In questi ultimi anni tra il Partito comunista italiano, inteso in senso autenticamente unitario - in un compatto "insieme" di dirigenti, base e votanti - e il resto dell'Italia, si è aperto un baratto: per cui il Partito comunista italiano è divenuto appunto un "Paese separato", un'isola. Ed è proprio per questo che esso può oggi avere rapporti stretti come non mai col potere effettivo, corrotto, inetto, degradato: ma si tratta di rapporti diplomatici, quasi da nazione a nazione. In realtà le due morali sono incommensurabili, intese nella loro concretezza, nella loro totalità. È possibile, proprio su queste basi, prospettare quel "compromesso", realistico, che forse salverebbe l'Italia dal completo sfacelo: "compromesso" che sarebbe però in realtà una "alleanza" tra due Stati confinanti, o tra due Stati incastrati uno nell'altro".

[316] Ibidem.

[317] Ibidem.

States, or between two States stuck one into each other".[318] The 'compromise' Pasolini advocated so enthusiastically referred to a possible and bilateral political alliance between the Christian Democracy Party (DC) and the Italian Communist Party (PCI) which only became effective in 1976 thanks to the mediation of Aldo Moro (DC) and Enrico Berlinguer (PCI), a few months after Pasolini's death. *Salò – 120 Days of Sodom* was a production made in the same weeks in which Pasolini expressed his political view from the pages of *Corriere della Sera*, and therefore stands as the very last testament from the Italian director to the resolution of this political situation.[319]

As a matter of fact, a few hours before his death, Pasolini agreed to be interviewed by journalist Furio Colombo for the national newspaper *L'Unità*. Whilst discussing the involvement of mass-media and the Catholic Church contributing to the massification of Italian society, Pasolini expressed the idea of an already-present infernal modernity with a decidedly *Dantesque* ring to it; whilst also alluding to his own impending death:

> "I go down through the Inferno and I know things that don't bother other people's peace. Beware though: the Inferno is coming up to you. It's true that sometimes it dreams its own uniform and justification (sometimes). However, it is also true that its will, its need of beating, assaulting, killing, is strong and it is widespread […] And you are, with school, television, and the apathy of your newspapers, you are the main caretakers of this horrendous order based on the idea of possessing and destroying. Lucky you, who suddenly turns happy as soon as you can place a neat label upon a murder. This all seems to me like another mass culture operation, like so many others. As you cannot prevent some things from happening, you find peace in building up walls."[320]

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[318] Ibidem

[319] For the further reference on the relationship between Pasolini and the Italian political situation of the 1970s see Siciliano, E. (1987). *Pasolini: a Biography*, London: Bloomsbury; and Duggan, C. (2014). *A Concise History of Italy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[320] Pasolini, P.P. (1975). 'Siamo Tutti in Pericolo – We Are All in Danger', *L'Unità,* 2nd November. Original Italian: "Io scendo all'inferno e so cose che non disturbano la pace di altri. Ma state attenti. L'inferno sta salendo da voi. È vero che sogna la sua uniforme e la sua giustificazione (qualche volta). Ma è anche vero che la sua voglia, il suo bisogno di dare la sprangata, di aggredire, di uccidere, è forte ed è generale. […] E voi siete, con la scuola, la televisione, la pacatezza dei vostri giornali, voi siete i grandi conservatori di questo ordine orrendo basato sull'idea di possedere e sull'idea di distruggere. Beati voi che siete tutti contenti quando potete mettere su un delitto la sua bella etichetta. A me questa sembra un'altra, delle tante operazioni della cultura di massa. Non

Salò – 120 Days of Sodom, therefore, casts its gaze on power and human alienation, depersonalisation and destruction hiding behind its façade of respectability. Pasolini inspects the abuse of power through fiction in his final film. In this dystopian setting, which is dominated by the loss of all forms of justice, Pasolini explores the various manifestations of anarchy through the relationship between exploiters and exploited as a way to criticise Italian society of the 1970s. However, "the anarchy of the oppressed people is desperate, idyllic and most of all improvised, and eternally unrealised. On the contrary, the anarchy of power is easily achievable with law articles and praxis. Sade's exploiters in fact keep on writing regulations and applying them regularly".[321] These principles of Pasolini's last film consequently raise the following question: in which ways has the adaptation and remediation of Dante's *Inferno* in *Salò* contributed to creating a counter to the phenomenon of a degradation in Italian society? The following sections give an insight into how the relationship between the infernal imagery and the perverse power dynamics connect to the arise of mass-societies, against which the movie stands as a caustic criticism.[322]

4.2   Dante's *Inferno* and Pasolini's *Salò – 120 Days of Sodom*: Defining Structure and Imagery

In his ventures as a journalist, writer and director, Pasolini has often reflected on the process of screenwriting and film adaptation with a particular focus on the key role that the film script plays in the remediation of narrative elements and imageries. In his seminal essay *A Structure that Wants to be Another Structure* (1963), Pasolini defined the screenwriting work as an "autonomous technique"[323]

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potendo impedire che accadano certe cose, si trova pace fabbricando scaffali."

[321] Pasolini, P. P. (1975). 'Il Sesso come Metafora del Potere [Autointervista] – Sex as a Metaphor of Power [Self-interview]', in *Corriere della Sera*, 25th March. Original Italian: "L'anarchia degli sfruttati è disperata, idilliaca, e soprattutto campata in aria, eternamente irrealizzata. Mentre l'anarchia del potere si concreta con la massima facilità in articoli di codice e in prassi. I potenti di Sade non fanno altro che scrivere dei regolamenti e regolarmente applicarli".

[322] To this extent, the production of the movie employed cast counting some of Pasolini's recurring actors along with several non-professional actors, especially in the role of the young victims. The filming lasted for the weeks between March 3rd and May 9th, 1975 in different locations among Cinecittà Studios in Rome, Villa Aldini in Bologna and Villa Sorra in via Pieve in Castelfranco Emilia. Moreover, a few outdoors shootings took place in the actual town of Salò, near Mantua.

[323] Pasolini, P. P. (2005). *Heretical Empiricism,* 2nd edition, Washington DC: New Academia Publishing LCC, 2005, pp. 187-196.

that alludes "to a *potential* visualisable cinematographic work as a substantive element, as structure of his *work in the form of screenplay*".[324] As previously discussed, the screenwriting process - and especially in relation to matters of film adaptation – should be evaluated also in terms of originality and autonomy. Indeed Pasolini considered the screenwriter's work as "both typical - it presents aspects that are truly similar to all actual, functional screenplays - and autonomous at the same time".[325] In the light of this productive tension, screenwriters need therefore to prepare for a strong "collaboration with the reader" as "his representational imagination enters into a creative phase mechanically much higher and more intense than when he reads a novel".[326] Pasolini described this involvement as necessary to engage with the "dynamic structure" of the screenplay, which "wills to be a form which moves towards another form".[327] Pasolini remarked that, in approaching a 'reference text' – which for *Salò* are both Dante's *Inferno* and Marquis de *Sade's 120 Days of Sodom* (1904):

> "we can very well define phase A with rigor from outside and in structural terms (for example, the literary structure of the screenplay) and phase B (the cinematographic structure). But at the same time we can empirically reanimate the passage from one to the other because the 'structure of the screenplay' consists precisely in this passage from the literary stage to the cinematographic stage".[328]

However, although Pasolini seems to agree with early adaptation theorists and their idea that 'something' passes from the literary form to the cinematic one, he does highlight "the necessity to stress more the *process* than the *structure*".[329] In relation to the purpose of this research aiming to investigate the cinematic adaptation of Dante's infernal imagery on the cinematic screen in the digital era, we find that the initial dialogue between the Italian poet and Pier Paolo Pasolini expressed during the screenwriting process operated on three different levels: that

[324] Ibidem, pp.187-188.

[325] Ibidem.

[326] Ibidem, p.191.

[327] Ibidem.

[328] Ibidem.

[329] Ibidem.

of the establishment of a clear structure, the re-presentation of a violent imagery and finally the definition of a moralistic intention.

The structure of the film is the most immediate echo of Dante's *Inferno*: Pasolini's *Salò* is in fact organised around four main parts, each of them explicitly quoting Dante's terminology. The movie is composed of a proem named *Antinferno* (Infernal Vestibule), followed by three *Gironi* (Circles) – *Circle of Manias*, *Circle of Shit*, and *Circle of Blood*. Each of them is specifically dedicated to a thematic form of punishment to which the victims are subject, reflecting the mechanism of retaliation ruling all Dante's infernal circles. The *Antinferno* corresponds to the first part of the movie where the historical setting and the rules regulating the characters' universe are established. We are brought into the last days of Mussolini's Republic of Salò, the last stronghold of the Fascist regime. Here we see that a group of four upper class men – the Duke, the Magistrate, the Bishop and the President – are signing a mutual agreement involving the exchange of their respective daughters through a reciprocal marriage which will consequently guarantee each one of them is safeguarded for the actions they are about to pursue. In this way, the four men formally bind their relationship to each other with a primary human exchange. Following this, a band of Fascists kidnaps and arrests young boys and girls all around town. A jump cut leads the spectator inside a beautiful mansion in the countryside, where we find that the boys and girls are separately imprisoned. The initial four male characters are here reunited with three upper class women – who later will cover the role of narrators – who are leading the group of girls into a separate room. The *Antinfernal* prologue ends with the public reading of the Pasolinian Infernal house rules: every day at 6pm the victims and the sadists will gather together in the 'orgy hall' where the female sadists will take turns to tell a story on a dedicated theme. These stories aim to arouse the sadists, who are allowed to interrupt the storytelling any time they desire in order to abuse whichever victim they choose. After dinner the orgies start. The sadists tell the victims that all acts of sexual intercourse will need to be either promiscuous, adulterous, sodomite, or incestuous. In addition, heterosexual intercourse is not allowed and punished with the cut of a limb. Finally, any religious acts are strictly prohibited and warrant a death sentence. The infernal rules are established with no possibility of return, with the Dantean declaration to abandon all

hope. In fact, the victims are told: "You are beyond any legal boundary. No one on earth knows that you are here. And for all the rest, you are already dead".[330] In the following three circles the victims are heavily abused either at a verbal, physical or psychological level. All tortures follow the Dantesque principle of retaliation that is based on proportioning the punishment to the gravity of the sin committed on Earth. Thus, in Pasolini's *Salò,* torture is proportional to the theme ruling the dynamics of the circle. In the Circle of Manias the victims are involved in acts of masturbation and urination, in the Circle of Shit sadists and victims are involved in a coprophagist banquet and practices of sodomy. Finally, in the last Circle of Blood the victims' blood is drained to death through acts of genital mutilation and burning, hair scalping and eye gouging.[331]

What differentiates Dante's *Inferno* to Pasolini's *Salò* structurally is the act of self-reflection in a moral portrayal of their contemporary Italian society – the 13th Century for Dante, the neo-capitalistic 1970's for Pasolini. As a matter of fact, "here Pasolini repeats Dante's sharp criticism [so] the necessity of an allegorical interpretation is made clear: the excess of the Sadean villa will signify simultaneously sexual pathology, the genocidal Nazi-Fascist death drive, and the anthropological degradation of Italians in 1970s commodity culture, which for Pasolini is neo-fascism".[332] As with Dante's *Inferno* the human body becomes the centre of any moral and political criticism against contemporary society and its dehumanising customs. Like Dante's damned people, the body of the victims in Pasolini's inferno becomes the trigger of privilege and public discourse is exercised. Consequently, "the dehumanisation of the victims in the film signifies a reification of human bodies and minds by a culture and economy that turns everything, including human bodies and thoughts, into merchandise – merchandise whose value is determined by the

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[330] *Salò – 120 Days of Sodom*, (P.P. Pasolini, ITA, 1975), min. 20.00. Original Italian: "Siete fuori dai confini di ogni legalità. Nessuno sulla terra sa che voi siete qui. Per tutto quanto riguarda il mondo, voi siete già morti".

[331] To this extent, as outlined by Patrick Rumble, the provoking nature of Pasolini's last film leads to its near 'unwatchability'. "I say [the movie is] nearly unwatchable" Rumble explains, "during the scenes of torture and humiliation, the act of watching is itself inscribed into the film: in the form of the libertines' voyeurism – their pleasure in watching the annihilation of the victims or their pleasure in being watched themselves as they annihilate the victims. This is the most meta-cinematic moment of film, and its self-reflectivity has a precedent in Dante", in Rumble, P. (2004). *Pasolini's Dante after the Disappearance of the Fireflies,* in, A. A. Iannucci, ed, *Dante, Cinema and Television*, Toronto-Buffalo-London: University of Toronto Press Inc., p.159.

[332] Ibidem, p.159-161.

mysterious whims of market forces".[333] In the light of this criticism and by keeping an eye on the remediation of Dante's infernal imagery on the cinematic screen at the same time, the next section assesses two key sequences centred on exploring practices of violence through the logic of punishment and the objectification of the human body. Following the *image-based* approach forming the methodology of this thesis, both sequences are also investigated through psychoanalytical lenses as *Salò* is strongly characterised by acts of sexual violence, sadism and fetishism.

4.2.1   Inside Pasolini's Inferno: An Aesthetic and Psychoanalytic Reading of the 'Dog Sequence' and the 'Beauty Contest'

Considering the context in which this film was conceived, in which ways did *Salò* remediate Dante's infernal mechanism and imagery in order to discuss the encroaching massification of Italian society? The analysis of the following two film sequences help to clarify this aspect. The first one, named the 'Dog Sequence', occupies the final stage of the first part of the movie, in the *Circle of Manias,* and explores the degradation of the human being to animal level. The second one, named the 'Beauty Contest', takes place in the second circle of the film in the *Circle of Shit* and explores the degradation of the human being to an even baser level, down to the mere reduction of the victims to sexual objects. As I am going to discuss, both sequences explore aspects of the abusive employment of power through acts of sadistic and fetishistic violence.

The 'Dog Sequence' is organised into six main sections. In the first one we see all sadists gathered together inside a well-illuminated room. (Figure 1) The image is a long shot presenting the sadists remaining still at the end of a room – a well-composed and balanced picture where the human presence is organised into a tripartite structure involving female sadists sitting together at the table on the left-hand side, the male sadists standing still at the centre of the image and the Fascist guards gathered together at the right-hand side of the picture. A quick cut leads the camera's eye to the stairs leading to the room in a frontal shot, where we see the group of victims for the first time, equally composed of boys and girls. They are kept

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[333] Ibidem, p.161.

on a lead by a few male fascist guards. (Figure 2) All victims are completely naked and acting like dogs on their knees. Once the human pack enters the room, all victims stop in front of the male sadists and continue to act like dogs. (Figure 3)
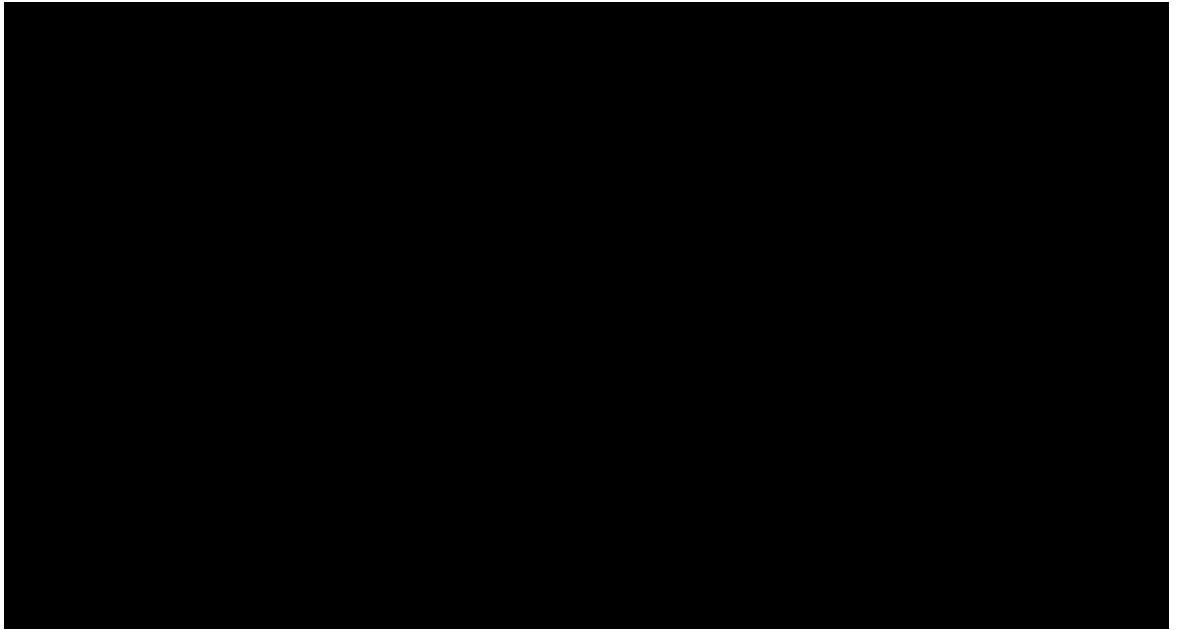
Figure 4.1 - Sadists waiting for the Victims
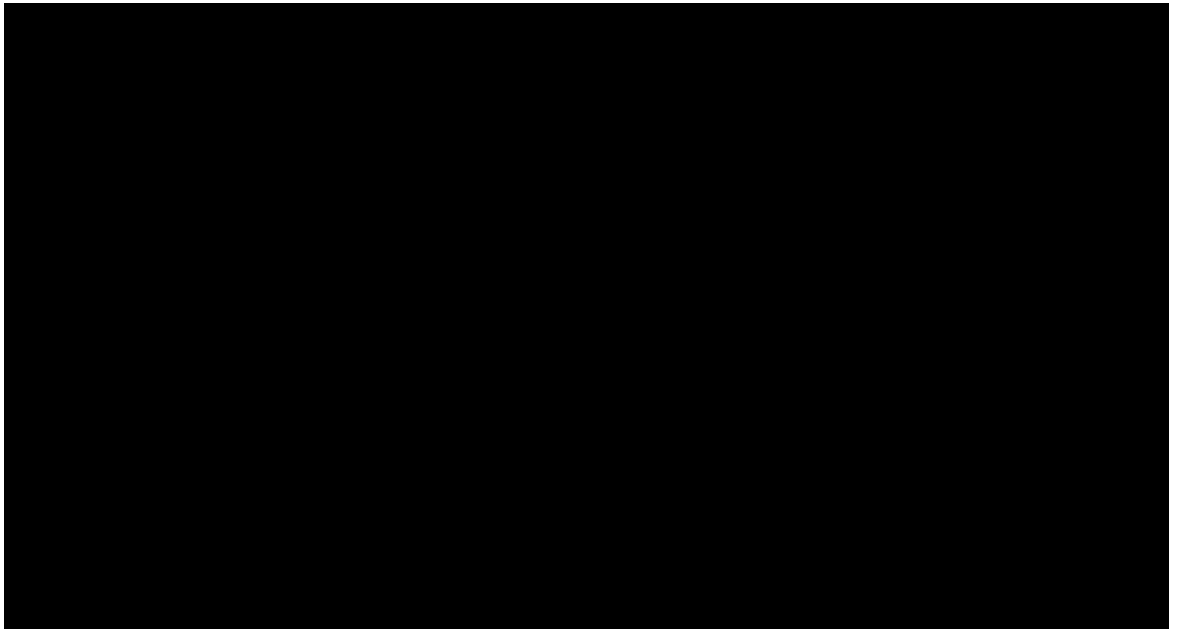
Figure 4.2 - Victims reduced to a pack of dogs are kept on a lead
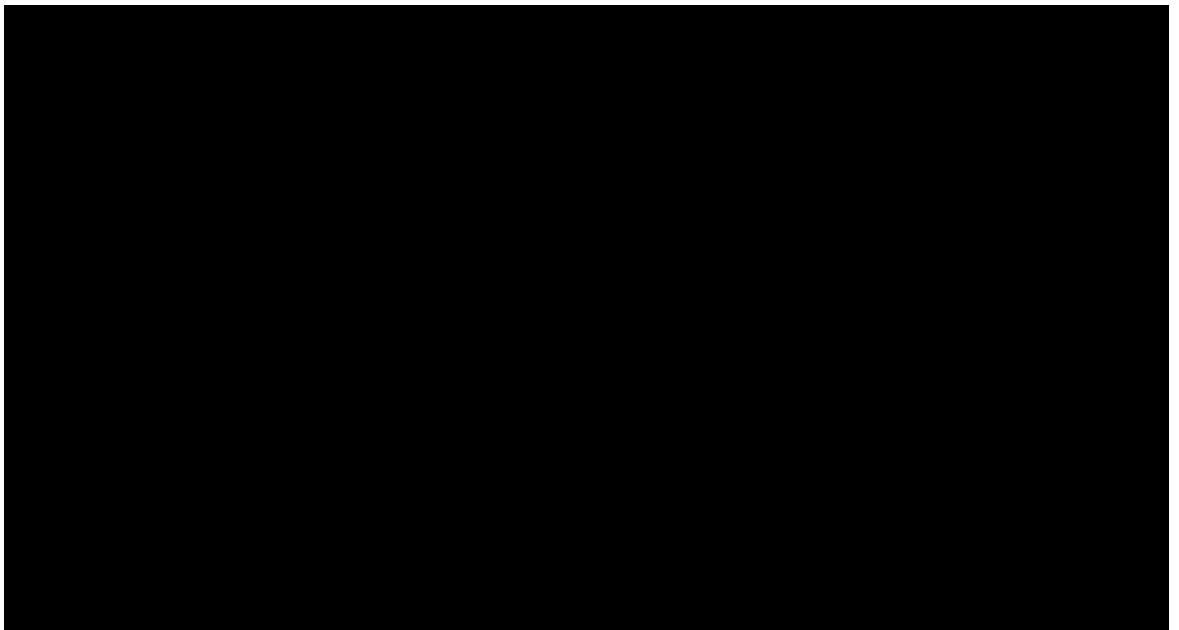
Figure 4.3 - Victims stop in front of the Sadists

Here, in the third part of the sequence, the sadists start playing with the

victims as if they were dogs. The sadists appear to treat the human dogs in a 'friendly' way. (Figure 4) But then suddenly the Bishop grabs a long leather whip and starts flogging a young male victim with deplorable violence and for apparently no reason. No one stops the sadist from his rage and the other victims remain silent on their knees and inside their pack while their companion gets tortured (Figure 5). Finally, the sequence ends with the Bishop grabbing a piece of polenta and placing a few, spiky nails inside of it. The girl comes from the pack and starts to take a bite. A stream of blood comes out of her injured mouth while the Bishop – now down on his knees – observes the scene entertained.
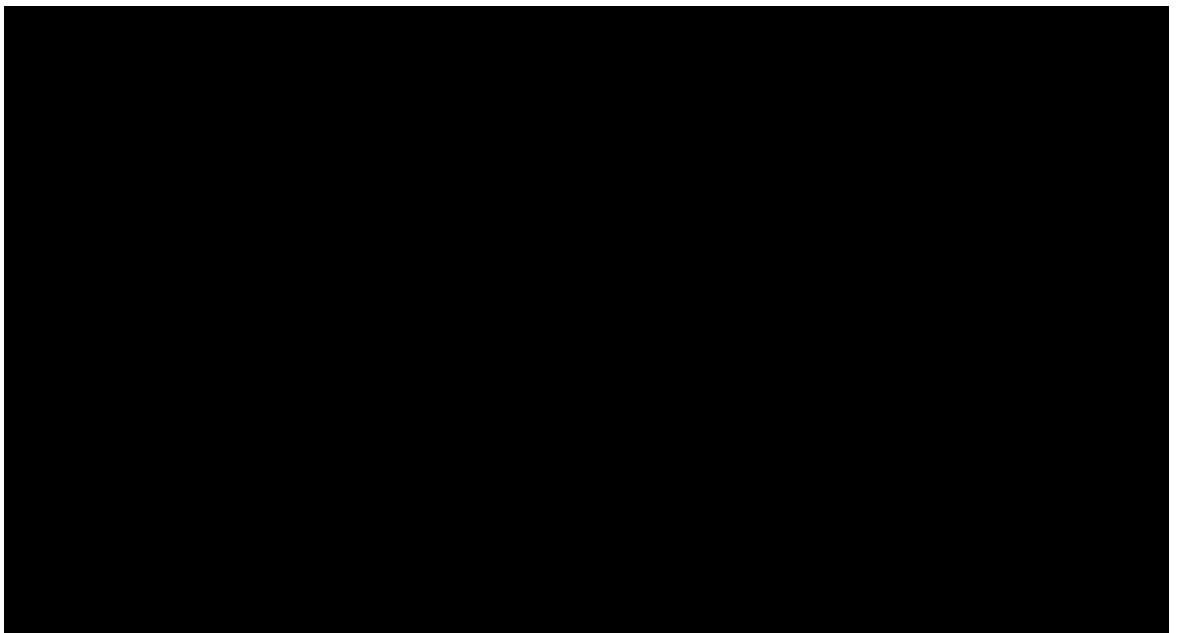
Figure 4.4 - Victims eating from a dog bowl
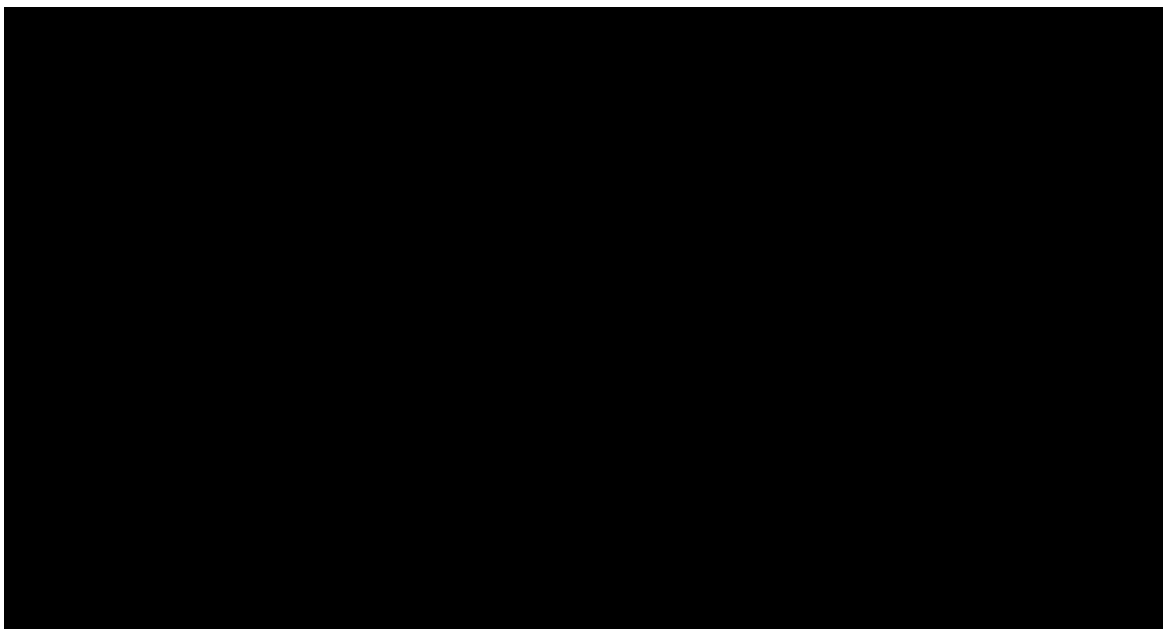
Figure 4.5 - The Sadist Bishop whips one of the Victims
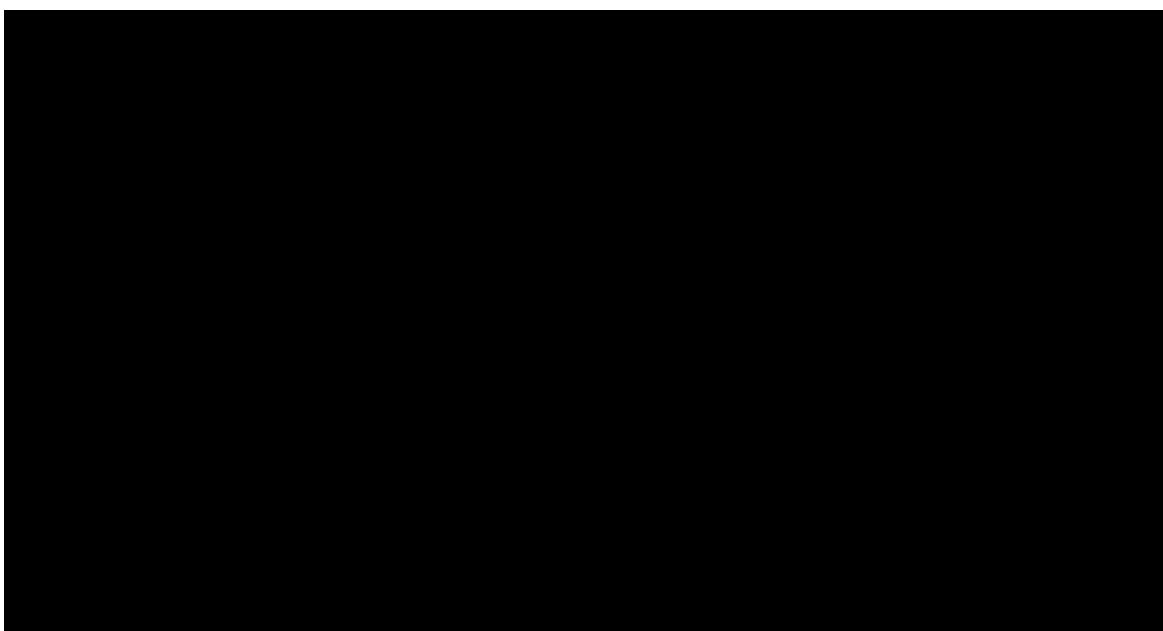
Figure 4.6 - The Bishop inserts a few nails inside of a polenta bite
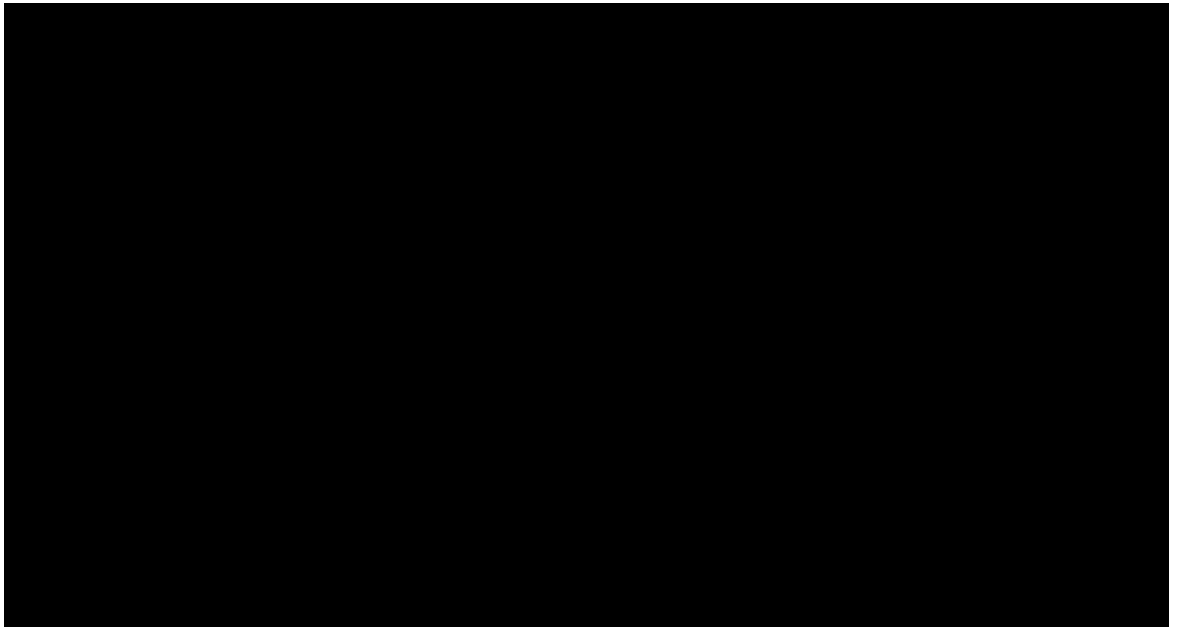
Figure 4.7 - One of the victims eats the polenta bite containing nails and gets hurt

In this sequence the most evident aspect of exploitation is related to the ways the Sadists master their power. Pasolini explicates the Sadists' power with different visual elements. In particular, the first element of power stands to highlight the Sadists' *financial superiority* in the capitalistic and consumerist era. This is made evident from the expensive clothes they are wearing. In particular, the guards on the right hand side wear the fascist uniforms which recall their military power, the male Sadists wear the businessmen dress-code of back suits and occupy the very centre of the first shot and finally the women on the left hand side are sitting at the table in their expensive clothes and do not actively participate throughout the whole scene. However, they are still entertained to watch the violence and make no attempt to defend the victims (Figure 1). Compounding the Sadists' relative power, the victims are left completely naked (Figures 2-3-4-5-7). In addition, the power held by the Sadists can also be defined as a *movement* power. The majority of the victims are kept on a lead which prevents them from escaping. Whenever one of the victims moves to escape the pack they are violently punished (Figures 5 and 7). While the Sadists can stand and move freely, the victims are reduced to animals and obliged to stay on their knees. Finally, the Sadists also hold the power of *food dispensing* – and it

is interesting to note that bites of meat are offered to the victims – and that this food gets served in the Sadists' very own hands or from a dog bowl (Figure 4).

In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), Sigmund Freud defines sadistic behaviour as "the desire of inflicting pain upon the sexual object".[334] This kind of violent inclination is more predominant among "the sexuality of most male human beings" that manifests through elements of "aggressiveness - a desire to subjugate".[335] Supporting this claim, throughout the whole film all acts of physical aggression are exclusively perpetrated by men, as shown in this and the following 'Beauty Contest Sequence'. In particular, "the biological significance of it seems to lie in the need for overcoming the resistance of the sexual object by means other than the process of wooing. Thus sadism would correspond to an aggressive component of the sexual instinct which has become independent and exaggerated and, by displacement, has usurped the leading position".[336] Behind the pure biological reasons that may foreground practices of sadism in their sexual connotation, Freud does not forget to link this sexual drive with the social relationships that humans create in their practices of association. In fact, he purports that: "the history of human civilization shows beyond any doubt that there is an intimate connection between cruelty and the sexual instinct".[337] This link will be later deepened in the further publication *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), where Freud outlines that:

> "Men are not gentle creatures […] they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. As a result, their neighbour is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him."[338]

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[334] Freud, S. (2000) *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, in S. Freud and I. Smith, ed, *Freud Complete Works 1890-1939*, p. 628 – Online Link available at http://www.valas.fr/IMG/pdf/Freud_Complete_Works.pdf

[335] Ibidem, p. 628.

[336] Ibidem, p. 628.

[337] Ibidem, p. 628.

[338] Freud, S. (2000). 'Civilization and its Discontent', in F., Sigmund, I., Smith, ed., *Freud Complete Works 1890-*

This perspective is particularly relevant to Pasolini's *Salò* as well, as the cinema created by the Italian director in the bourgeoisie villa during the last days of the Fascist dictatorship criticised the social dynamics of perversion, profound inequality and depersonalisation that contemporary capitalist society creates.

If we consider the sadistic drive in the light of the logic of punishment, we might be able to consider the ways Dante's infernal mechanisms, setting and imagery get remediated into the *Salò*'s inferno. It is interesting to underline how Pasolini replicated the relationship between individual groups and masses that often distinguishes the narrative dynamics of Dante's *Commedia*. In the *Commedia*, when Dante completes his trip through the circles of Hell, the narrative dynamics adopted to identify the damned people he meets along the way interrelates with the one Pasolini creates in *Salò*. Each of the infernal cantos implies a specific corporal punishment and perpetual damnation, which is proportional to the gravity of the sin the damned people had committed when they were alive. Whenever Dante goes down into a new circle, he catches a glimpse of the damned people in their group: they are all part of an indistinct mass of tortured bodies. Subsequently, one or two specific people come out of the mass to speak to Dante. In this specific moment, his or her identity is revealed: we are therefore able to identify the damned person as an individual who is being damned for the same sin the others trapped in the infernal circle are, but he or she is able to narrate their own story, to be upgraded to the status of a human being, and therefore acquire a defined personality, integrity and identity. In *Salò*, Pasolini adopted the same mechanism. In fact, at the beginning of the sequence, when the victims appear reduced to a pack of dogs, the spectator is not able to identify any of them. (Figure 2 and Figure 3). We can barely understand their gender, even if all victims are completely naked. Subsequently, in the moment when one of them exits the pack - and therefore exits the group - the victim gets heavily tortured. This is the case of the whipped young boy (Figure 5) and the subsequent sequence when the young girl eats the polenta padded with spiky nails (Figure 7). As the frames make evident, we see that the victims who get separated from the group acquire their own identity – through the determination of their gender, their facial traits, their screaming voice. However, as opposed to Dante's *Inferno*, the

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acknowledgment of their identity does not imply an upgrade of their human value. On the contrary, the graphic violence the victims undergo degrades their own human integrity and dignity and once more highlights the social distance between them and the sadists. The Duke comments on the whipping act that the Bishop has already terminated:

> "So Excellence you are now convinced from seeing those who do not enjoy the things I do, and suffer from the worst discomforts, of the charm to be free to tell yourself: 'So I am happier than this scoundrel called the commons'. Wherever men are equal and this difference does not exist, happiness could never exist there".[339]

This statement shows once more the opposition between the mass and the individual: in this case through his sadistic violence upon an innocent young boy, the Bishop remarks his individuality against the indistinct mass of what he calls 'the commons'.

The relationship between mass and individual in practices of depersonalisation and humiliation is further explored in the sequence of the 'Beauty Contest'. The action develops in six main episodes. At the beginning, we see all the sadists waiting on the top of the same stairs as in the 'Dog Sequence'. We can clearly identify the characters within the long shot. We recognise a few Fascists guards, along with the male and female sadists. The camera is placed slightly below eye level: the visual effect obtained puts the sadists slightly higher than the observer. This specific composition already demonstrates a separation between the audience and the Sadists who stand at a superior height. While waiting for Mrs Maggi to open the door, the male sadists discuss the significance of the sodomite practice, considered to be "the most absolute in its mortal shades for human beings, and the most ambiguous as it accepts social rules in order to break them".[340] (Figure 8) When Mrs Maggi opens the door, we are back into the big, mirrored hall we had already seen in

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[339] *Salò – 120 Days of Sodom* (P. P. Pasolini, ITA, 1975) min. 50-51, original Italian: "Ebbene Eccellenza si è convinto, che dalla vista di coloro che non godono ciò che godo io e soffrono dei peggiori disagi, che derivi il fascino di poter dire a se stessi 'Dunque io sono più felice di questa canaglia che si chiama popolo.' Dovunque gli uomini siano uguali e non esista questa differenza, nemmeno la felicità esisterà mai".

[340] Ibidem, min. 1.17.50, Original Italian: "il più assoluto per quanto contiene di mortale per la specie umana, e il più ambiguo perché accetta le norme sociali per infrangerle".

the sequence that I previously analysed, now standing in the semi-dark. When the eyes adapt to the lack of light we recognise that the group of victims has been 'composed' in Mrs Maggi's 'own masterpiece' in a sort of human art installation. The young victims are bowed on their knees, their faces hidden under their arms thrown on the floor. They are completely naked and showing their backs to the Sadists. Moreover, the camera shot never includes the victims' heads, which completely prevents the observer from recognising any of their individual traits. (Figure 9)
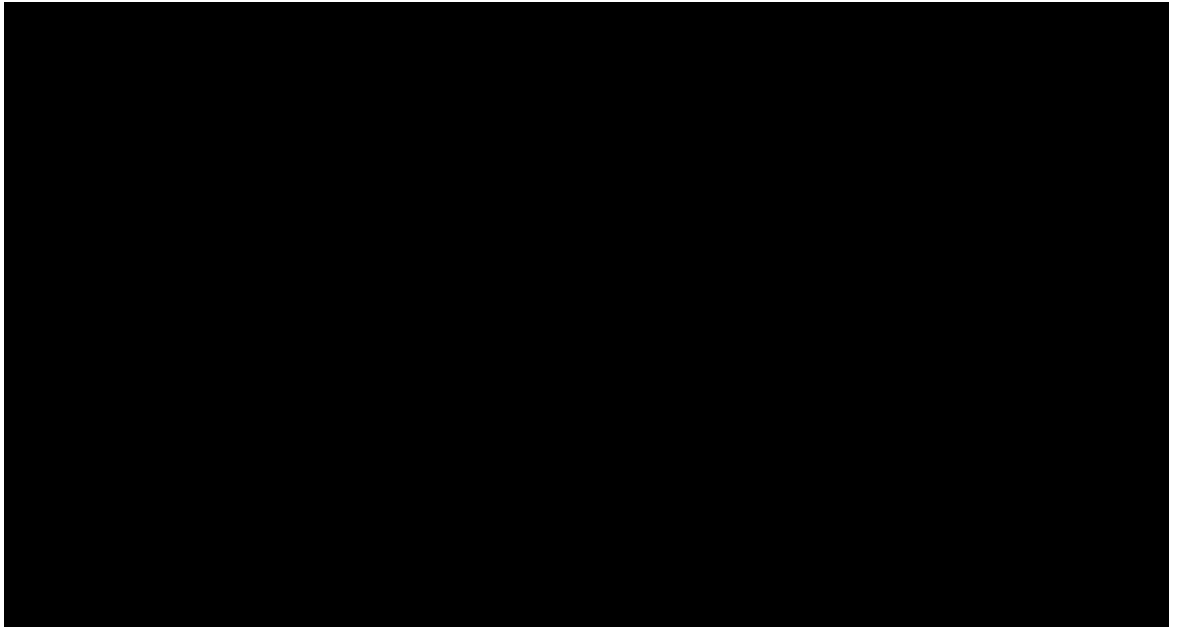
Figure 4.8 - Sadists waiting outside the main hall
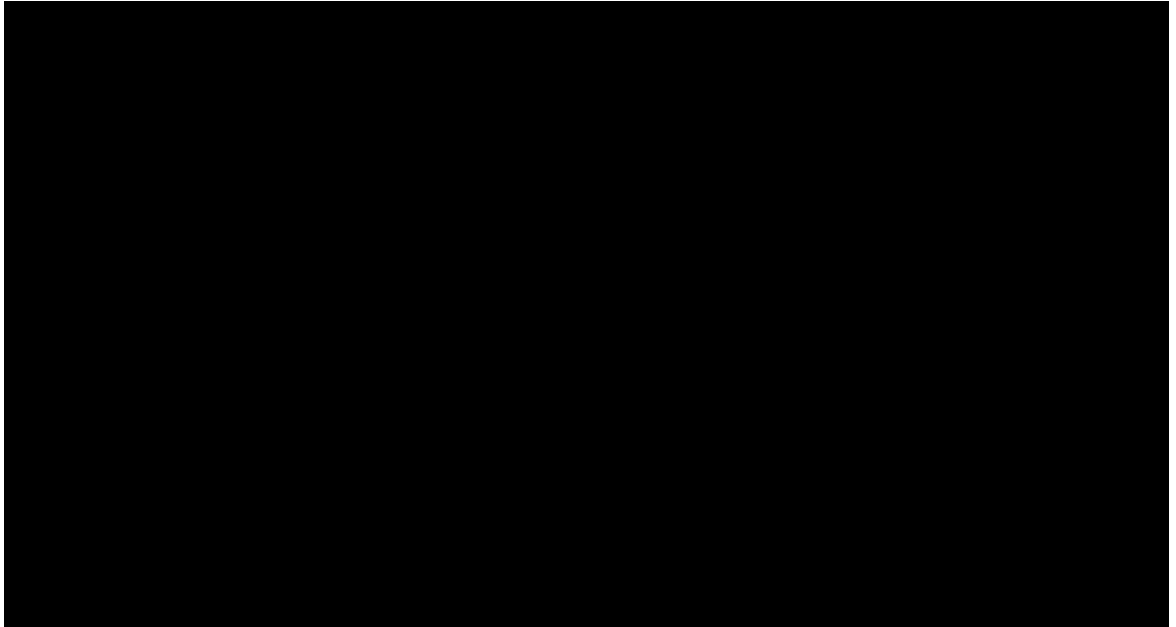
Figure 4.9 - Mrs Maggi's 'masterpiece'

Now the Sadists start the beauty contest and discuss their prize: the victim with the most beautiful and perfect bottom would be instantly killed. It is interesting to underline how, once more, only the male Sadists actively participate in the violence, while the guards and the women observe the scene in silence, as previously seen in the 'Dog Sequence'. The male Sadists continue to check the victims' bottoms with a torch in their hand, in order to decree the winner. Their bodies are completely immobile, it is hard to say whether they are even breathing while the Sadists check and discuss their bottoms: it is fundamental for them not know whether the buttocks belong to a male or a female or to a specific person as "it might influence the decision. Quite the opposite – we need to be completely free in our choice". (Figure 10) Finally the decision is made. The Sadists immobilise the terrified Franchino and put a gun against the young boy's scared face. The trigger is pulled but the gun is not loaded (Figure 11). It is interesting that the epilogue of this sequence shows once more the Dantesque dynamics between the group of damned people and one of its members. The identity of the mass remains unknown until one specific character – in this case the young boy named Franchino - emerges from the group. Here the victim gets identified by name and facial traits and consequently, as with the two individuals

emerging from the group in the previously analysed dog sequence, tailored violence is perpetrated on the body and psyche of the chosen individual.
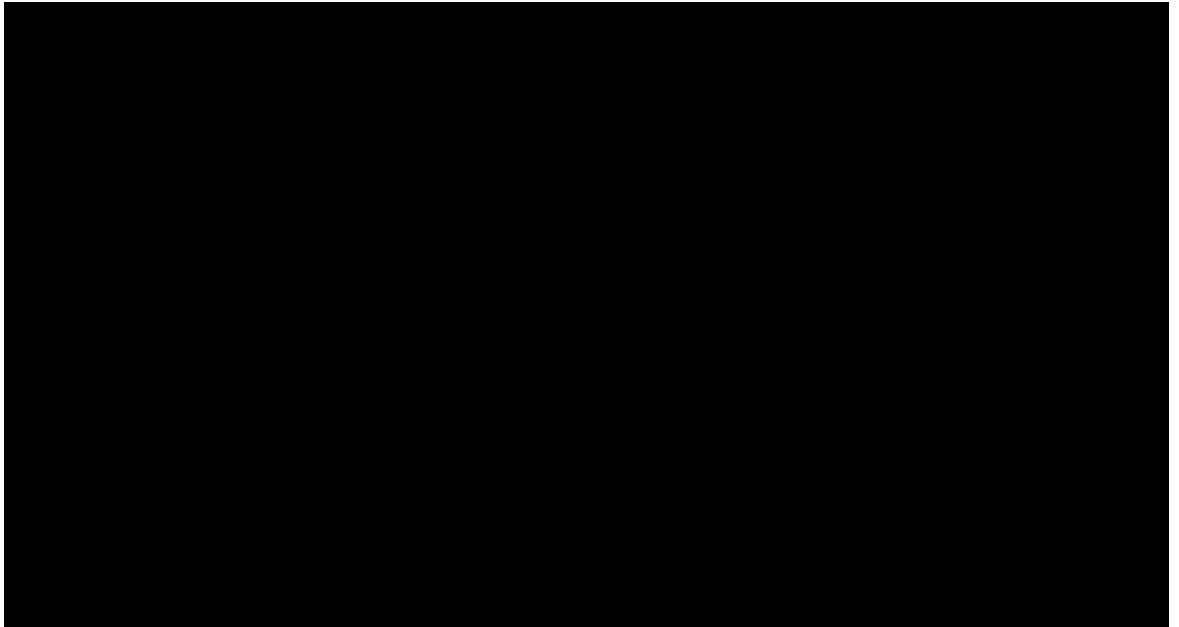
Figure 4.10 - Sadists checking the Victims

Figure 4.11 - Franchino receives the prize for winning the beauty contest

The phenomenon of reducing the human being down to objects is often present in Dante's *Inferno.*[341] However, what differentiates the objectification of the human body in Pasolini's *Salò – 120 Days of Sodom* from the metamorphosis of the body in Dante's poem is the sexual and fetishist connotation that applies to the victims in Pasolini's film. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), Sigmund Freud defines the phenomenon of *fetishism* as extreme sexualisation and desire of possession of a "substitute" of the sexual object "as an assignable relation to the person whom it replaces and preferably to that person's sexuality".[342] These impulses are also evident in the 'Beauty Contest' through the obsessive attachment to the victims' bottoms as a sexual substitute which "passes beyond the point of being merely a necessary condition attached to the sexual object" that, on a further level, leads "the fetish" to become "detached from a particular individual" and therefore

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[341] See e.g. *Inferno XIII* when Dante meets Pier delle Vigne whose body is reduced to a bleeding and bare tree or Canto XXVI when Dante meets Ulysses and Diomedes whose bodies are merged together in a Siamese burning flame.

[342] Freud, S. (2000), p.626.

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"becomes the sole sexual object".[343] This last characteristic is particularly evident in this second sequence, as the male Sadists are prevented in any way from recognising each of the victims as individuals. In fact, the four Sadists are first physically kept separated from their sexual objects. We see them waiting in the 'art room' while the composition is being prepared. Once they have stepped into the room, they ask to switch the lights off in order to focus their attention only on their sexual substitutes which are illuminated by the torch. In addition to this sexual element, Freud also outlines a mysterious and transcendent aspect in which substitutes are related to "the fetishes in which savages believe that their gods are embodied". [344] Moreover, the fetish attitude is made evident in Pasolini's sequence by the idea of 'composing' the bodies of the young victims in a form of an art masterpiece along with the obsession of finding the best bottom that fulfils the top requirements of aesthetic "beauty and grace".[345]

However, as the analysis of these two scenes has shown, the practice of sadism and fetishism perpetrated in the film is not only linked to sexual behaviour. Indeed, as Isaak I. Rubin (2006) has brilliantly outlined when discussing the works of Alexander Bogdanov[346] (1897) and Karl Kautsky[347] (1925) regarding the socio-economical-political dynamics of capitalism, the concept and act of fetishism might be further extended to social-economic dynamics of capitalistic societies with a sadistic quality, something Marxists named *commodity fetishism*. Commodity fetishism relates to "the exchangeability of commodities as internal, natural property of the commodities themselves. In other words, that which is in reality a relationship among people, appear as a relation among things within the context of commodity fetishism".[348] In the modern era, where the industrial production is on a mass scale, with serial and disposable main features that fears the substitutability of individuals,

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[343] Ibidem, p.626.

[344] Freud, S. (2000), p. 626.

[345] *Salò – 120 Days of Sodom*, (P. P. Pasolini, ITA, 1975), min. 1.20.00: "Please gentlemen notice the beauty of this groove…. I don't think that the weight of these loins could be compared to the grace that I have shown you before". Original Italian dialogue: "Signori notino la bellezza di questo incavo…Non mi sembra che la pesantezza di questi lombi possa essere paragonata alla grazia che vi ho fatto notare prima".

[346] See e.g. Bogdanov, A. (1897), *A short course of Economic Science*, Moscow: Murinova's Bookshop.

[347] See e.g. Kautsky, K. (1925), *The Economic Doctrines of Karl Marx*, London: A. and C. Black.

[348] Rubin, I. I. (2008), *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value,* Delhi: Aaron Books Publishing House, p.6.

Salò explores the relationship between sex and power, or more specifically between the objectification of individuals through sexual practices and capitalistic power. In Pasolini's own words: "All sex contained in *Salò* – and the film contains a lot of sex – is also the metaphor of the relationship between power and the ones subjected to this power. In other words it is the representation (maybe a dreamlike one) of what Marx called the human commodification: that of the degradation of the body to a thing – through its exploitation".[349] The Fascist context of the Republic of Salò is not therefore related only to that specific historical moment. Indeed it is a "symbol" recalling all forms of "power that transforms individuals into objects",[350] which is exactly what happens in the sequences analysed. Furthermore, the different shades of fetishism involved in this piece are also strongly linked to practices of sadistic violence. The main feature of these two scenes - and also of the violence carried out throughout the whole film - is the potentially infinite repetition of practices of humiliation on the same person or groups of victims who have no chance to escape. As evidence of this, the space in which they get tortured visually replicates this idea of prison and infinite reiteration of the violence. As we can see from both scenes, the few windows of the room are placed at the top of the wall and they are grilled with iron bars whilst two giant mirrors are placed at both sides of the room so that their reflections repeat the image of the violence *ad infinitum*. In addition to this, the aspect of the cyclical renovation of the torture is further emphasised by the final sentences pronounced by the Sadist who is pointing the gun towards the young boy chosen as winner of the 'Beauty Contest': "You idiot! How would you think we would have killed you? Don't you know that we would kill you one thousand times and up to the limits of eternity, if eternity could have limits".[351] It is important to remember that the dynamics of never-ending and cyclical humiliation are present in both books inspiring Pasolini's last film: that of Dante's *Inferno* – where the damned people are condemned to undergo the same punishment outside any limits of time - and in the

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[349] Pasolini, P. P. (1975). 'Il sesso come Metafora del Potere [Autointervista] – Sex as Metaphor of Power [Self-Interview]', *Corriere della Sera*, 25th March, p.15. Original Italian: "Tutto il sesso che c'è in Salò (e ce n'è in quantità enorme) p anche la metafora del rapporto del potere con coloro che gli sono sottoposti. In altre parole è la rappresentazione (magari onirica) di quella che Marx chiama la mercificazione dell'uomo: la riduzione del corpo a cosa (attraverso lo sfruttamento)".

[350] Ibidem, original Italian: "Ho preso a simbolo di quel potere che trasforma gli individui in oggetti".

[351] *Salò – 120 Days of Sodom*, (P. P. Pasolini, ITA, 1975), min 1.21.30, original Italian: "Imbecille, come potevi pensare che ti avremmo ucciso? Non lo sai che noi vorremmo ucciderti mille volte, fino ai limiti dell'eternità, se l'eternità potesse avere dei limiti?".

Marquis De Sade's novel *120 Days of Sodom* where "the apathetic reiteration of the act brings to light a new factor: number. It brings to light the relationship between quality and quantity. The act passionately reiterated on the same object is depreciated (or diversified) for the benefit of the quality of the object. As the object is multiplied and the very number of objects depreciate them, the quality of the act itself, reiterated in apathy, is the better affirmed".[352] In this way, the primarily sexual connotation of fetishism, containing also a mysterious aspect linked with the drive towards the transcendent, implies elements of cynical and sadistic behaviour. In fact, through practices of repetition and by renewing their acts of humiliation, the power of the Sadists arises and corroborates, while the victims get constantly and irreversibly reduced to objects. With this in mind, along with considering the criticism of the capitalism through the objectification of the human body and dignity we need to remember that, as both sequences show, the *acts of threatening* and *humiliating* are preferred to the *act of killing*. In conclusion, this constant *memento mori*, threatening death: "pushes the spectator inside of this Pasolinian Inferno which involves: the extinction of any sentiment, of the psyche, of drama, of any kind of human interaction, of any natural physical function, of any social value".[353]

If we combine these infernal elements in the turbulent social and historical moment in which this movie first came out, we are better able to picture the troubled context in which *Salò* tried to distribute its original version in the mid-1970s. The history of its first circulation has been controversial and hampered by the censorship that was applied with different results, according to Italy's cultural sensibility. Two questions foreground the comparative analysis of both British and Italian censorship: what was the initial reception of the film? What are the main similarities and differences between both institutions for film classification? Further to this, what role did Dante's *Inferno* play in encouraging the distribution of the film?

[352] Klossowski, P. (1995), 'Sade or the Philosopher-Villain', in A., Pierre, D. B., Roberts, S., Mark and S. A. Weiss, ed*, Sade and the Narrative of Transgression*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 51-52.

[353] Bachmann, G. (1975), 'Salò On-Set Diary', in "*Slight and Sound"*, vol.45(1), Winter 1975-76, contained in the booklet attached to *Salò -120 Days of Sodom* (P. P. Pasolini, ITA, 1975), 2015 DVD edition, pp.16-17.

4.3   *Salò – 120 Days of Sodom*: A Comparative Perspective of Italian and British censorship

> "Milan January 29th, [1976]
> Pier Paolo Pasolini's 'Salò-Sodom' will be judged today by the first division of the Criminal Court of Milan. The debate will start at 4pm. The sentence is expected to be issued in the late afternoon. The trial for offence against public decency issued against the tragically-dead director started on Tuesday, January the 20th. The judges have registered the deposition of the producer, Alberto Grimaldi, who is now the one responsible for the film after Pasolini's death, along with the deposition of the public prosecutor Roccantonio D'Amelio. Tomorrow, prosecution and defense will provide a wide documentation of reviews and articles and will issue their favour or reservation on the film".[354]

When this article first came out at the end of January, 1976 Pasolini was already dead. *La Stampa*, one of the most important Italian National newspapers followed the trial involving producer Alberto Grimaldi in the Italian distribution of Pasolini's *Salò.* In the light of the 40th anniversary of Pasolini's murder and initial distribution of the film, Roberto Chiesi (2015) has investigated and reconstructed the complex chronology and surrounding debate about this film that surfaced in the 1970s within official institutions, national press and the audience.[355] A preliminary opposition against the distribution of the film dates back to the editing phase, just a few weeks before Pasolini's murder, when between August 14th-18th, 1975 sixty-four film cans were stolen in Rome from "the Technicolor buildings, including Federico Fellini's *Il Casanova*, Damiano Damiani's *Un Genio, due Compari e un Pollo* and a *Salò*"

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[354] Soldati, M.,(1976). 'Sequestrare Salò? – Salò censored?', *La Stampa*, 30th January, p.3. Original Italian: "Milano, 20 gennaio [1976], "*Salò-Sodoma* di Pier Paolo Pasolini sarà giudicato domani dalla prima sezione penale del tribunale di Milano. Il dibattimento è fissato alle ore 16. Nel tardo pomeriggio dovrebbe essere emessa la sentenza. Il processo per oscenità contro il film del regista tragicamente scomparso è cominciato martedì 20 gennaio. I giudici hanno ascoltato la deposizione del produttore Alberto Grimaldi, unico responsabile dell'opera dopo la morte di Pasolini, e le accuse del pubblico ministero Roccantonio D'Amelio. Domani accusa e difesa forniranno un'ampia documentazione di recensioni e articoli con pareri favorevoli o riserve sull'opera".

[355] See Chiesi, R. (2015). *Cronaca di una Persecuzione Annunciata: Salò e la censura – Chronicle of an announced Prosecution: Salò and censorship*, in the official booklet attached to *Salò – 120 Days of Sodom*, (P. P. Pasolini, ITA, 1975), DVD edition, Bologna, 2015, pp.35 – 45. Original Italian: "La post-produzione fu infatti rallentata dal clamoroso furto di settantaquattro pizze di negativi, sottratte dalle celle frigorifere della Technicolor, di *Il Casanova* di Federico Fellini, *Un Genio, due Compari e un Pollo* di Damiano Damiani, e *Salò*, avvenuto fra il 14 e il 18 agosto. [...] Di Salò esisteva un intermedio negativo a contatto che fu utilizzato per il montaggio [...] Dopo aver ricevuto una comunicazione del produttore a che 'dichiara di essere disposto a eseguire anche dei tagli se la Commissione lo ritiene opportuno' [...] La deliberazione è la seguente: 'il film nella sua tragicità porta sullo schermo immagini così aberranti e ripugnanti di perversioni sessuali che offendono sicuramente il buon costume e come tali sopraffanno la tematica ispiratrice del film sull'anarchia di ogni potere'".

that had not been distributed yet. What survived of Pasolini's last work from this theft was "an intermediate contact negative that was employed for the final cut". When the producer Alberto Grimaldi presented the film to the censorship board at the end of October 1975, Pasolini was still alive. A few days later the board, despite the "availability given by the Producer Alberto Grimaldi to cut a few scenes, if necessary", rejected the distribution of the film in Italian cinemas as its images were considered "so aberrant and repugnant in relation to sexual perversion that it would surely offend the morality and consequently overwhelm the main theme of the anarchy of the power that inspires the film".[356] In the following weeks, Alberto Grimaldi appealed against this judgement. Meanwhile the film premiered on November 22nd 1975 at Paris Film Festival, France with a press conference involving "Bernardo Bertolucci, Laura Betti, Liliana Cavani, Luigi Comencini, Gillo Pontecorvo, Francesco Rosi and Sonia Savage".[357] On December 23rd 1975 *Salò – 120 Days of Sodom* finally received formal authorisation to be shown uncut in Italian cinemas as the board did not consider the film "to cause offence against morality" and specified that, despite the high number of sex scenes, they did not involve "any intention to arouse lust".[358] The film could therefore be distributed in Italian cinemas and, according to Chiesi "15.675 spectators attended the screening in the first two days".[359] However, whilst the audience seemed to react positively to the screening, the press reported several boycott actions even inside the cinema premises such as the release of "stink bombs"[360] in Milan or the formal complaints leading to the confiscation of the film reels on January 13th 1976. In the following weeks Alberto Grimaldi was called for trial in March 1977, when the film could be redistributed without the scenes involving "the sodomy of president Doucret [...] the masturbation of the inexpert boy and the mannequin" along with "the sodomy of Blangis" and "the

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[356] Sentence 601/67445 dated November 12, 1975 released by Vth Cinematographic Revision, Rome, Italy reported in full as a scanned image in the official DVD case of *Salò – 120 Days of Sodom*, (P. P. Pasolini, ITA, 1975), DVD edition, Bologna, 2015.

[357] Chiesi, R. (2015). p.36.

[358] Ibidem, p.37. Original Italian: "La maggioranza ritiene [...] di non poter condividere il parere della Commissione di primo grado, che il film costituisca offesa al buon costume. [...] Il sesso [...] non assume mai nel film il carattere di una intenzionale ed eccitante allusione alla lussuria".

[359] Ibidem, p.37. Original Italian: "Nei primi due giorni il film attirò 15.675 spettatori".

[360] Ibidem, p.37.

President masturbating in front of the mirror and the sodomy of the Bishop".[361] As Chiesi pointed out: "It is interesting to notice how the Court did not order the removal of the violence, torture or rape scenes, but instead the ones related to consentient sodomy, in which three of the four Sadists […] practice passive sex and get possessed by the henchmen or get possessed by themselves".[362] In this mutilated version and with an 18 certificate, the film was re-distributed in Italy on March 10th 1977 and could be seen by "two million"[363] people. However, following further protests the film was again confiscated in June 1977 and redistributed only in 1985, but still in its "censored version".[364] We needed to wait until its first TV screening on Tele+ in the year 2000 for the film to be shown as uncut and until 2015 for its first Italian restoration and DVD distribution.[365]As this preliminary overview about the Italian context has shown, the first distribution of *Salò* inside Italy had often been hampered by the intervention of both official authorities and protesters. So how was the situation in the UK in the mid-1970s different?

Salò's very first screening in London dates back to autumn 1976 when it was screened "as part of the London Film Festival […] without incident, at the Odeon, Leicester Square, but only members of the National Film Theatre were allowed into the performance".[366] Following this exceptional precedent, the film was then scheduled to be screened on Tuesday 26th of July 1977 at the Old Compton Cinema, Soho. However, that same day, "half a dozen police went inside and told the manager they would take the film, by force if necessary. It was immediately handed over".[367] It

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[361] Ibidem p 39. Original Italian: "Il 5 marzo 1977 la Corte d'Appello di Milano ordinò la restituzione della pellicola alla PEA 'previa eliminazione e confisca' delle seguenti sequenze: […] la scena riguardante la sodomizzazione del presidente Durcet e quella della masturbazione del ragazzo inesperto e del fantoccio […] la sodomizzazione del personaggio di Blangis […] la scena della masturbazione del presidente davanti allo specchio […] la sodomizzazione del Vescovo".

[362] Ibidem, p.39. Original Italian: "E' interessante notare come la Corte avesse imposto l'eliminazione dal film non delle scene di violenza, di torture o stupri, ma delle sequenze di sodomia consenziente, ossia di quelle in cui tre dei quattro Signori […] praticano il sesso passivo e si fanno possedere dai loro scherani o si possiedono fra loro".

[363] Ibidem, p.39. Original Italian: "nelle sale vennero staccati circa due milioni di biglietti".

[364] Ibidem, p.41. Original Italian: "Ma quando *Salò* tornerà nelle sale, nel giugno del 1985, la versione distribuita sarà ancora quella tagliata."

[365] Ibidem, p.42. See original Italian: "Salò verrà trasmesso in televisione in un'unica occasione, nel 2000, sul canale a pagamento Tele+ nella versione integrale".

[366] Malcom, D. (1977). 'Film Shown Despite Seizure', *The Guardian*, 28th July, p.3.

[367] Ibidem. The London episode was reported also by the Italian press as we can see in 'Sequestrata a Londra una

is interesting to underscore that this episode happened during the same weeks of *Salò*'s re-distribution in Italian cinemas in its mutilated version that led to the second confiscation of the film in the Italian territory, as discussed before. This climate of tension among official institutions, newspapers and the audience was perceived in the London area. As reported by the British press, Pasolini's very last film had "caused considerable controversy, but many critics feel it to be his masterpiece". [368] In order to better investigate the premises and the outcomes of this controversial episode, I contacted the BBFC in London to access the file containing several documents on the subsequent 1977 London screening of *Salò.* This involved contacting the owners of the Old Compton Cine Club Michael Klinger and Toni Tenser who first screened the movie without a BBFC certificate, along with the former head of the BBFC James Ferman, who supported the distribution of the film in the UK, and the office of the Director of Public Prosecution. In respect of the confidential nature of the majority of the correspondence contained in the file, I have omitted all personal details and data therein contained. However, it is still possible to reconstruct the events from these observations.

First of all, as the BBFC official website reminds us the film had originally been submitted to the BBFC for nationwide cinematic release in public cinemas by United Artists Corporation Limited, the company in charge of distributing *Salò* in the UK, in January 1976, when it was refused an X (over 18) certificate for three main reasons: first, the contents of the film could result in a charge of "gross indecency",[369] according to the legal premises of the common law; consequently, the majority of local councils would not want the film screened in their area. Also the large number

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copia del Salò – Salò confiscated in London', *L'Unità* (29th July, 1977), p.7: "[...] La polizia londinese ha denunciato anche la direzione del cinema e il personale per aver permesso una 'condotta disordinata in locale pubblico ed esibizioni indecenti'" – ENG: "[...] The Metropolitan police has reported the cinema managers and the staff for permitting a 'disorderly house and indecent exhibitions' in their premises". It is interesting to underline how this Italian article wrongly reports the issue of a BBFC certificate at that time: "[...] Salò aveva passato regolarmente l'esame della censura ed era stato ammesso alla proiezione con il divieto ai minori di diciotto anni" – ENG "[...] Salò had regularly passed the Censors examination and was allowed to be screened with an 18 Certificate".

[368] Ibidem. In relation to the controversial debate among film critics in the immediate days following the screening at the Old Compton Cine Club see Derek, M. (1977). 'Pasolini, Whose Last Film Salo has been Seized and the Distributors Charged, Considered Scandalising People was a God-given Right', *The Guardian*, 5th August, p.8: "Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending upon your view on the film, there appear to be some moralists left in England. Yet arguably, the biggest moralist of them all was Pier Paolo Pasolini. He was a Marxist who was deeply critical of contemporary society, almost as critical of himself and certainly anxious that what he said through his art should not be misunderstood".

[369] See BBFC official website at http://www.bbfc.co.uk/case-studies/salo120-days-sodom

of cuts required to align the film with the British standards would have seriously compromised the understanding of the film. According to the BBFC file, the Request Practice Number is "05816" with the title "120 Days of Sodom" and a declared length of "10471 ft"[370] - in its original version and ignoring the cuts applied by the Italian censors. On January 13th 1976 the board decided not to certify the film as suitable for public screening and gave the following, extended reason: "while the film is obsessive, and the matter perverted, it is also distanced in its presentation, all the tortures taking place with no sound which would add horror to the visual presentation". Consequently, the examiner added, "on current Board standards [the film] would require some 40-60 cuts even if we accepted the overall theme and the fact that the subjects of debauchery are all teenagers".[371] Following this rejection, Ferman informed United Artists of the reasons behind the BBFC decision and explained that, despite the acknowledgment of the artistic value of *Salò*, it would have still been very difficult to find a wide distribution in the UK because of *Salò*'s violent and sexual content, as "this Pasolini film exceeds the standards which would be set by most of the local authorities in the UK and that the film would also probably be vulnerable at law".[372] With this in mind, in the following weeks the lawyers worked together in order to prevent a possible prosecution as well as to try to find a way to distribute *Salò* legally. In order to achieve this objective, in August 1976 Ferman contacted the office of the Director of Public Prosecution (DPP) in London and as evidence of suitability of the film for distribution in the UK he attached a copy of the monthly bulletin of February 1976 in which we read that:

> "In almost every case, the sexual and other horrors are presented either in long shot or off-screen, and there is no exploitation sensationalising. We are meant to hate everything we see, and there is no covert gloating over the spectacle [...] The version we saw was rather

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[370] See BBFC file on *Salò*, p.1.

[371] See BBFC file on *Salò*, p.5-6. Note the file at p.5 is the typewritten transcription from original handwritten report available at p.6 stating: "Pasolini 120 Days of Sodom – Viewed and Examined 13th January 1976". In the transcription at p.5 we see that the original words "young children" are corrected by pen into "young teenagers".

[372] Se BBFC file on *Salò*, p.8. Moreover, as further evidence of the opposition of local councils to distribute the film see BBFC file, p.10 containing "a copy of the decision in respect of the film" sent by the "Royal County of Berkshire – County/District Joint Film Viewing Committee" sending "a copy of the decision in respect of the film» and not allowing distributing the film as: "After viewing the film, the Berkshire County Council, as agent for the Council of the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, Slough Borough Council, Bracknell District Council, Newbury District Council and Wokingham District Council has refused to grant a certificate for its public exhibition within those district".

crudely dubbed into American, and it is possible that a sub-titled version might be less nauseating because it is slightly more distanced. [...] We were asked to consider cuts, yet cuts would destroy the film's purpose by making the horrors less revolting and therefore more acceptable; a turn-on rather than a turn-off".[373]

We deduce from this extract that the potential sustainability of the film was firmly recognised. On the other hand, the application of further cuts to the film would have damaged *Salò*'s artistic value by the "wielding of absolute power with the temptation to satisfy all private desire, and the result is a parade of moral and physical horror the like of which has rarely been portrayed on the screen".[374]

A few months later, after the thwarted attempt to distribute the film in the UK, Ferman suggested United Artists try to sell its rights to the film to private cinema clubs where only adult members could be admitted to the screening and therefore reduce the risk of a possible legal prosecution. Taking the suggestion on board, United Artists sold the rights of *Salò* to the Old Compton Street Cine Club, where the movie was then screened in its uncut version to an exclusive collection of members in July 1977. However, the Metropolitan Police intervened, confiscated the film and reported the owners of the Cine Club for 'gross indecency', eventually applying further cuts to the reels. After this seizure, in the following weeks Ferman personally spoke to the Deputy Director of Public Prosecution in order to reconsider a possible distribution of *Salò* in the UK by claiming that the new Criminal Law Act 1977 – which extended the Obscene Publications Act to cinema films and became effective on July 29th – could protect *Salò* from prosecution if the board would consider *Salò* as an entirety and in light of its artistic qualities. Despite the fact that the legal charges of 'gross indecency' brought upon the Old Compton Cine Club could be dropped thanks to the new terms of the Criminal Law Act 1977, the DPP still did not allow the film to be screened, claiming to be correctly complying with the legal ground of 'obscenity', according to that same Criminal Law Act 1977.

Following this new rejection and after several months of intense negotiation

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[373] See BBFC file on *Salò*, p.23-24. Letter dated 16th August, 1976.

[374] Ibidem.

among all parties, in 1979 the DPP finally allowed the film to be released in the UK without interference, however still only in members' cinema clubs. The agreements involved the mandatory cut of a few controversial scenes along with the obligation for cine clubs to introduce the screening with a "film explanation" in order to place the film "in its proper moral and cultural context for the benefit of the audience". Moreover, a "full and summary form" was "prominently displayed in front of house of the Cineclub" and "no stills from the film" would have been "shown outside or inside the Cineclub" nor "written material" would be "used outside or inside the Cine Club or in any way in any press material which highlights the sexual or violent aspects of the film".[375] Moreover, it is fascinating to observe how any possible further acts of censorship could be fought using the perception of the film as an adaptation of Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*. In the proposed introduction to the film, Dante's *Inferno* was cited as artistic support and the cultural heritage of Pasolini's last work:

> "[Pasolini] uses too, some of the imagery of Dante's *Inferno*, with its terrible Circles of Hell, where those who had done violence to man and God included the blasphemers and the sodomites. For Pasolini, there was, too, the violence of dehumanised sex, of the exploitation and degradation of the human body, which he felt to be at the heart of Fascism. In one circle of Dante's Hell, as in Pasolini's film, the sufferers are immersed in excrements to await their fate. In Italy, such imagery is traditionally associated with the degradation of the body and the spirit ".[376]

The BBFC, with their legal advisors, worked on the cuts to reduce the likelihood of it being prosecuted for obscenity. The total length of all interventions for all reels amounted to "471 feet" and – contrary to what happened with the Italian seizures – the cuts required were mainly related to violent and sexually explicit scenes and not to the acts of sodomy - except for the one involving the "homosexual

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[375] See BBFC file on *Salò*, p.22 – Extract from letter May 9th, 1979.

[376] See BBFC file on *Salò* p.90. As evidence of the cultural significance of Dante's *Inferno* in Italian culture in relation to the 'degradation of the body and the spirit' in *Salò* the University of Warwick has confirmed that "After further research on the question of eating excrements in Dante, I must confirm that in the final analysis it would be difficult to maintain that the characters in canto 18 of the Inferno are actually involved in eating. However, given that the characters are totally submerged in it and the elaborate description employed to close the canto, it would be equally as tenuous to assume that they can avoid it. My conclusion is therefore that although there is no intention and hence no 'justification', the situation should be enough to establish a connection between the two works that goes beyond the formal verisimilitude intended by the film-maker", in BBFC file, p.54, letter released by *University of Warwick – School of Italian*, December 13th, 1978.

buggery between the Monsignor (Bishop) and soldier".[377] After the application of these cuts, the film was scheduled to be screened on May 24th, 1979. However, the police intervened again to confiscate the reels and apply further cuts. Ferman's reaction to the police intervention was firm: "I must stress that the issue is far more important than the film *Salò*, since in international terms it will not be Pasolini's film which is in the dock, but the British legal system and our reputation for artistic freedom".[378] Following this internal debate among the authorities, the film could finally be screened throughout the 1980s in the *cinema d'essai* circuit with a considerable "177 feet cut".[379] In 1991 the film applied for TV transmission in the UK but got rejected once again as it was considered "not suitable for transmission at any time on satellite TV".[380] As it is stated on the BBFC official website, we needed to wait until 2000 when the BBFC granted its authorisation for *Salò* to be distributed in British cinemas as uncut.[381]

Despite both the Italian Commissione per la Revisione Cinematografica and the British Board of Film Classification applying milder restrictions to Pasolini's *Salò – 120 Days of Sodom* since the year 2000, its distribution and reception in very recent years can be still considered extremely controversial. In 2015, Italy held celebrations for both *Salò*'s first distribution and remembrance of Pasolini's death. National institutions along with newspapers and the audience itself have promoted several initiatives in order to discuss and eventually recuperate the importance of Pasolini

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[377] For a more detailed report of the seizures applied in the UK see BBFC file on *Salò,* p. 110-129.

[378] See BBFC file on *Salò*, p.133. Letter dated June 6th, 1979.

[379] See BBFC file on *Salò*, p. 136. Letter dated June 26th: "the two copies of the film Salò [...] have now been returned to our clients [....] so that our clients are now free to exhibit the same to members of their club [...] the cuts ought to be placed in perspective. They totalled approximately 117 feet and we now understand from out clients that that amounts to one minute 20 seconds of cuts from a film of approximately two hours' length".

[380] See BBFC file on *Salò* pp.147-150. Document named: "Registration Form for TV Transmission" dated at 21/10/1991 with reference SAF60267.

[381] See http://www.bbfc.co.uk/case-studies/salo120-days-sodom: "*Salo* was formally resubmitted to the BBFC by the BFI in October 2000. This submission came shortly after the BBFC had published a new set of classification Guidelines in September 2000, themselves the result of a major process of public consultation exercise. The BBFC had stated in its news release when launching the new Guidelines that the BBFC would no longer intervene with material for adult viewing unless the material in question was either illegal or genuinely likely to be harmful. The BBFC was satisfied that *Salo* was neither illegal nor harmful within the terms of its new Guidelines and therefore agreed to classify the film 18 uncut for cinema exhibition on 16 November 2000. The film had been viewed by a number of examiners at the BBFC, as well as by Director, Robin Duval, and its President, Andreas Whittam Smith. The film was subsequently submitted for video classification by the BFI and was awarded an 18 uncut certificate for video and DVD release soon after on 19 December 2000".

and his *oeuvre* in Italian culture. Within this context, digital technologies have intervened at different levels to make the public discourse remain inside their digital premises. Despite official initiatives celebrating Pasolini's artworks within national boundaries, a few unexpected obstacles presented themselves during the resurging popularity of the Italian director. Why did the official culture want to herald Pasolini once more while, at the same time, national institutions were not collaborative in providing information about the cultural revision? Moreover, to what extent has this ambivalence been shown using digital technologies? And then to what extent have digital technologies been employed either to promote new forms of circulation or to censor Pasolini's work? The next three key events held in 2015 will help to investigate these questions in more depth. In particular I am looking at: (I) the restoration and DVD edition of Pasolini's *Salò* produced and distributed by Cineteca Bologna in 2015; (II) The special screening of this restored version on November 2nd 2015 in Italian cinemas; and finally, (III) the communication between the positive revision of National newspapers and director Gabriele Muccino, who, through his Facebook page put forward an opposing evaluation of Pasolini's films.

4.4   *Salò – 120 Days of Sodom*: the 2015 DVD Edition by Cineteca Bologna

On September 10th-11th 2015 *Salò* was officially screened to the audience of the 72nd Venice International Film Festival, in its brand-new restored format curated by Cineteca Bologna and CSC. The film, presented as part of the Venice Classics section, won the Best Film Restoration award. When receiving this prize, Gianluca Farinelli, head of Cineteca Bologna expressed his gratitude to the jury: "You have just made a historical choice, by awarding a film that had never received a prize before. On the contrary, it has been seized and its distribution boycotted. *Salò* receives this award after forty years, and thanks to this seminal recognition and this restoration, we will soon be able to watch it again in Italian cinemas".[382]

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[382] 'A Venezia un Leone per Salò di PPP, miglior film restaurato – A Golden Lion for Salò by PPP in Venice, best Film Restoration' http://www.centrostudipierpaolopasolinicasarsa.it/molteniblog/a-venezia-un-leone-per-salo-di-ppp-miglior-film-restaurato/ Original Italian: "Voglio ringraziare la Mostra di Venezia, Francesco Patierno e tutta la giuria. Avete compiuto una scelta storica, premiando un film che non era mai stato
premiato prima, attorniato da censure e boicottaggi distributivi. A quarant'anni di distanza, Salò riceve questo

In the following weeks, along with planning the re-distribution of the film for November 2nd, 2015, Cineteca Bologna launched the DVD of this restoration onto the market, actually the first one ever produced by an Italian institution on digital.[383] The ground-breaking importance of this edition produced for the 40th anniversary of the film derives from the direct intervention of digital technologies on at least two levels: first, they have been used directly in the restoration phase as a technical tool, second, they have facilitated and encouraged the broader circulation of the film, partly assisted by Pasolini's rejuvenated reputation in Italian culture promoted by official institutions. The idea of both a technological and cultural impact of digital technologies during film restoration is already present in the work of Giovanna Fossati (2009) who describes how "restorers gain so much power with the digital that their sole role is becoming very influential".[384] Restorers may bring the film to the audience as "it possibly appeared at the time when it was first shown, […] or adding elements that are typical of contemporary restoration tools".[385] In addition to this, and in the light of the growing influence of digital technologies in the 21st Century, the restoration process carried out with digital tools implies the employment of "new dispositifs in a manner that would apply better to the 'film as dispositif' framework"[386] and this is particularly relevant with the possibility of DVD conversion at the end of the restoration process. The impact that DVDs as devices acquire regarding film conservation and distribution specifically apply to films such as Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò*, especially if we consider the history of censorship that this film has seen in the past forty years both at a national and international level, as

importantissimo riconoscimento e, grazie a questo restauro, potremo tornare a vederlo anche nelle sale cinematografiche italiane".

[383] Before this date, only a few other DVD editions of the film had been produced and distributed at an international level: the Criterion Spine #17 (Region 1 NTSC) curated by the BFI with a running time of 1:56:24 and released on August 11th, 1998 and re-issued on August 26th, 2008 with a running time of 1:56:32. Another BFI edition named BFI Video Publishing Catalogue No: BFIVD510 (Region 2), was released on April 2, 2011 with a 1:51:46 running time, with the lack of a four-minute sequence that could be found in the Criterion Spine #17 edition. All BFI editions contain English subtitles available on the original Italian audio. The Criterion Spine #17 offers also the option to watch the film with English dub. Out of the British territory it is useful to remind also the French GCTHV (Columbia Tristar Home Video – Region 2, France) released on October 22nd, 2002, with a 1:51:32 running time. This edition contains the original Italian audio and the possibility to switch the original language into the version dubbed in French. The DVD also contains French subtitles only. For a comparative analysis of the technical aspects and contents of these DVD editions see
http://www.dvdbeaver.com/FILM/dvdcompare/salo.htm

[384] Fossati G. (2009). *From Grain to Pixel: The Archival Life of Film in Transition*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, p.139.

[385] Ibidem, p.139.

[386] Ibidem, p.139.

previously discussed.

However, the investigation that I have carried out about the 2015 DVD edition of *Salò* produced by Cineteca Bologna has been hampered by both the restricted access to any information around the restoration process and the digital conversion and the unavailability of Cineteca Bologna to discuss this topic, showing once more the ambivalent behaviour of official institutions behind their celebrative facade. I also tried to contact Cineteca Bologna for several weeks in order to acquire more information about the restoration process of the film, the significance of producing a DVD edition for the 40th anniversary of its first distribution and Pasolini's death along with deepening the technological and cultural importance of the employment of digital technologies in this restoration. After an initial agreement of Cineteca Bologna to respond to my questionnaire and several reminder e-mails and attempts to reach the department on the phone, a copy of the questionnaire was returned to me six weeks later and with only the first eight questions answered (Appendix #2). I tried to contact the restoration department several times to renew my interest in their work, but I never received any official communication stating that the institution would prefer not to answer the second part of the questionnaire, which is related to aspects of film censorship and the cultural impact of digital technologies in practices of film restoration, conservation and distribution.

Very little information has been officially released by Cineteca Bologna regarding their latest work on *Salò*. For this reason, the main sources I could access for gaining a greater understanding on this work were the DVD of the restored edition and the special screening on November 2nd in Rome. After personally attending the screening discussed in the next section, the DVD was ordered online through Cineteca Bologna's official website. The order took place on November 9th 2015; the payment was finalised online via debit card, the total amounting to 37 euros. It was then despatched on November 16th, via TNT and reached my London address on November 18th. The 0.3 Kg-parcel contained the DVD case along with a few promotional flyers on the forthcoming events organised by Cineteca Bologna and a leaflet on the national competition for short and medium-length films, whose deadline to apply, however, had already expired on November 15th 2015. Once opened, the DVD case contains two disks: the first one is entirely dedicated to the

film, while the other one contains two hours of extras composed of five documentaries produced in 1975, 2005 and 2013 mostly containing interviews. The DVD case contains a booklet curated by Gian Luca Farinelli but it does not include any detailed contributions in relation to the restoration process or the realisation of the DVD. However, the DVD case and the majority of the contents are clearly celebrating this restoration and, more broadly, the cultural importance of this film in Italian film history. The outside of the case reminds us that this edition is part of the "Rediscovered Cinema"[387] collection. The numerous captions and quotes describe how this film is Pasolini's "last film. A sulphureous and damned masterpiece that is here accompanied by two hours of precious and nearly exclusive extras".[388] The booklet itself gravitates around the resurgence of Pasolini's importance in Italian culture. Giuseppe Bertolucci (2015) reviews the film as "particular" as well as "exceptional" and "unique".[389] In a similar vein, Roberto Chiesi (2015) attributes the genius of Pasolini to his "perfect synthesis, [leading to] the most comprehensive image of a society composed of passive spectators and connive, where horror becomes spectacle and entertainment and at the same time [...] recognises the evil inside of every human being".[390] However, nothing in the booklet or the extras explains the ideological, financial, cultural and technological reasons behind this restoration and no clue to how the restoration process was enacted either through the booklet or by responding to my questionnaire.

The sole summary overview provided in relation to the restoration process can be found in the 1 page-introduction to this DVD edition, written by Gian Luca Farinelli himself, which briefly gives us an insight into the restoration process of this DVD. Farinelli (2015) reminds us that the film version has been obtained via a

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[387] See DVD case, front side. Original Italian "Il Cinema Ritrovato".

[388] See DVD case, back side. Original Italian: "Capolavoro sulfureo e maledetto, accompagnato da oltre due ore di preziosi filmati in gran parte inediti".

[389] Bertolucci, G. 'Un Film Che 'Non ci Lascia Stare' - A Film that Does not Leave us Alone' in *Salò – 120 Days of Sodom* (Pasolini, ITA, 1975), booklet of the DVD edition, Cineteca Bologna, ITA. p.14. Original Italian: "Ma veniamo ora a Salò, a questo oggetto che, per la sua particolarità e per la sua eccezionalità, vorrei dire per la sua unicità, fatico a definire film".

[390] Chiesi, R. (2015). 'Un Film in Forma di Mistero Medievale – A Film like a Middle-age Mystery,' in *Salò – 120 Days of Sodom* (Pasolini, ITA, 1975), booklet of the DVD edition, Cineteca Bologna, ITA. p.30-31. Original Italian: "Pasolini trova la sintesi perfetta, l'immagine più pregnante di una società di spettatori e conniventi passive dove l'orrore diventa spettacolo ed intrattenimento e al tempo stesso [...] riconoscendo il male dentro ogni essere umano".

"digital restoration process" by working on the "original negatives that the producer Alberto Grimaldi has provided and that are currently stored at the National Archive in Rome".[391] In particular, as Cineteca Bologna specifies, the film "was restored from the camera negative (OCN) scanned at 4K, and the Italian magnetic mix soundtrack".[392] By outlining the main passages for the restoration Cineteca Bologna explained that "the film was restored in 4k. The physical damages were repaired, all splices checked and then cleaned with HFE in ultrasonic system. Following scanning, the images were digitally stabilised and cleaned to eliminate all signs of time such as spotting, scratches, and visible splices".[393] However, the institution has not provided any further details about the number of copies considered and the possible variations between them. In relation to the restoration of the images, the main piece of information given is related to the photographic quality, which Cineteca Bologna says, "has been the real challenge of the restoration and in order to bring back the original colour of the film".[394] The colour correction was measured, somewhat vaguely, as "35 mm period copies by Giandomenico Zeppa, colourist at Immagine Ritrovata Lab, who could work with Carlo Tafani, camera operator on Pasolini's set, and collaborator of Tonino Delli Colli, beloved DOP of almost all Pasolini's films".[395] With this in mind, and along with the possibility of collaborating with some original crew members for the 2015 restoration, "the colour correction was carried out with the most respect for the original choices and the most care was considered in order to hide the brightness of the digital in order to get as closest as possible to the

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[391] Farinelli, L. (2015). 'Introduction' in *Salò – 120 Days of Sodom* (Pasolini, ITA, 1975), preface to the DVD edition, Cineteca Bologna, ITA, p.5 Original Italian: "La versione integrale che qui presentiamo è stata restaurata digitalmente dal laboratorio L'Immagine Ritrovata della Cineteca di Bologna, a partire dai negativi originali messi a disposizione dal produttore del film Alberto Grimaldi, conservati dalla Cineteca Nazionale di Roma. Particolarmente complesso è stato il lavoro di color correction, durante il quale sono state utilizzate alcune copie 35mm d'epoca e Giandomenico Zeppa, colorist dell'Immagine Ritrovata, ha potuto lavorare con Carlo Tafani, operatore del film, collaboratore di Tonino Delli Colli, amato direttore della fotografia di quasi tutte le pellicole di Pasolini. La fotografia utilizzava una luce diffusa per togliere le zone d'ombra alle diverse scene e mostrare tutto, con la stessa crudeltà che permea il film. Una fotografia senza luce, poco cinematografica, con una predominanza di colori acidi, verdi, cyan, che contribuiscono a dare un tono raggelato e asettico alle scenografie di Dante Ferretti. Il lavoro di color correction si è mosso nel pieno rispetto delle scelte originarie e la massima cura è stata rivolta a nascondere la lucentezza del digitale per avvicinarsi al tono neutro e freddo dei colori originali".

[392] See questionnaire, question #6 in Appendix.

[393]Ibidem, question #5.

[394] Ibidem, question #5.

[395] Farinelli, L. (2015), p.5.

neutral and cold tone of the original colours".[396] In this way, they aimed to recreate that peculiar Pasolinian photography that "employed a diffuse light in order to eliminate the shadowed areas", that could "recreate [...] that cruelty pervading the whole film" at the photographic level. This specific mood could be obtained thanks to a kind of "photography that lacks of any chiaroscuro, which is less cinematographic, with a predominance of acid colours, greens, cyan, and could contributes to providing Dante Ferretti's scenography of that gelid and aseptic tone".[397] Finally, in relation to matters of sound restoration, Cineteca Bologna specifies that, "after completing the digitalisation process, the soundtrack was then digitally cleaned". In particular, thanks to the employment of a "background noise reduction" technique, it was possible to "eliminate all wear marks, without losing any of the dynamics and features of the original soundtrack".[398]

Another aspect of the restoration remains unclear: despite Cineteca Bologna promoting this version as "integral",[399] and especially if we compare this edition to both BFI Criterion Spine #17 and BFI Video Publishing Catalogue No: BFIVD510, we notice that this BFI DVD edition contains a four minute sequence at the end of the first marriage sequence that is not present in the Cineteca Bologna 2015 DVD edition (which is also the one screened and distributed in Italian cinemas on November 2nd 2015). The DVD booklet does not explain whether this restored version is the same one that world-premiered in Paris on November 22nd 1975 nor if it aligns with the one screened on its Italian premiere in Milan on January 10th 1976 or after the intervention of the Censorship that edited the film and that redistributed it from March 1977. In the same manner, it is not specified to what extent this 2015-restored version differs from the tapes screened at the Old Compton Cinema, London in 1977 which I discussed in earlier sections of this chapter. Despite the fact that the BFI records the controversial London Screening as "shown uncut, to members only,

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[396] Farinelli, L. (2015), p.5.

[397] Farinelli, L. (2015), p.5.

[398] See questionnaire, question #5 in Appendix.

[399] Farinelli, L. (2015), p.5. The running time indicated upon the DVD is reported being as 1h 56', the actual running time of the film is 1h 52' 07'', including titles related to the 2015 film cut.

without a certificate from the BBFC",[400] it is hard to reconstruct the genealogy of the first circulation of film tapes, and the evidence of a four-minute sequence in the BFI Criterion Spine #17, originally restored from the film copies retained at the BFI archives, helps to strengthen the necessity for Cineteca Bologna to produce or at least give public evidence of a more documented study on the original circulation of the film. With such little information provided by Cineteca Bologna about why they were celebrating after 40 years of hampered and censored distribution, it was the screening of the film on November 2nd 2015 which enriches our perspective on the relationship between the ambivalence surrounding the 40th anniversary of *Salò*'s first distribution and commemoration of Pasolini's death. Thus, have digital technologies intervened in either contributing to the public debate or have they promoted new forms of censorship within digital premises?

4.5 November 2nd, 2015 – The Italian Launch and Reception of Pasolini's *Salò* Forty Years After: Report of a Young Academic as the Spectator

The recently restored digital edition of *Salò* curated by Cineteca Bologna was planned to be redistributed in Italian cinemas on November 2nd 2015 – exactly forty years after the Italian director's corpse was found on the Ostia shoreline. How would a 21st century audience react to this film? Would *Salò* still be perceived as obscene and controversial? I decided to personally attend the screening in Rome in order to watch the organisation of this event in the city where Pasolini had made many of his films. I also had direct access to the very first moments of the film's reception amongst this selected target audience.[401]

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[400] Se BBFC official website at: http://www.bbfc.co.uk/case-studies/salo120-days-sodom, paragraph 2.

[401] This personal initiative of investigating and experiencing the phenomenon in real-time as a "participant observer in qualitative research", a practice that involves "inquiring from the inside" derives from the fact that this special screening was specifically scheduled in Italian cinemas only for one day and specifically for the 40th anniversary of Pasolini's death. Taking into account the preceding controversial distribution and mixed reception of this film that I have discussed, I firmly believe that "being there" allowed me to access this phenomenon more closely, by "becoming immersed in, and part of the phenomenon under study". In this way, I could "reflect upon [my] own personal experience entering an unfamiliar organizational setting" leading to "a different mode of enquiry" that opened up to a wider set of data and exclusive elements related to the very first moments of the reception of this film after forty years from its first release. All quotes from Iacono, J., Brown, A. and Holtham, C. (2009). 'Research Methods – a Case Example of Participant Observation', *The Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods,* Vol. 7(1), pp.39 – 46. Full text available at www.ejbrm.com

The preparations for the 2015 release of *Salò* in Rome included a plethora of side-events organised by the official institutions in the capital city and in particular during the ongoing *Rome Film Fest*. The standout aspects of these commemoration events were based on rediscovering the work of the Italian director mainly through his own voice and testimony, using different media such as screenwriting, poetry, cinema and TV. This precise choice involved a particular focus on Pasolini reflecting upon his own artistic work whilst Italian society was experiencing several social and cultural changes, rather than through what remains today of his poetry, novels and films with a bare archival perspective.[402]

In this celebrative spirit, positively re-evaluating Pasolini's cultural importance prior to November 2nd, I have monitored *mymovies.it – Il cinema dalla parte del pubblico – Cinema on the Audience's Side* - one of the most popular Italian search engines and archives. November 2nd 2015 was the day of the Italian release of *Salò*. *Mymovies* listed it in the forthcoming releases for the week between November 2nd and November 8th, along with *Spectre*, *Freehold*, *Snoopy and Friends*, *Alaska*, *45 Years* and *Rock the Kasbah*. However, when the release day came I noticed that, unfortunately, no cinemas across all of Rome, including the ones of the UCI network, would screen *Salò – 120 Days of Sodom*. How would it be possible that the city where he had spent most of his life and where he died was heralding Pasolini in its official events but would not screen his final movie? In order to discover this, my research took me eventually to the main *cinema d'essai* in Rome, via Trevi Cinema, the official cinema room of Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia and the Italian National Cinema Academy where, on November 1st, they screened Pasolini's *Accattone*.[403] Despite the fact that CSC actively assisted with the restoration of *Salò* alongside Cineteca Bologna, they did not screen Pasolini's last movie on its official release date. Finally, I came across the screening organised by Cinema America at Alcazar Cinema, one of the most important *cinema d'essai* rooms in Trastevere. However, there was no evidence of this screening online: not in their official website or Facebook Page,

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[402] See *Pasolini's Voice – La Voce di Pasolini* (M. Cerami, ITA, 2005) and *Pasolini: Il Corpo e la Voce – Pasolini: the Body and the Voice* (P. Marcellini, ITA, 2015). The first documentary is based on Pasolini's private diaries alongside an audio track of the director dictating *viva voce* part of the script of *Porno Teo Kolossal* to his Assistant Director the unfinished movie he was working on during the last days of his life. The second documentary resulted from the assimilation, restoration and digitalisation of Pasolini's most relevant RAI TV interviews.

[403] *Accattone* (P.P. Pasolini, ITA, 1961).

nor in a possible event circulating via Facebook, nor on deeper within the MyMovies database. Consequently, I called the cinema on the morning of November 2nd. After several attempts, I eventually received an answer at 5 pm, confirming that they would screen *Salò* at 8.30 pm and at 10.30 pm that same day. [404] I reached the Alcazar at 8.15 pm. There was a long queue at the till. The giant film poster of *Salò* - the same one appearing on the DVD cover - stood in the cinema lounge. It was not possible to purchase the film ticket online before heading to the cinema. I paid the fixed 6-euro price for each ticket. No student discounts applied, nor reductions. I entered the screening room. It was my first time in that cinema theatre: it is a modern and compact cinema room, with around 120 red seats aligned on the same level. The room was already half full. I counted around seventy people; all of them Caucasian. Around 60% of them were men. The majority of the spectators did not come alone, but with a friend or in a small group of three. I noticed this as the room was not entirely full and the people already sitting there tended to leave an empty seat between those who did not know each other. Only two spectators came alone: the first a man around 70 years old and sitting in the back of the room. The other man was sitting in the same group of seats, middle-aged and focused on a printed copy of the cinema programme. No age group dominated, we could see that there there were people in their twenties, right up to the man in his seventies, sitting alone. The atmosphere before the beginning of the screening was quite relaxed, the groups of the youngest ones were chatting with each other, some of them took a *selfie* with their smartphone, some others tried to find out whether the cinema had a bar, but unsuccessfully: no one ate or drunk during the screening. The screening started on time at 8.30pm. There was no commercial advertising before the screening: just the advertisement of the *European Cinema Circuit*, followed by that related to the *FICE – Italian Federation of Cinema d'Essai* and, lastly, the captions instructing the audience that the film version they were going to watch was the one restored by Cineteca Bologna in collaboration with Cinema Zero and CSC. However, before *Salò – 120 Days*

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[404] On January 31st, 2016 and only twelve weeks later the screening *of Salò* in Rome, the Alcazar Cinema in Trastevere closed for ever. The cinema had to "sustain incredible costs for maintaining a single screening room: more than a 50.000-euros-rent". Since 2008 "more than forty *cinema d'essai* have closed in the sole city of Rome". A plague that was surrounded by "the deepest silence of the Italian institutions". The Alcazar Cinema was the only one in Rome to screen Pasolini's *Salò* on November 2nd, 2015. Without them, no-one in Rome could watch the movie on the night of its 40th anniversary. Quotes from Ulivi, S. (2016). 'Alcazar, Ultimo Spettacolo - 'Alcazar, The Last Screening', *Corriere della Sera*, 25th January. Full text available at http://roma.corriere.it/notizie/cultura_e_spettacoli/16_gennaio_24/alcazar-ultimo-spettacolo-chiude-storica-sala-trastevere-53b053b2-c2dd-11e5-9b69-aff8e7a41687.shtml

of Sodom started, the film was introduced in the form of an interview of Pasolini about this movie, caught by Gideon Bachmann in 1975 and also part of the extras of the DVD, a few weeks before Pasolini's murder.[405]

After this introductory video-interview on the genesis and the main themes touched upon in *Salò*, the film started. The audience was quiet and the room stranded in complete darkness for a few seconds. When the movie started to be screened the audience were advised that the version they were going to watch was the one recently presented at Venice Film Festival, restored and digitalised in 4k by *Cineteca Bologna – L'Immagine Ritrovata* Lab in collaboration with *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia*. The screening lasted for 111 minutes. During the screening the audience was generally engaged. However, there were a few interesting aspects to be noted: first, in the initial fifteen minutes of screening the entrance door opened three times and a few more people entered the room when the film had already started. I was sitting close to the entrance door and I could recognise that all the new entrants were 'young people', below forty years of age. Second, the atmosphere got interrupted a couple of times by two different phones ringing, however they immediately got cancelled and put on to silent mode. No one answered the phone or left the room during the screening. There were two audience reactions of particular note during the film. The first reaction happened during the sequence of the 'faeces banquet' when one sadist with his mouth visibly dirty with faeces invites his victim to do the same. After this line the 2015 audience in the cinema room burst into laughter. The second sequence where the audience reacted is contained in the last part of the film, when one of the victims, caught in the act of breaking the rules, pronounces a racist comment against the young housemaid of African origins – who is the only non-Caucasian in the whole film. This line generated a widespread murmur among the majority of the audience. When the screening ended and the lights went up the audience remained in complete silence and left the room quietly. Even the ones who had come with their friends did not talk to each other. Outside the screening room, there was already another group of around fifty people preparing to attend the following screening, starting at 10.30 pm. The

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[405] *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Interview under the Tree*, (G. Bachmann, ITA, 1975), also contained in *Salò – 120 Days of Sodom* (P. P. Pasolini, ITA, 1975), DVD edition, Cineteca Bologna, ITA, 2015.

demographics of this new audience sample were similar to the 8.30 pm audience: they all looked of Caucasian origins, aged between 20-70.[406]

It is interesting to observe how the audience reaction of the 2015 screening inside of a *cinema d'essai* in Rome can be compared to the 1976 spectatorship experience that Mario Soldati recalled in the national newspaper *La Stampa*, during the days of the second confiscation of the film tapes in Italy that I have previously discussed. Soldati could see the movie in an ordinary cinema theatre in Milan, where he was impressed by the "mixed and interclass audience"[407] that filled out the room during an "ordinary screening for ordinary people".[408] Although this was not "a special screening for journalists or intellectuals"[409] - just as the 2015 screening that I attended was not - Soldati's description of reactions of the audience reactions recall tones and elements of the 2015 screening. Soldati underlined "the modest behaviour of the audience",[410] as, despite the violent content, it reacted to the film "with its own silence, with its own modest murmurs, and [I would say] with its own breaths in a positive way".[411] Even if Soldati did not report any controversial reaction during the screening, the audience's final response after the end of the screening in 1976 recalled the 2015 one, as "a long silence seemed to retain the audience on their seats: they went away slowly, and more in silence, without looking into each other's eyes".[412]

The day after this screening the majority of Italian newspapers flatly ignored

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[406] In order to investigate the audience attending the event with more precise statistics, I asked the cashier for more detailed data on the number of tickets sold that night but they did not provide me any further information about this aspect of the screening.

[407] Soldati, M. (1976). 'Sequestrare 'Salò'? - Do we have to confiscate Salò?' *La Stampa*, 30th of January. Original Italian: "Ripeto, fino dalle prime battute, il film mi parve una grande opera d'arte. Ma devo aggiungere subito che, mentre vedevo il film, ero sorpreso e confortato nella mia ammirazione dal contegno del pubblico. La sala era colma, non si trattava di una proiezione speciale, per i giornalisti o intellettuali: era uno spettacolo qualunque per un pubblico qualunque. Ebbene, contrariamente a quanto mi aspettavo, questo pubblico misto e interclassista [....] E quando il film finì, un lungo silenzio parve trattenerli sui sedili: si alzarono lentamente, ancora in silenzio, quasi evitando di guardarsi l'un l'altro", p.3.

[408] Ibidem, p.3.

[409] Ibidem, p.3.

[410] Ibidem, p.3.

[411] Ibidem, p.3.

[412] Ibidem, p.3.

this widespread event, involving at least "65 cinemas" in Italy.[413] Ironically the main newspapers were still debating and questioning the significance of Pasolini's *oeuvre* in film history and the possible answers to his mysterious death rather than reporting or questioning the importance of this new screening in contemporary times. Why did the main National press not dedicate a space to discussing or at least remembering Pasolini's last film that was screened the night before? In addition to this, what can this silence tell us about the perception of Pasolini and *Salò* in 2015? On November 3rd 2015, Filippo La Porta reflected on the importance of Pasolini's heritage in the contemporary era. His tone is celebrative and nostalgic at the same time, and aligned with the renaissance of the Italian director's reputation forty years after his death. The journalist asked the reader:

> "What's left of Pasolini? What would Pasolini say to a young teenager of the 21st Century?" First of all, I think he would find a sensible interlocutor, as adolescents of all times are attracted by two attitudes that we find in the Friulan writer: a disarmed sincerity, a bit too serious, almost self-defeating quality (which is complementary to the lack of irony) and then a sort of reckless radicalness in facing their existence".[414]

In relation to the significance and influence of 'Pasolinian ideas' in Italian society in the 21st Century, La Porta did not forget the modernity of Pasolini's critique of the "cultural homogenisation" and "regression of development" along with the "cultural genocide, the disappearance of particularistic cultures and also the proposal to abolish school and TV".[415] The glorification of the Italian director in the 40th anniversary of his violent death continued in other articles that the main national newspapers had dedicated to Pasolini in the following days. From the front page of *La Repubblica*, Michele Serra wrote:

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[413] See Turrini, D. (2015). 'Pier Paolo Pasolini. Salò restaurato torna al cinema: la manipolazione del potere sui corpi e sulle menti. – A Restored Version of Pasolini's Salò screened again. The manipulation of power upon the human body and mind'. *Il Fatto Quotidiano*. Full text available at:
http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2015/11/01/pier-paolo-pasolini-salo-restaurato-torna-al-cinema-la-manipolazione-del-potere-sui-corpi-e-sulle-menti/2175022/

[414] In La Porta, F. (2015). 'Quel Che Resta di Pasolini - What remains of Pasolini', *Il Messaggero*, 3rd November, 2015, p.26. Original Italian: "Che cosa rimane di Pasolini? Cosa ha da dire Pasolini a un adolescente di oggi? Innanzitutto credo che troverebbe un interlocutore molto sensibile, poiché gli adolescenti di ogni epoca sono attratti da due attitudini che ritroviamo nello scrittore friulano: una sincerità disarmata, seriosa, quasi autolesionista (complementare alla mancanza di ironia) e poi una radicalità anche spericolata nell'affrontare l'esistenza".

[415] Ibidem, p.26.

"Everyone like Pasolini. In the 40th anniversary of his violent death it's almost impossible to find someone who could talk about him enough or talk insolently. (Maybe the Illinois Nazi, but I don't read their blog…). We can consider this posthumous unanimity with the biggest scepticism ever, but also with something less malicious and obvious. For example, that the artist's enormity, his literary, poetic, essayistic, journalistic, cinematographic, dramaturgic *oeuvre* affirms itself as one of the biggest ever in the history of our 20th Century".[416]

As these voices show, the revisionism of Pasolini's relevance in Italian cultural history seemed to be exalted from the printed pages of the main national newspapers to buffer the main initiatives and events created to promote Pasolini's oeuvre in the 21st Century. On the other hand, despite Michele Serra's article outlining the homogeneous glorification of Pasolini by the contemporary Italian critics, a few days later the Italian director Gabriele Muccino triggered a violent backlash among fans, intellectuals and film critics by posting on Facebook his personal review on Pasolini's work from his house in Malibu. [417]

It is interesting to note that despite the majority of modern newspaper articles focusing on remembering the importance of Pasolini's *oeuvre* for its multidisciplinary and intermedial nature along with outlining some new perspectives on the contents of his films,[418] Gabriele Muccino was the only one - at least with his level of influence - to speak out about Pasolini as a director, by questioning his ability to create coherent visual and narrative worlds on the cinematic screen. In particular, in his post - despite recognising the importance of

[416] Serra, M. (2015). *'L'Amaca', La Repubblica*, 3rd November, p.1. Original Italian: "Pasolini piace a tutti, nel quarantesimo della sua morte atroce è quasi impossibile trovare qualcuno che ne parli con sufficienza o con insolenza (a parte i Nazisti dell'Illinois, ma non seguo il loro blog…). Di questa unanimità postuma si può pensare tutto il male possibile; ma anche qualcosa di meno malizioso e di meno ovvio. Per esempio che l'enormità dell'artista, il corpus della sua opera letteraria, poetica, saggistica, giornalistica, cinematografica, drammaturgica, si stagli con tale evidenza nella storia del nostro Novecento da imporlo come uno dei grandissimi di sempre".

[417] The Italian director Gabriele Muccino spoke from his personal Facebook page, available at the link: https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100009886084386&fref=ts. The post was immediately removed after a few hours and it is available in the Appendix of this chapter. It is interesting to note how this post looked more like an open letter than a standard, concise Facebook post. In fact, its main formal characteristics seem more like an editorial article coming from a film expert with a practical background to be published in a newspaper than a concise and sharable online piece of content. Its structure, its extended prose and curated grammar, the signature of the director at the bottom – despite these words coming out from his verified profile - the extended length of the content and the inner structure of the paragraph composed of introduction, argument and conclusion all contribute to show evidence of this unusual approach to social media.

[418] See e.g. La Porta, F. (2015). 'E Accattone doveva scomparire a Ponte Milvio - And Accattone was meant to disappear at Ponte Milvio', *Il Messaggero*, 3rd November, p.26

Pasolini "as a thinker, journalist and writer" - Muccino heavily attacked Pasolini as a director. The first critique referred to the stylistic deficit of Pasolini's movies when compared with the works of other important Italian directors in the 1960s and 1970s such as "Rossellini and Vittorio De Sica, right up to Fellini, Visconti, Sergio Leone, Petri, Bertolucci" who helped to give Italian cinema international recognition to such an extent that in those years "Italian cinema was the highest thing, teaching the world of cinematic and cinematographic poetic and storytelling". Moreover, Muccino continued, the main responsibility for Pasolini as a director lied in having unconsciously "opened the doors to this illusion that being a film director could be accessible to anyone, interchangeable or even something to 'improvise' at [...] and made cinema a product that could be approached by the ones who were incapable of making it". In relation to this, Muccino argued that, "Pasolini's cinema opened the door to what was, de facto, the anti-cinema in relation to matters of aesthetics and storytelling" along with "demolishing the necessity for Cinema to be a POPULAR art" which quickly led, in just a few years, to the rapid decline of Italian cinema from "being the second biggest film industry in the world to being one of the most invisible ones".[419]

In the minutes immediately following the publication of this post, hundreds of users commented and reported its content. Consequently, a few hours later Muccino's account had been completely shut down, a form of digital censorship that lasted a few days. The day after the publication of this post, the national newspapers enquired as to how Gabriele Muccino's voice might have contributed to enriching and contesting the largely one-sided debate on Pasolini's commemoration. The newspapers recognised how the online reaction to this post – that did not contain any explicit insult, swear-words, blasphemy or pornography – focused on "discrediting those who discussed Pasolini's beatification" and had manifested that peculiar "online conformism which expresses in insulting those who disagrees with the sole opinion".[420] This argument addressed elements of the coercive power that

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[419] All quotes from Facebook post by Gabriele Muccino on 4th November 2015. See Appendix

[420] Gnocchi, A. (2015). 'Muccino non Toccare Pasolini: Il Pensiero Unico Corre sul Web -Muccino, Do Not Touch Pasolini: The Sole Opinion Speeds along the Web', *Il Giornale,* 5/11/2015, available at http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/spettacoli/muccino-non-toccare-pasolini-pensiero-unico-corre-sul-web-1191043.html. Original Italian: "Insomma, Muccino è in possesso di tutti i titoli necessari per esprimere un parere sensato in materia di stile cinematografico. Lo ha fatto in modo duro ma onesto, fregandosene di quelli che lui

Salò itself explores, to such an extent that Fulvia Caprara (2015) enquired that "if Pasolini was still alive, he would agree with Muccino, not for the contents of his critique, indeed for the tones of the reactions".[421] This was a type of reaction that Muccino himself defined as a disruptive behaviour typical of some kind of "Fascist-squads-of-social-networks",[422] as their action has subsequently led not only to the temporary suspension of the director's account, but to the permanent removal of the incriminating post from Muccino's page.[423] These elements show how – despite Pasolini's undeniable popularity among contemporary generations – there was a cultural revision through censorship and exclusion of the minority holding an opposite opinion - and it was carried out using the digital tools of social media.

Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, the genesis of Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò* (ITA, 1975) and its circulation in the past forty years have been controversial, fragmentary and cyclically hampered by the clash of public opinion and national institutions. With this in mind, *Salò*'s inherent tribute to Dante's *Inferno* as expressed through the remediation of the infernal imagery largely through the lenses of political and ideological criticism against the massification of Italian society. Specifically, this criticism was made visible on the cinematic screen through corporal punishment and sadistic tortures in the historical setting of the Fascist dictatorship aiming to symbolise absolutist and anarchic power. As the cases of the initial film distribution in both Italian and Britain first distribution in mid-1970s has demonstrated, the discontinuous circulation of the film has heavily affected the consistency of its availability to the audience and eventually ended up in the seizure of the original cut,

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definisce "forcaioli e squadristi dei social". Il problema è che capire l'opinione di Muccino non interessa. Meglio creare il santino di Pasolini, o del venerato maestro di turno, e screditare chi mette in discussione la beatificazione. Questo atteggiamento sfocia nel conformismo, e il conformismo on line si esprime attraverso l'insulto contro chi dissente. A Pasolini, che era un provocatore, sarebbe piaciuto il pensiero unico?"

[421] Caprara, F. (2015). 'Muccino Critica I Film di Pasolini, Pioggia di Insulti in Rete - Muccino Against Pasolini's Films: the Web Replies with a Flood of Insults'. *La Stampa*, 5th November, p.25.

[422] As appeared in Gnocchi, A. (2015).

[423] The post was later available only thanks to the mediation of some national newspapers. See e.g. the screenshot of the post reported by the online version of *La Repubblica* at the following link: http://www.repubblica.it/tecnologia/social-network/2015/11/03/foto/gabriele_muccino_su_facebook_rispetto_pasolini_ma_non_era_un_regista_-126564567/1/#1

a decision that has threatened the film's integrity up until the last few years. Meanwhile, the seizure of a film like this one has generated a controversial political and social debate in Italy and beyond, demonstrating the cultural impact of this film over the past forty years. For this reason, a greater focus on the intervention of the role of digital technologies at both a technological and cultural level was needed in order to explore how practices of film conversion and digital conversion preserved this film along with providing it a broader circulation. This aspect is made clear by the various DVD editions considered throughout the chapter, with a particular focus on the BFI versions and the one produced by Cineteca Bologna based on its own restoration for the 40th anniversary. That said, the non-collaborative attitude from Italian institutions in providing a practical insight into the reasons behind the re-release of this film and the renaissance of the director's importance in Italian culture does lead us to believe that Pasolini's impact in Italian society has not been entirely digested yet - in terms of financial, political, technological and cultural reasons that even the opposition of the institutions partly prevented us from exploring. Recent DVD editions of the film have shown how digital technologies can be used in support of practices of film conservation and distribution but, may also promote new practices of film censorship as we saw from the suspension of Gabriele Muccino's official Facebook page.

In conclusion, in the year of the 750th anniversary of the birth of Dante Alighieri along with the 40th anniversary of Pasolini's death, the case of *Salò* stands as a prime example of how a film adaptation inspired by Dante's *Inferno* cannot be investigated by exclusively keeping the aesthetic of the 'reference text' as central but, on the contrary, by operating a methodological shift that considers both aspects of remediation and its consequent cultural impact in the digital era. In the light of these dual celebrations, this film shows once more how the process of film adaptation cannot be exclusively considered as a one-way process that starts from literature in and arrives at the cinematic medium. Instead, the reality is a productive tension among the various media including the intervention of digital technologies, where the contextualisation of the infernal matter triggers a caustic dialogue with the most contestable aspects of contemporary mass societies. The following chapter dedicated to David Cronenberg's *Cosmopolis* (CAN, ITA, FR, POR, 2012) provides more insights

on this dialectic phenomenon.

CHAPTER 5. *COSMOPOLIS* (CRONENBERG, 2012): AN INFERNAL JOURNEY TOWARDS THE END OF THE FUTURE

Introduction

The previous chapters have investigated the ways in which infernal imagery inspired by Dante's *Inferno* has been appropriated and remediated by the medium of cinema, before exploring the resulting social impact of these films during 2005-2015. In particular, Chapter Three and Chapter Four have tested the boundaries of the adaptation process, with particular emphasis on the re-mediate power of the cinematic medium and its use of digital technologies. More specifically, I have explored the utilisation of digital technologies from various angles, including film restoration practices, digital conversion and the subsequent release of DVDs, before I finally turned the focus to aspects of the film's circulation and reception. The main research questions have been addressed to explore the social and political impact of digital technologies on conservation, re-distribution and reception of the selected film case studies of 2005-2015.

With this in mind, this last chapter assesses the case study of David Cronenberg's *Cosmopolis* (CAN, FR, ITA, POR, 2012). Before *Cosmopolis*, the Canadian director had shot another nineteen feature films that were filmed entirely using analogue cameras and had a career covering over thirty years of cinema and technological change in the industry.[424] In collaboration with David Cronenberg, Peter Suschitzky had been the cinematographer of over ten of these films. Significantly, *Cosmopolis* was the very first feature film Cronenberg shot entirely on digital camera. This choice represented a pivotal challenge for both professionals, aged respectively sixty-eight and seventy at the time when the film shootings took place in 2011, and around ten years after the original outbreak of digital shooting in

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[424] See *Stereo* (1969), *Crimes of the Future* (1970), *Shivers* (1975), *Fast Company* (1979), *The Brood* (1979), *Scanners* (1981), *Videodrome* (1983), *The Dead Zone* (1983), *The Fly* (1986), *Dead Ringers* (1988), *Naked Lunch* (1991), *M. Butterfly* (1993), *Crash* (1996), *eXistenZ* (1999), *Spider* (2002), *A History of Violence* (2005), *Eastern Promises* (2007), *A Dangerous Method* (2011). For a more comprehensive overview of David Cronenberg's filmography see http://gb.imdb.com/name/nm0000343/

the mainstream film industry.[425] One of their works, *Cosmopolis*, is the story of 28 year-old-billionaire David Packer, head of one of the biggest currency speculative financial companies of a dystopian 21st century New York City, who decides to cross town from East to West to get his haircut done in his favourite barber shop. His one-way journey is mostly confined within the premises of his luxurious white limousine, where other characters temporarily step inside to speak to him, while his security is threatened both by the anti-capitalist protest that is violently erupting around him on the streets, and psycho former-employee Benno Levin, who has been chasing Eric for the whole day with the sole intent to kill him.

Cosmopolis is therefore the story of an imminent apocalypse in a modern-day hyper-technological society. This would appear to exhibit only a tangential relationship to Dante. However, as the core of this thesis lies in approaching adaptation predominantly through aspects of remediation and not exclusively through the lenses of fidelity to the text, I consider this final film as the best example with which to conclude this investigation for the following reasons. First, as discussed in the Literature Review, several scholars have analysed the influence and the adaptation of Dante-inspired imagery in both American and Canadian culture as well in their film industries (Iannucci 2004; Braida and Calé 2007; Tulk 2004).[426] Second, both *Cosmsopolis* and Dante's *Inferno* narrate the story of the personal journey of the protagonist whose outcome will affect the whole of mankind if certain ethical changes are not adopted. If Dante mainly approaches from a Catholic perspective, *Cosmopolis* speaks from an aggressive and neo-capitalist reality which has become so pervasive as to represent the entire order of the world: the word 'cosmopolis' itself comes from the Greek language and means "every city" [k*osmos* =

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[425] See Arundale, S. and Trieu, T. (2015). *Modern Post: Workflows and Techniques for Digital Filmmakers*, New York-London: Focal Press, p.58 "Panavised F900s were used by George Lucas in the making of *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones* (2002), regarded as the first major studio picture to be shot 100 percent digitally. However, it was a French film, *Videocq* (2001) that was the very first all-digital film to be released, which was also shot with the Sony HDW-F900".

[426] See Braida A., and Calé, L. (2007). *Dante on View – The Reception of Dante in the Visual and Performing Arts*, London: Routledge; Iannucci, A. A. (2004) *Dante, Cinema and Television*, Toronto-Buffalo-London: University of Toronto Press. In particular, see Tulk, J. (2004). *Dante and Canadian Cinema.* In A. A. Iannucci, Amilcare A., (2004) *Dante, Cinema and Television*, Toronto-Buffalo-London: Toronto University Press, 2004, p. 177: "Throughout this history, one presence is pervasive and enduring, the presence of Dante [...]. The major way in which Dante has engaged Canadian filmmakers has been with respect to the pivotal issue of vision".

order/world and *polis* = city]. Finally, the setting of both stories is underpinned by enduring violence, suffering and the loss of all hope: the main elements which distinguish the infernal environment. For all these reasons, this final chapter offers Adaptation Studies an enhanced understanding of the impact of Dantesque infernal imagery in films produced in the digital era and their impact in contemporary political and social discourses.

Taking these preliminary considerations as the starting point for this final investigation, this chapter explores the remediation of Dante's infernal imagery on the cinematic screen through an evaluation of the process of film adaptation in the digital era at four different levels, each of them corresponding to one of the following sections. Firstly, in the light of the dialogues surrounding the intertextual medium of literature that have previously been assessed in the Literature Review, this chapter explores the legacy of Dante's *Inferno* in Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*, the source novel published in 2003 in the USA and on which David Cronenberg has subsequently based his film.[427] Following on from this section, this chapter offers a detailed examination of the screenwriting stages that the Canadian director had to face before starting to shoot the film. For this reason, the shooting phase is at the centre of the investigation in section 5.2, in which the chapter explores the direct intervention of digital technologies on set. This helps us to investigate the remediate power of digital technologies in its seminal contribution to issues of film aesthetic and therefore not only in practices of film conversion and re-distribution, as discussed in the previous chapters. The third section 5.3 is focused on investigating the remediation of the infernal imagery through the dystopian representation of the City of New York. In order to do so, I discuss the following two contributing factors: I first show how the overwhelmingly representation of digital technologies on the screen are responsible for triggering acts of capitalist exploitations, against which the protesters are fighting; I further show how these acts of exploitation are further visually exhibited by elements of physical separation between the few representatives of the ruling class and the indistinct mass of protesters, leading to increasing violence. To support this argument, I draw from the encounter between Eric Packer and his 22 year-old

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[427] DeLillo, D. (2003). *Cosmopolis*, New York: Scribner. The reference edition for this chapter is DeLillo, D., (2003), *Cosmopolis*, London: Picador.

System Analyst Michael Chin, the conversation between Eric Packer and his Chief of Theory Vija Kinsky, the final considerations on the dead rat as the main symbol of the protest and the last meeting between Eric Packer and his stalker, Benno Levin. Finally, the last section evaluates both the impact and the mixed reception of *Cosmopolis* in the USA following its launch in the summer of 2012. Many critics denounced the film as "wilfully confounding, indulgent, claustrophobic and obfuscating, more concerned with attitude than clarity of focus".[428] However, as section 5.4 illuminates, others proposed to overcome the mere aesthetical interpretation and instead read the film as an anticipation of the Occupy-Wall-Street-inspired movements that were breaking out in several countries around the world, including the USA, in the same months when the film was being shot. With this in mind, two key questions arise from this chapter: what can an adaptation such as *Cosmopolis* tell us about the relationship between the mastering of the digital sphere and the imminent economical changes? And in the light of these considerations, in what ways can *Cosmopolis* function both as a *memento* and as a *prophecy* of the end of the capitalistic order?

5.1   Adapting DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*: the Screenwriting Phase

When exploring the different stages behind the genesis of David Cronenberg's *Cosmopolis* two details need to be taken into account. First, the legacy of Dante's *Inferno* in relation to the *oeuvre* of the American contemporary novelist Don DeLillo. The second relates to investigating the productive dialogue between DeLillo's 2003-novel *Cosmopolis* and David Cronenberg's 2012-homonym film, which has involved the Canadian director in the making of the film since the screenwriting phase. In relation to the first aspect, several scholars have explored the intertextual relationship between Dante and DeLillo by stressing how this influence is not solely aesthetical or exclusively centred on matters of 'fidelity'. Indeed, its expression comes from its foundational belief that adaption is a powerful way to make social and political criticism. In this way, "Dante allows historical and political elements to

[428] Puig, C. (2012). 'Cosmopolis: Snarky, Sermonizing, Bewildering', Film Review, *USA Today*, August 16th. Online version available at: http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/life/movies/reviews/story/2012-08-16/cosmopolis-robert-pattinson/57101504/1

complicate or enrich an essentially religious poem",[429] whilst, conversely, "DeLillo allows a curious religious dimension to emerge in its essentially historical and political novel(s)".[430] There is a productive tension between Dante's *Inferno* and *Cosmopolis* – a novel about the development of a fictional world that is pervaded and ruled by several infernal dynamics – and it is a tension derived from Dante's Catholic-based afterlife-order and DeLillo's dystopian portrayal of New York City. Both stories gravitate entirely around the protagonist's journey, but this presents opposing outcomes. In fact, while Dante's journey can be considered as "goal-oriented"[431] and, more precisely, aiming to reach the top of mount Heaven by passing through Hell and Purgatory first, Eric Packer's journey to cross the city of New York just to get a haircut is "obsolete, for there is now no place to get to".[432] Thus, while Eric Packer's journey is reminiscent of Dante's in certain formal and narrative ways, the journey of *Cosmopolis* distinguishes itself by being over-exposed to the interaction with digital media, which influences – indeed, rules – almost every aspect of Eric Packer's everyday-life. Consequently, in order to picture "the new digital world" in which Eric Packer's moves, we need to understand that, in this kind of infernal setting, "there is no point in going anywhere since at the speed of light one already is where the action is *at*".[433] However, as previously stated, the spiritual drive of the protagonist pushes the dynamics of both Dante and Eric Packer's journeys forward. In the light of these considerations, the infernal setting of the story, here translated to the streets of a New York which is devastated by a disruptive political protest, allows us to reconsider the making of this film as a key example of the remediation of Dante's infernal imagery on the cinematic screen in the digital era.

The first stage of David Cronenberg's *Cosmopolis* involved approaching DeLillo's novel with the intention of turning it into a movie, which led the Canadian

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[429] Cowart, D. (2003). *Don DeLillo: The Physics of Language*, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, p.92.

[430] Ibidem, p.92.

[431] Ebert, J. D. (2011). *The New Media Invasion: Digital Technologies and the World They Unmake*, North Carolina: McFarland and Company Inc., p.190.

[432] Ibidem, p.190.

[433] Ibidem p.191.

director to become actively engaged with the adaptation process from the very beginning of the screenwriting phase. David Cronenberg has since reflected on many of the practical stages that occurred in adapting DeLillo's novel into his own film. First of all, the original intention to approach the book did not derive from a spontaneous reading. Indeed, this possibility became realistic only when producer Paulo Branco and his son "came to suggest that [Cronenberg] could adapt it for the screen".[434] This was as unusual request for the Canadian director as he "generally prefer[s] to come out with [his] own projects".[435] Despite this, the structure and the dynamics evident in the novel presented a few possible obstacles in its adaptation to the cinematic screen. DeLillo himself has pointed out how "adapting *Cosmopolis* would be particularly tricky, since most action is confined within a car, which doesn't translate well to the screen".[436] However, the lack of physical space due to the majority of the scenes taking place inside of a white limousine did not particularly hamper the screenwriting phase. Cronenberg's main inspiration in considering this project as suitable for the cinematic screen derived from the "amazing dialogues"[437] that could act as the cornerstone of the film to develop alongside the visual world. Eventually, the dialogues were so captivating that it took only "six days"[438] for the script to be completed.

The practical procedure that was employed in order to adapt the 'reference text' for the cinematic screen comprised two main stages. The first phase involved Cronenberg literally copying "all the dialogues from the book"[439] on his computer "without changing or adding anything".[440] This first act of transcription took the director just "three days".[441] This idea of keeping the dialogue intact has been

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[434] 'Interview with David Cronenberg', in *Cosmopolis Official Pressbook*, p.6 available at the film's official website www.cosmopolisthefilm.com

[435] Ibidem, p.6.

[436] 'Interview with Don DeLillo', in *Cosmopolis Official Pressbook*, p.11 available at the film's official website www.cosmopolisthefilm.com

[437] 'Interview with David Cronenberg', p.6.

[438] Ibidem, p.6.

[439] Ibidem, p. 6.

[440] Ibidem, p. 6.

[441] Ibidem, p.6.

preserved up to the final cut of the resulting film, and it later represented one of the most impactful directions that Cronenberg imposed on set. Robert Pattinson - the leading actor of the film playing the role of David Packer - has commented on the importance of preserving the exact form and organisation of the dialogue both in his preparation and performance, due to the fact that all actors in the film "had to say the dialogues exactly as they were written to the word. [Cronenberg] wouldn't tolerate any variation".[442] This instruction too can be considered as unusual in the relationship between the film script and the shooting phase as generally "scripts aren't followed scrupulously".[443] On the contrary, they are mostly considered as "just a foundation and actors are supposed to make them their own".[444] In particular, dialogues are generally required to be fairly "flexible" when performed on a film set. [445] In this case, indeed, Pattinson defined his performance as being more similar to "acting in a play: when you play Shakespeare, you cannot rephrase the lines".[446] When considering the method adopted in the screenwriting process, Cronenberg knew precisely that his work could not be classified as standard; on the contrary, he was conscious that his method would be considered as a "unique adaptation".[447] The dialogue is the fulcrum around which the entire adaptation process pivots, and this procedure can be read as absolutely unprecedented in Cronenberg's career, especially if we consider that "in some books the dialogue does not feel like it belongs to the mouth of actors. It is literary and it works on the page, but it's something that you'd really want to hear somebody speak, and so, you change it. In this case, I really wanted the dialogue to remain the same".[448] Reflecting upon the importance that the literal appropriation of the novel's dialogic parts have played, DeLillo stressed how the adaptation process has actively transformed his work to such an extent that when he first saw the movie he found himself "discovering" the story, "or even

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[442] From 'Interview with Robert Pattinson', in *Cosmopolis Official Pressbook*, p.17 available at the film's official website www.cosmopolisthefilm.com

[443] Ibidem, p.17.

[444] Ibidem, p.17.

[445] Ibidem, p.17.

[446] Ibidem, p.17.

[447] Ibidem, p.6.

[448] Macauley, S. (2012). 'Flash Crash, Interview with David Cronenberg', in *Filmmaker, Summer 2012*, p.55.

understanding it for the first time".[449]

This being said, the decision to keep the dialogue untouched in the screenplay did not necessarily imply a lack of active participation of Cronenberg as a screenwriter in the completion of his work. In fact, and this represents the second stage of the adaptation process in the writing phase, after transcribing the dialogue lines, another three more days were spent "on filling up the gaps between dialogues"[450] along with rearranging both the diegetic structure and the narrative development of the film. In particular, both operations were related to deciding in which practical ways the filming phase could set the majority of the scenes inside the limited space a limousine can provide, as previously pointed out. Nevertheless, Cronenberg managed to face these problems by indicating directly throughout the film script all the "practical stuff like choosing settings and props".[451] In order to do so, he decided to "describe the limo in detail" by addressing questions like "where does Eric sit? Where are the others? What is happening in the street?"[452] alongside outlining issues regarding the "casting, the lighting, and how close you are on the faces when the [actors] say these lines".[453] All these aspects needed to be taken into account at the start of the process in order to "find cinematic equivalents"[454] once the film progressed to filming on set. The plethora of aesthetic and technical aspects of the shooting phase directly onto paper allows us to reconsider the issue of fidelity from the practical perspective of the screenwriting process. Cronenberg himself has embraced the idea that "in order to be faithful to the book, you have to betray the book".[455] With this in mind, after transcribing the dialogue and pointing out various aspects of the shooting phase within the different scenes, the screenplay form was more similar to a proper "plan for crew and actors, and a production tool too",[456] and

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[449] 'Interview with Don DeLillo', p.13.

[450] Ibidem, p.6.

[451] Ibidem, p.6.

[452] Ibidem, p.6.

[453] 'Flash Crash, Interview with David Cronenberg', p. 93.

[454] Ibidem, p.93.

[455] Ibidem, p.93.

[456] Ibidem, p.6.

could consequently be considered sufficient to move forward to the filming stage.

Despite Cronenberg often discussing the various practical issues he faced in the adaptation process in several interviews, neither the production company nor the Canadian director have ever made available to the public the full script or even a single extract.[457] I have personally contacted both Cronenberg's agency and producer Paulo Branco to officially request a copy of the film script, but I have never received a positive reply. Nevertheless, if we consider the film as it appears in its final cut, despite the fact that the majority of the dialogue is taken verbatim from the novel it is still possible to acknowledge a few interventions that substantially differentiate the film in both structure and narration. Structurally, the key change that is immediately evident in the film is the complete elimination of the section in the novel entitled 'The Confessions of Benno Levin', the two introspective chapters placed respectively at the end of Part I and Part III, in which the reader experiences the antagonist's inner thoughts narrated in the first person. Cronenberg completely ignored these two chapters, which do not develop the main storyline horizontally, and so in the movie the antagonist appears only in the final sequence. However, the face-to-face confrontation between Eric Packer and Benno Levin has been kept identical to the final chapter of the book. David Cronenberg has observed that:

> "It wouldn't have worked in the film. We would have needed a voice-over or one of these devices, which often generates poor results. I preferred to save it all for the meeting between Packer and him – the final sequence –, which is very long: 20 minutes. 20 minutes of dialogues! It's a choice, the kind of choices you have to make to turn a novel into a film".[458]

In addition to this, at least two other scenes have been eliminated from the film: the first one is the scene where Packer finds the homeless woman in his car straight after coming back from the rave party,[459] while the second one relates to the

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[457] See e.g. Cosmopolis official website http://cosmopolisthefilm.com/en or the production company official website http://www.alfamafilms.com/ or the film IMDB page http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1480656/. None of them displays any access to the whole film script or even to any extracts of it.

[458] 'Interview with David Cronenberg', in *Cosmopolis Official Pressbook*, p.7 available at the film's official website www.cosmopolisthefilm.com

[459] see DeLillo, D. (2003). *Cosmopolis*, London: Picador, pp.128-129.

final part of the confrontation between Eric Packer and Benno Levin.[460] However, there is a specific scene deleted in the editing phase which deserves special attention in this analysis, both because it substantially alters the dynamics of the story, and because it appropriates and remediates Dante's infernal imagery in this film. The scene in question is of the fourth meeting between Eric and his wife, the rich heiress-poet Elise Shifrin. In the novel, after randomly running into each other at mealtimes and ending their relationship, the two take part as extras on a film set in which:

> "There were three hundred naked people sprawled in the street. They filled the intersection, lying in haphazard positions, some bodies draped over others, some levelled, flattened, foetal, with children among them. They were a sight to come upon, a city of stunned flesh, the bareness, the bright lights, so many bodies unprotected and hard to credit in a place of human transit".[461]

Inside this Dantesque body cluster, pictured as immobile inside of the urban hell of a dreary alley of New York City, the two make love and talk about the uselessness of money.[462] As previously mentioned, this scene has been completely eliminated in the film. However, contrary to the chapters dedicated to Benno Levin and the two other episodes which were consciously excluded from the script, this choice was not made in the screenwriting phase, but instead in the editing phase following the film shooting. David Cronenberg has since explained: "I shot the scene, but afterwards I thought the situation was unlikely, artificial; so I edited it out".[463] The main reason for excluding this scene from the final cut derives from a lack of coherence in the phenomenal world which the director perceived as being a hallucination experienced by the main character: "As soon as I read it I thought: it's not really happening, it is only in Packer's mind. And I couldn't see myself filming dozens of naked bodies in a street of New York. I am wary of films within films".[464]

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[460] Ibidem, pp.200-208.

[461] Ibidem, p.172.

[462] The idea of a pile of anonym human bodies in a damned condition in which, however love can spring is already present in Dante's *Inferno* at least in *Inferno V* dedicated to the meeting with Paolo and Francesca da Rimini in the Circle of Lust and in *Inferno XVIII* in the VIII Circle – the Bedlam of Pimps and Seducers.

[463] 'Interview with David Cronenberg', in *Cosmopolis Official Pressbook*, p.7 available at the film's official website www.cosmopolisthefilm.com

[464] Ibidem, p.7.

This example shows us how the various dynamics influencing the entire adaptation process are more complex than simply working on a script in disconnection with the shooting and editing phase: indeed, they might also deal with practices of re-writing stories from the 'reference text' in a conscious and engaging manner. At the same time, it becomes necessary to consider the editing phase as a form of screenwriting that may be able to also situate the adaptation process in the post-production phase. In addition, despite the dialogue being largely preserved – a precise choice that closely links Cronenberg's work to DeLillo's one - the criterion of fidelity itself does not sufficiently allow us to investigate the remediate and creative power of the cinematic medium if we decide to employ it in a mere comparative and aesthetic mode. In the light of this consideration, the use of digital technologies in this film allows us to reconsider the extent to which their intervention was of fundamental importance in the re-working and production of the infernal imagery on the cinematic screen. In particular, this investigation poses two different questions, each of them exploring a different use of digital technologies in this film: first, to what extent has the employment of digital cameras in the shooting phase been of fundamental importance for the realisation of the film? Following these technical considerations, in which ways have the infernal imagery been remediated on the cinematic screen through its relationship with the same image of digital technologies in the film? The first question is addressed in the following section 5.2, while the second one is explored in section 5.3.

5.2   Shooting *Cosmopolis*: A Digital Choice

Moving forward from the screenwriting phase, the idea of shooting *Cosmopolis* on digital came to Suschitzky after two music video experiences using ALEXA photographic equipment in which "the tolerance of the camera for extreme changes in exposure and contrast was very impressive".[465] As previously discussed, the main obstacle for *Cosmopolis* at a photographic level was related to the limited space where the majority of the scenes were shot, set in the back of a limousine in which the director of photography knew precisely that he "wouldn't have room to

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[465] 'A Twisted Trip in COSMOPOLIS – Interview with Cinematographer Peter Suschitzky' available at the ARRI Group Official Website: http://www.arri.com/news/news/a-twisted-trip-in-cosmopolis/

hide many lamps".[466] Consequently, the possibility of shooting on digital might have turned out to be the perfect choice as "the sensitivity of the camera would have been an alley".[467] The support Suschitzky showed towards digital cameras is a brilliant change of perspective from a cinematographer that has spent the majority of his long career shooting with analogue equipment. It is a rare and encouraging attitude shown by an experienced professional to start shooting on digital for reasons other than financial or generational obligation. This awareness plays a key role in understanding the cultural revolution behind the technological transition from analogue to digital cameras. On this topic, Paul Wheeler (2001) has pointed out:

> "Many cinematographers from a film background might be wary of the new technology or simply feel they must dislike it on principle. This would be a very great shame for, as […] digital cinematography can be an exciting system, capable of producing pictures of superb quality, and over which the cinematographer has far more personal control than with the film image".[468]

In terms of improving control, lighting is of course usually the biggest technical problem the photography department must overcome during the filmmaking process. The balances between light and dark, penumbra and chiaroscuro, colours and the grey scale have all had an enormous impact on the aesthetics and emotional expression of the cinematic experience. In order to achieve the aesthetic and artistic results wanted for *Cosmopolis*, the sensitivity of digital cameras was of fundamental support to the lack of physical space, as previously discussed. Suschitzky also actively collaborated with the scenography department in order to provide light sources beyond the standard lighting equipment. As the cinematographer admitted, "we did 'cheat' and take the roof off a few times but we did that perhaps only twice and that was to get the camera into a position it couldn't get to otherwise and not for the lighting".[469] Light sources which were actively integrated into the limousine included "some LED lights and sometimes a 150-watt tungsten light with diffusion or bounces. The car was also designed with these 'TV

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[466] Ibidem.

[467] Ibidem.

[468] Wheeler, P. (2001). *Digital Cinematography*, Oxford: Oxford England Focal Press, p.XVII.

[469] Ibidem.

monitor style' panels",[470] providing the source of alternative inner light sources. After adopting these pro-filmic options, Suschitzky set the ISO of the camera to "800"[471] and used "a very light Pro-mist"[472] filtration lens in order to give the image the highest definition possible. A subsequent colour grading was carried out in post-production in order to help reduce the "little bit of noise"[473] in the paste stage, derived from the initial rejection of using the light meter on set, as at the beginning the director of photography decided to rely only on the *moviola* monitors. Despite this initial adjustment, *Cosmopolis* is a rare case showing the seminal importance of shooting on digital in order to contrast the lack of physical space where situating lighting equipment has proven tougher. After finishing this film production, Suschitzky has expressed a preference to shoot on digital in future collaborations. The main reason for this goes beyond mere technical and aesthetic choices adopted on set, instead it deals with aspects of the distribution phase and, more specifically, with the screening stage:

> "An important factor to keep in mind is that even if you shoot on film your movie won't actually be shown on film. Not in the United States and Canada anyway. It will be projected digitally, which means you have to digitalize the film. And side-by-side I think the true digital image looks far better than the digitalized film image".[474]

This awareness does not only elicit a feeling of scepticism towards the employment of digital technologies in practices of film conversion directly to digital – which, on the contrary, becomes fundamental in practices of film restoration for movies produced in the pre-digital era, as we could see in the previous chapters. It also encourages us to rethink new films entirely shot on digital, and to consider digital technologies not only as a technical device, but more importantly as an *expressive* and *creative* tool that "can be used expressively in the service of the filmmakers' goals, and thus [is] equally deserving of attention throughout the

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[470] Ibidem.

[471] Ibidem.

[472] Ibidem.

[473] Ibidem.

[474] Ibidem.

process of interpretation".[475] Consequently, if we consider this phenomenon under the theoretical lenses of Film Adaptation Studies on which this thesis is rooted, we might gain a greater understanding of the inner potential of digital technologies "to produce meaning alongside and in concert with other cinematic tools".[476] Therefore, this methodological shift becomes necessary to better investigate the mutual influences between what is visible on the screen and how those images have been realised. Consequently, a greater attention towards focusing on this polarity helps us to first discover both the aesthetic and interpretational impact of digital technologies in the film industry, before we continue our exploration of the social and political effects of circulated digital films. In the light of these considerations and by keeping *Cosmopolis* at the centre of this investigation two key questions need to be addressed. First, to what extent has the employment of digital technologies alongside their massive representation on the screen intervened in re-mediating and producing the infernal imagery of the dystopian city of New York City, the setting of Cronenberg's film? With this in mind, to what extent do they contribute to an understanding of their social impact in the 21st Century? The following sections investigate these points.

5.3   The Moment Before the Fall: The Inferno of New York City.

According to the definition provided by Michael Gordin, Hellen Tilley and Gyan Prakash (2010), a *dystopia* – the literal translation from Greek is 'bad place' – is a universe which is "subjected to increasing entropy" that consequently "places us directly in a dark and depressing reality, conjuring up a terrifying future if we do not recognize and treat its symptoms in the here and now".[477] This definition allows us to reflect on at least two main aspects: first, the acknowledgment that a dystopian reality is associated with a series of infernal dynamics ranging between various aspects of the human interaction within the urban space. Second, the idea that these infernal dynamics might also be present in the current world and therefore beyond a

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[475] Purse, L. (2013). *Digital Imaging in Popular Cinema*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p.10.

[476] Ibidem, p.11.

[477] Gordin, M. D.; Tilley, H. and Prakash G. (2010). Ed., *Utopia/Dystopia – Conditions of Historical Possibility*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p.2.

strictly fictional universe. In this way, dystopias work both as a *memento* and as a *prophecy*, as they trace the path for an apocalyptic scenario in the imminent future that might devastate the contemporary world immediatly if certain changes are not soon put into place. This section discusses the ways in which the image of New York City, where *Cosmopolis* is set, investigates, enquires and proposes aspects of dystopia, in relation to the prophecy of the collapse of the capitalistic order that the story predicts as imminent for the recently passed *future* of the early 2000s. However, before proceeding further a preliminary question arises: why is this apocalyptic scenario set inside one of the main American metropolises? This is fundamental to carrying out the investigation proposed in this chapter.

According to Emiliano Ilardi (2010), in the United States the urban space of the main American metropolis has been historically arranged by following a system of mass containment, therefore incorporating the idea of a 'border' inside the urban area. The main purpose was to create a dividing wall inside the city, in order to keep each group of people separated from one another. In the USA "once all lands got occupied, the city had to become the main border area".[478] This kind of internal separation developed in two different, complementary ways: the 'horizontal' border through which the space has been rearranged into extensive blocks eventually assigned to specific groups of people sharing some broad cultural or financial characteristics; and the 'vertical' border – that of the built-up giant skyscrapers that could physically and intensively incarnate that which Ilardi defined as "social Darwinism linked to the strange alliance with puritan predestination". In this way, skyscrapers became the private space of those who are, through their personal economic wealth, "either stronger than the others, or elected by God".[479] Consequently, skyscrapers are not only part of a particular architectural development that "aims to make the ruling class and those who had success and power dominate the surrounding space". Indeed, they became the main "element of

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[478] Ilardi, E. (2010). *La Frontiera contro la Metropoli – The Border against the Metropolis,* Naples: Liguori Editore, p.26, Original Italian: "E' la città ad assumere le fattezze di spazio della frontiera una volta che le terre sono tutte occupate".

[479] Ilardi, E. (2010), p.54. Original Italian: "Anche l'immaginario americano si basa su un fortissimo darwinismo sociale unito in una strana alleanza con la predestinazione puritana. Nella frontiera sopravvive il più forte o il prescelto da Dio".

separation from the anonymous and dangerous mass".[480] In this rationally organised space, for those who step out of the comfort-zone of skyscrapers, the impossibility of controlling or even identifying the movement of the indistinct crowd around the streets becomes the main danger of which to beware. Contrary to what happened in the majority of European cities, "in the American metropolis a small muster of people moving together is already considered a threat, as well as vagrancy gets prosecuted by law".[481] According to Ilardi (2010), the main reason behind this uncanny feeling is based upon the mastering and controlling the public spaces with impeccable precision. But, because people walk in the streets separately for a plethora of purposes that are each not required to be officially and publically approved, the American urban imagery fears any form of unorganised crowds because they are "not possible to register".[482] *Cosmopolis* reworks this fear on this screen in both its narrative and infernal imagery. "It is New York, but it's New York where an apocalypse is happening to it", actor Paul Giamatti has commented.[483]

The dystopian urban hell of the city of New York deploys at least three different but interconnected aspects of exploitation and the subversion of order. The first one regards the polarity between the *material* and *immaterial* spheres, and the way in which the employment of digital technologies control and rule all main financial trends. The second aspect investigates dynamics of separation/contamination between the ruling class, represented by Eric Packer, and the protesters striking around the streets of New York, represented by both the indistinct mass of the rioters and the character of Benno Levin. Finally, the last aspect deals with the constant uncanny awareness that something is going to happen soon and that, if started, it will lead to the definitive collapse of the capitalistic order.

[480] Ilardi, E. (2010), p.55. Original Italian: "Dal punto di vista simbolico cioè il grattacielo non è tanto importante come elemento di dominio sullo spazio circostante da parte delle classi dominanti, da parte di chi ha avuto successo e potere, ma soprattutto come elemento di separazione dalla folla anonima e pericolosa".

[481] Ibidem, pp.27-28 Original Italian: "L'anonima mescolanza di un gran numero di persone in uno spazio pubblico non è percepita come fonte di opportunità o fantasmagorie, ma come potenziale fonte di pericolo. Nelle metropoli americane un piccolo assembramento di persone che si muovono insieme già rappresenta da solo una minaccia come pure è severamente vietato il vagabondaggio".

[482] Ibidem, p.28. Original Italian: "La folla anonima, non catalogabile"

[483] Shehori, S. (2012). 'The Off-Topic Interview: Paul Giamatti', *Huffpost Entertainment*, 14th August. Full text available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/steven-shehori/the-offtopic-interview-pa_b_1775350.html

In the same way that "the *Divine Comedy* offers a picture of the universe that is a mixture of physical cosmology and spiritual allegory",[484] the inferno feeding the world of *Cosmopolis* also gravitates around the two-way polarity between both *physical* and *immaterial* drives. In particular, what connects the world of *Cosmopolis* with the infernal imagery inspired by Dante's *Inferno* is the impossibility of reaching a state of spiritual calm, and that consequently pushes the characters and their fictional world towards the tension of corporeality. The impossibility of ascending and transcending the physical is therefore at the foundation of this urban hell which appears to be wavering in a state of perpetual limbo, where everything might fall down at any moment. Even the protagonist's only desire of having his haircut done cannot be entirely satisfied in the end, as the barber would only be able to complete half of Eric's head. Thus the pervading presence of digital technologies and their key role in either determining or symbolising the infernal dynamics of the film are the most evident element through which the cinematic screen portrays this tension between the material sphere of the physical and the immaterial sphere of the spiritual. The *material* aspect of these kinds of technological devices is rooted in their appearance as items of a well-defined and easily recognisable design, situated in specific, physically determined locations. These devices also possess an immaterial nature: this is of tremendous importance as it has the potential to both gather and separate communities from one another, as well as change the way in which people are politically active. This kind of immaterial nature, which internet-equipped digital devices possess, allows them to interconnect devices from different geographic areas and enables users to interact in real time with an immediate visual return of information. These kinds of actions are due to the "homogenization of all information into digital code and given form as electronic pulse [...] regardless of actual content; the formative existence is the same".[485] As I am going to discuss, it is through the mastering of the digital sphere that the ruling class of *Cosmopolis* generates acts of exploitations on the masses.

The visual world of *Cosmopolis* is filled with digital devices bridging the

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[484] Cartwright, J. H. and Baker, B. (2005). *Literature and Science: Social Impact and Interaction*, Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO Inc., p.10.

[485] Manzerolle, V. and Kjosen, M. (2016). *Digital Media and Capital's Logic of Acceleration*, in C. Fuchs and V., Mosco, *Marx in the Age of Digital Capitalism*, Leiden, Holland: Printforce, p.172.

material and the *immaterial* premises. An example is a few touch-screen computer monitors perfectly integrated in the limousine design and through which Eric Packer obsessively controls the currency market trends of the day. (Figure 1 and Figure 2) Likewise, digital and wireless are the medical tools which the doctor uses on Eric's body to check his health statistics and whose results are displayed in real time on a further super-flat-screen-HD monitor. In the same way, Eric's Chief's of Security, Thorval, uses a voice-controlled gun, and his 22-year-old system analyst, Michael Chin, keeps playing with a digital tablet in his hands while discussing with his boss about the security of their network and the implication of youth in the "interaction between technology and capital. Their inseparability".[486] (Figure 3)
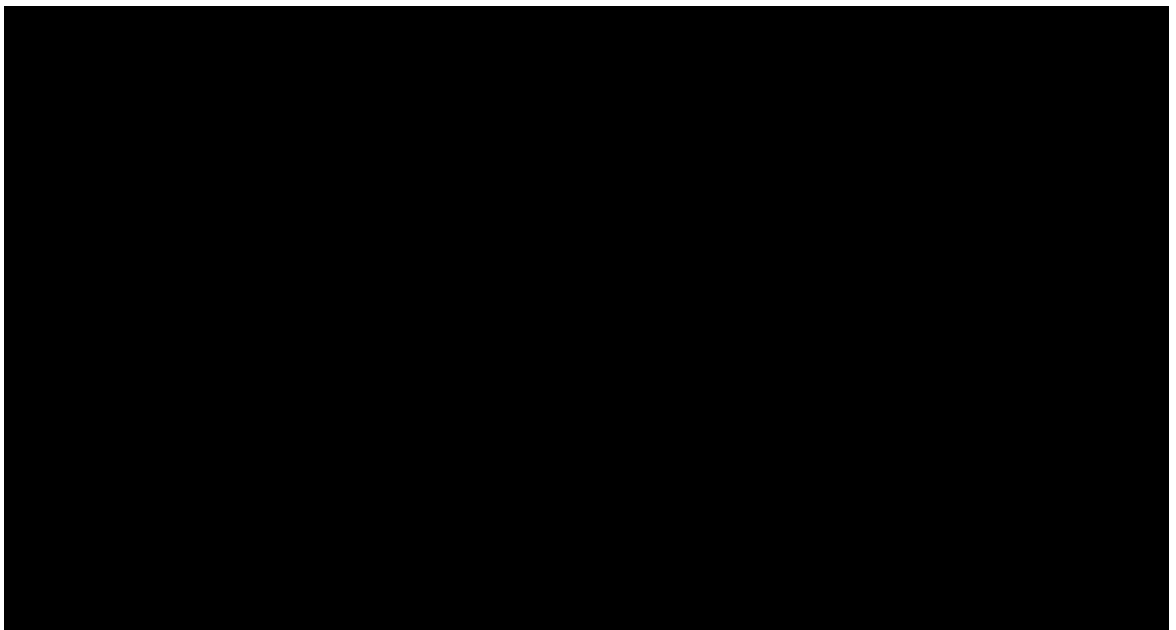
Figure 5.1 - The White Limousine - Monitors to Check the Currency Market Trends in Real-Time

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[486] *Cosmopolis* (Cronenberg, 2012) min. 12.00

Figure 5.2 - Detail of a computer monitor integrated in the limousine design
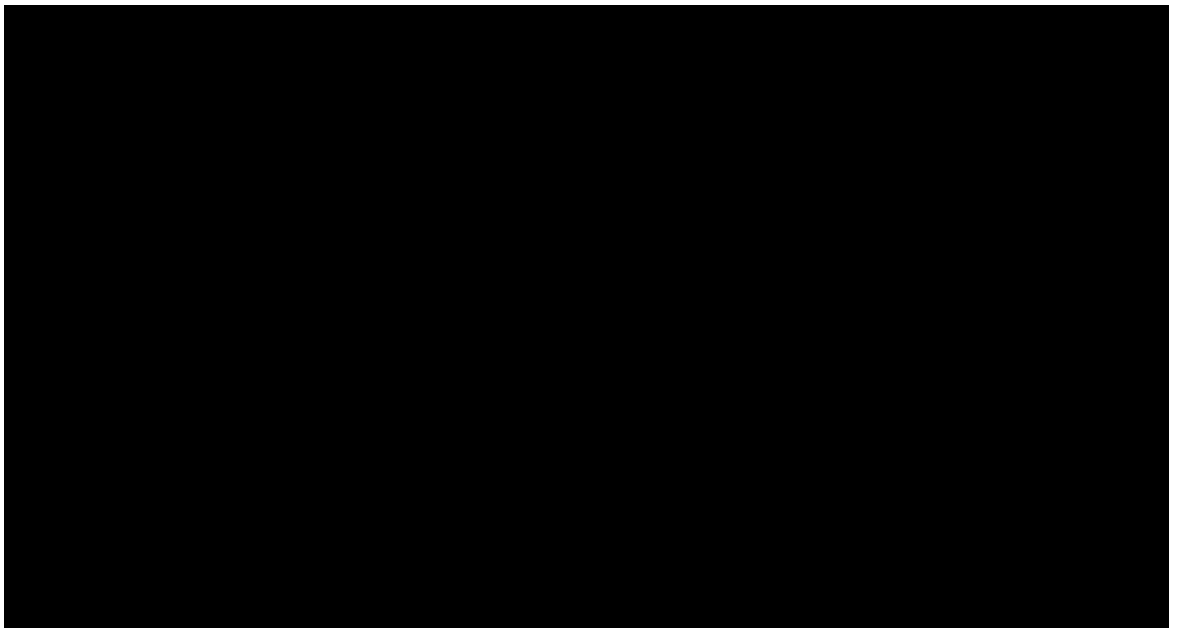
Figure 5.3 - Michael Chin - Eric's 22-year-old Chief of Security and his inseparable tablet

More specifically, this awareness plays a particular role in understanding the mechanisms foregrounding the dynamics of *Cosmopolis*, as it elucidates the interdependent connection between the potential of the digital sphere - here in the

hands of young generations - and its social and financial impact on mass societies. But how exactly can digital technologies impact on 21st-century Western Capitalism? And how could their mastering of technology generate social inequality? To address these questions, we first must accept that "capital is the unity-in-process of production and circulation", which, in order to cut down "periods of negation and devaluation" needs to constantly "increase its velocity thus decreasing the time spent in circulation".[487] Consequently, in this scenario digital media becomes the perfect tool through which this acceleration becomes possible. When capital turns into "electromagnetic waves, there is no need for a real metamorphosis of qualitatively different material forms"[488] and it is hence able to overcome the physical limitations of space and time. Therefore, in this essentially *immaterial* context, capital is not only able to move and accelerate in a propulsive spin, but also reach "its formal idea" and "self-valorising value".[489] In its digital premises, capital accordingly exists only conceptually or symbolically, representing "the primacy of images and signs over material objects".[490] In support of these considerations, the *image* and *imagery of money* in *Cosmopolis* is almost completely *immaterial* and exclusively mediated through the physical screens of digital devices: as evidence of this, we do not see a single banknote, nor a coin, nor even a credit card make an appearance during the purchase transactions of the film. On the contrary, the visual representation of money in the film is reduced to its essence of mathematics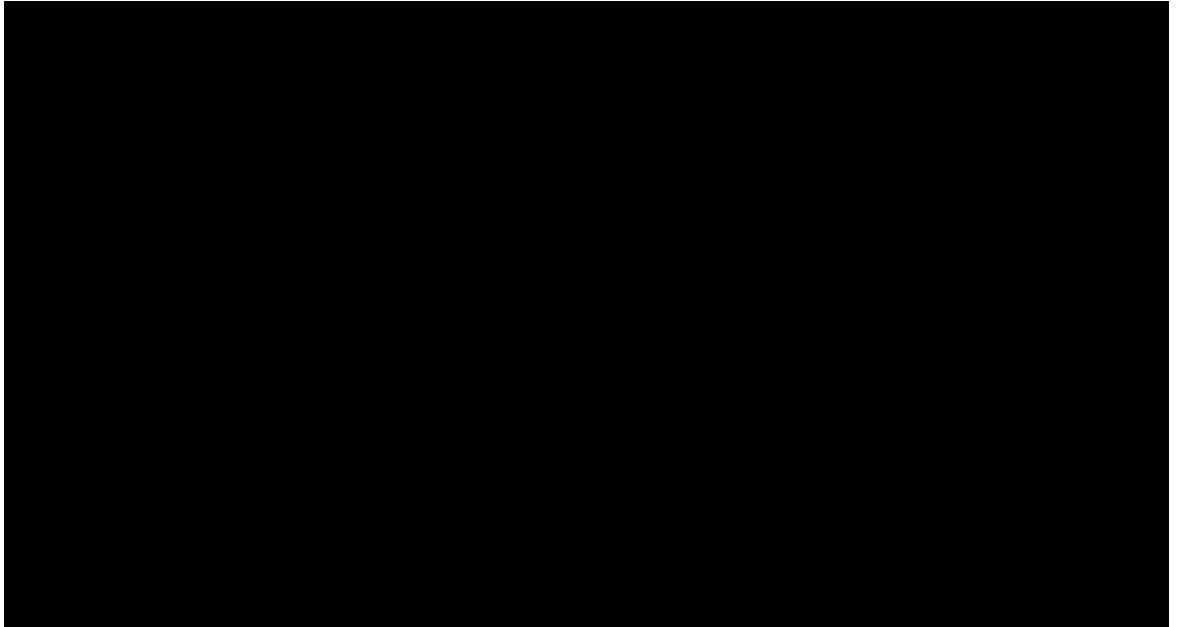 and geometry: a list of illegible numbers and abstract graphs flowing down Eric's digital monitors. In *Cosmopolis* money is therefore essentially *invisible*; a perilous *concept* that "has lost its narrative quality" and is substantially "talking to itself".[491] In this self-referenced, self-feeding and self-reflecting scenario, money becomes almost impossible to define with stable precision. On the elusiveness drive of money and its significance in every-day life, Eric Packer comments:

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[487] Manzerolle V. and Kjosen M. (2015), p.158.

[488] Ibidem, p.162-163.

[489] Ibidem, p. 163.

[490] Ibidem, p.163.

[491] See DeLillo, D. (2003). *Cosmopolis*, London: Picador, 2003, p.77: "Because money has taken a turn. All wealth has become wealth for its own sake. There's no other kind of enormous wealth. Money has lost its narrative quality the way painting did once upon a time. Money is talking to itself".

Didi: What does it mean to spend money? A Dollar, a Million
Eric: For a Painting?
Didi: For anything
Eric: I have two private elevators now. One is programmed to play Satie's piano pieces and to move at one-quarter normal speed. This is right for Satie and this is the elevator I take when I am in a certain, let's say, unsettled mood. Calms me. Makes me whole.[492]

No character can provide a solid definition of what money is. Eric too, the richest and wealthiest of the characters in the world of *Cosmopolis,* cannot even give a proper response without stepping into the personal spiritual sphere, which risks the influence of indiscriminate disposal of money. Moreover, Eric Packer cannot even quantify the exact amount of the financial loss that hit him the day in which the film is set. He keeps on talking of "money by the tons", "many millions", "hundreds of millions",[493] as an undefined, impossible-to-practically-quantify cipher. The reason lying behind this vague and mostly abstract idea of money may chiefly derive from the fact that even Eric does not know precisely where his fortune comes from. He has never done a practical job in his life. He is an asset manager who spends his entire working day in front of a computer screen, immersed in the world of digital markets. Moreover, he is only twenty-eight and fully part of the *youth-technology-capital* relationship that we have previously discussed. Consequently, Eric actually *disposes* of his fortune that, similarly, was unlikely to have been based on a Marxist-inspired circuit of goods production, sale, purchase and consumption. On the contrary, Eric's fortune is substantially abstract and numerical and its "expanse of the earth is reduced to nothing".[494] Consequently, the few who own and have access to the capital see their wealth growing exponentially, while the others remain stuck in the mire of financial speculation. This is why money disposability and its rapid circulation through the digital threads is the main element that impacts the social and political sphere of Eric Packer's world, along with being the person responsible for generating the plethora of social inequalities against which the protesters are rioting in the streets. In fact, in *Cosmopolis* the direct access to money and its logic is granted only to the cabal of financial elites of which Eric is a member, and it is they

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[492] DeLillo, D. (2003), p.29 and also *Cosmopolis*, (Cronenberg, 2012), min. 17.00 -18.00.

[493] *Cosmopolis* (Cronenberg, 2012), min. 18.00 -18.34.

[494] Ibidem, p.162-163.

who are able to manipulate the capital. Meanwhile the overwhelming majority is kept separated from direct access to money and is prevented from knowing exactly how these kinds of financial dynamics work. As a result, the possession of money in its digital form and knowledge of its financial dynamics has become the major act of power in the world of *Cosmopolis*, in which not even the President of the United States is considered to be the ultimate authority. In relation to the weakness of the central government, Eric provocatively demands: "do people still shoot at presidents? I thought there were more stimulating targets".[495] In the redefinition of the dynamics of power, and especially in relation to the private digital network in which the ruling class moves and disposes of the capital, Robert Prey (2016) has pointed out how being excluded from this specific financial network triggers "relations of exploitations".[496] As evidence of that, "if network and connectivity are the dominant logic of morphology of life, then oppression is defined by disconnection from these networks".[497] This logic of keeping the masses separated from both access to the financial circuit and knowledge of its mechanisms functions on at least two different, interdependent levels: that of the firm act of exclusion and the ensuing practice of self-exclusion that the ruling class exercises in order to preserve their power and maintain exclusive access to capital. In that respect, both of these levels are heavily represented in the film: for example, Eric's obsessive questions in relation to the security of his company's network, or the limousine in which he is crossing the city that allows people inside watching the outside world without the gaze being returned, or the lack of any physical or verbal interactions between Eric and the protesters.

These different acts of separation and self-exclusion are mainly explored on the screen through concepts of *invisibility*. This dual-natured characteristic is fuelled by the desire of the ruling class to remain anonymous. In fact, they hide behind the name of their corporation and never communicate their personal identities to the masses. The second concept of *invisibility* is a direct consequence of the coercive

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[495] *Cosmopolis* (Cronenberg, 2012), min. 9.15-9.30

[496] Prey, R. (2016). *The Network's Blindspot: Exclusion, Exploitation and Marx's Process-Relational Ontology,* in C. Fuchs and V. Mosco, ed., *Marx in the Age of Digital Capitalism*, Leiden, Holland: Printforce, p.204.

[497] Ibidem, p.207.

power, which, as previously mentioned, leads to those outside the super-elite that regulates the financial system becoming alienated. The strict relationship between *power* and *invisibility* has been identified and explored since Plato in the *Republic*, in which he narrates the myth of the archetypical despot, Gyges, whose "power is manifested everywhere despite, or perhaps due to, his invisibility".[498] Invisibility therefore is here associated with a form of ubiquitous and constant power, with the idea that the physical sphere of the individual holding the power and the knowledge of its mastering needs to be kept separated from its public identification, in order to preserve its unlimited authority. However, according to Philip Ball (2015), the outcomes deriving from the (ab)use of invisibility in relationship to the exercise of power cannot be ascribed to a "wondrous"[499] skill, indeed it needs to be conceived as a proper "moral challenge".[500] Ball continues, arguing that when associated with the exercise of power, "invisibility corrupts. Nothing good could come of it".[501] As a consequence of the ruling classes' invisibility along with their obsession to not be seen by the masses, various forms of mass exploitation feature in *Cosmopolis*. Indeed, "alienated individuals need to be alienated from something, as a result of a certain objectifying and dualistic practices that manifest themselves in the historical framework".[502] This is why, in *Cosmopolis,* the protesters are constantly kept separated from Eric Packer, both in terms of direct physical contact with the multi-millionaire young man, and of mutual acknowledgement: the rioters do not know who is sitting inside the white limousine, nor does Eric Packer. – In fact he does not even seem interested in discovering their identities. Furthermore, in *Cosmopolis* the representatives of the ruling class do not show any emotional reaction to the world of the exploited. Their constant detachment highlights a further line of division that keeps the two groups firmly separated from one another.

The sequence of 'the burning man' is a key example to prove this point. In

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[498] Ophir, A. (2002), *Plato's Invisible Cities – Discourse and Power in the Republic*, London: Routledge p.131.

[499] Ball, P. (2015). *Invisible: The Dangerous Allure of the Unseen*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press p.4.

[500] Ibidem, p.4.

[501] Ibidem, p.4.

[502] Nygren, K. G., and Gidlund, K. L. (2016). *The Pastoral Power of Technology*, in C. Fuchs and V. Mosco, ed., *Marx in the Age of Digital Capitalism*, Leiden, Holland: Printforce, p.404.

the moment the white limousine gets stuck in the protest, Eric is sitting inside with Vija Kinsky, his Chief of Theory. A few moments later, their attention is caught by one of the protesters who is sitting on the sidewalk right next to where the limousine is sliding by, and whose body is alight. It is of interest that Cronenberg has adapted this sequence to the cinematic screen by documenting once more the physical separation between the ruling class and the world of the exploited. In fact, although DeLillo's novel Eric is watching the scene from inside the limousine, he decides to experience the protest in the first person by putting his head outside the sunroof of the car. Instead, in Cronenberg's version, the whole scene is entirely filmed inside and therefore is solely from the point of view of the exploiters. First, the camera is placed inside the limousine where it captures the scene with a slow sliding movement, a lateral medium shot that lasts only eight seconds.[503] Secondly, Eric remains seated with Vija for the whole time and does not show any intention to open the sunroof. Consequently, we are able to watch the scene only through to the limousine transparent window that is partly covered by an opaque red varnish that some unknown protesters have previously sprayed onto. (Figure 4)
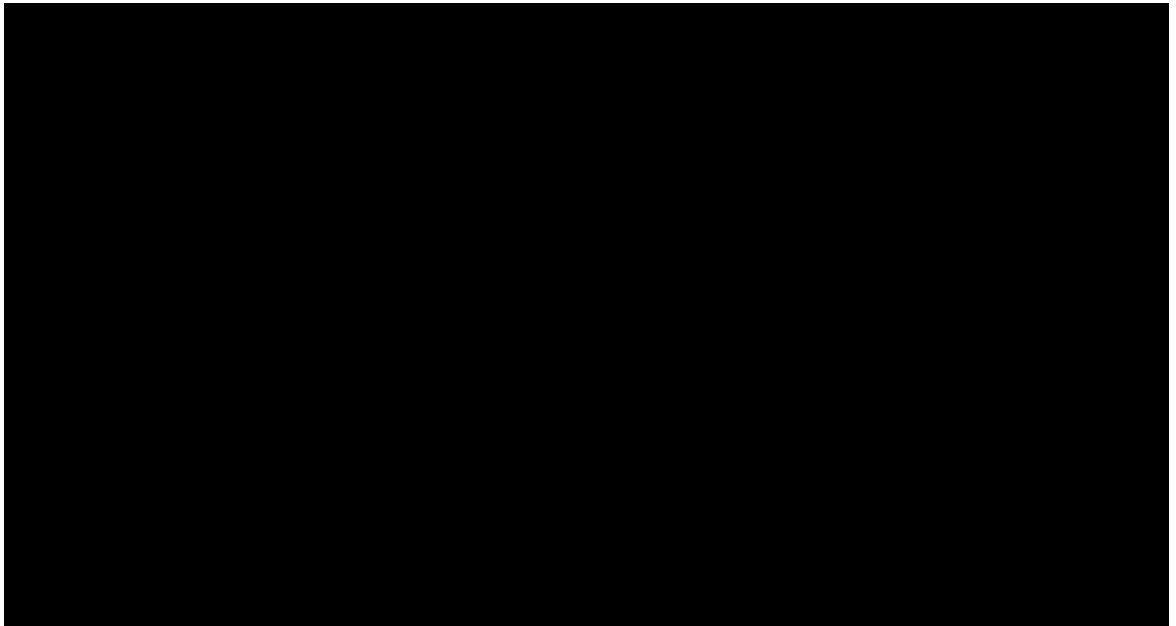

Figure 5.4 - The Burning Man sequence: the view point remains inside the limousine

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[503] *Cosmopolis* (Cronenberg, 2012), min. 39.22-39.30.

In this way, Cronenberg imposes a total barrier of separation in order to block the characters' clear visibility of the scene and therefore of any possible emotional participation to the protester's pain. This sort of physical separation works at two different levels: the first one involves the choice of not showing the burning man while the two characters comment on his immolation. In fact, the focus of the image is constantly kept on the two main characters portrayed in close-up and occupying the majority of the frame space, therefore leaving no room for any recognisable image to come through from the outside. The second level is the emotional detachment that Vija shows towards the burning man and the dynamics of his protest. "It's not original", she says calmly to Eric in response to Eric's invitation to "imagine the pain. Sit there and feel it". "It's an appropriation", Vija insists with an indifferent tone and facial expression.[504]

If Eric Packer is the main representative of the world of the exploiters, both the indistinct mass of the people rioting around the streets of New York City and the character of Benno Levin – who has been chasing Eric Packer for the whole day in order to kill him – stand as the main representatives of the world of the exploited. With this in mind, the world of the exploiters in *Cosmopolis* is essentially digital and composed of a small circuit of privileged individuals. Contrary to this, the world of the exploited is, in this film, essentially *physical* and composed of a large mass, which hampers the digital elusiveness by slowing the pace and putting obstacles in place. Meanwhile, in opposition to the increasing speed that characterises the capital flow through the digital network, the journey of Eric Packer is trapped in a constant situation of being slowed down and obstructed in the rioting city. This aspect underlines once more how, while the financial system moves essentially on digital threads and remains invisible to the majority, the human protest is resolutely corporeal and physical. In fact, in *Cosmopolis*, the Dantesque echo of the infernal mass is made evident through the image of the protesters on the cinematic screen: we first see them as a cluster of human bodies trying to attack Eric's limousine, but it remains impenetrable.

The reworking of the imagery of Dante's infernal mass in *Cosmopolis* is here

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[504] *Cosmopolis* (Cronenberg, 2012), min. 39.00-40.00

remediated through the key *physical* symbols of the protest: the *dead rat* which the protesters wave against the main symbols of capitalism, a constant leitmotiv that accompanies the cinematic experience for the whole film. As I am now going to discuss in more depth, in *Cosmopolis* the dead rat is here employed both in its physical determination of land animals and vehicle of contamination, and as the uncanny spectre of an imminent and inevitable change, which, more specifically, is associated with the collapse of the capitalistic order. With this in mind, what can the insistent presence of the dead rat tell us about the imminent collapse of the world of the exploiters?

In *Cosmopolis* the image of the protesters waving dead rats against the representatives of the ruling class is seen several times throughout the whole movie: we see them for the first time in the lunch sequence, in the first half of the film, when Eric is dining with his wife inside a glamorous restaurant. Only a few moments later a couple of protesters break inside, screaming that: "a spectre is hunting the world" and then throw the dead rats at the scared customers.[505] It is important to underline how once more there is no physical contact between the protesters and Eric or his wife. Indeed, it is the dead rat thrown at the customers, which haunts them with the possibility of contact and therefore instils a fear of possible contamination. Furthermore, the continued presence of the dead rat is of great importance in the protest sequence where the animals acquire a further and metaphorical significance. In the riot where Eric's limousine gets trapped, we do not just notice dozens of protesters holding dead rats in their hands or being dressed up with rat costumes, but, more importantly, we are threatened by the image of a puppet, shaped as a giant dead rat, occupying half of the screen and which eventually gets leaned against Eric's limousine. (Figure 5)

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[505] *Cosmopolis* (Cronenberg, 2012), min 22.00. The motto is taken from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' opening sentence of their 1848 *Manifesto of the Communist Party* which recites: "A spectre is haunting Europe, the spectre of Communism". For extended readings see
https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf
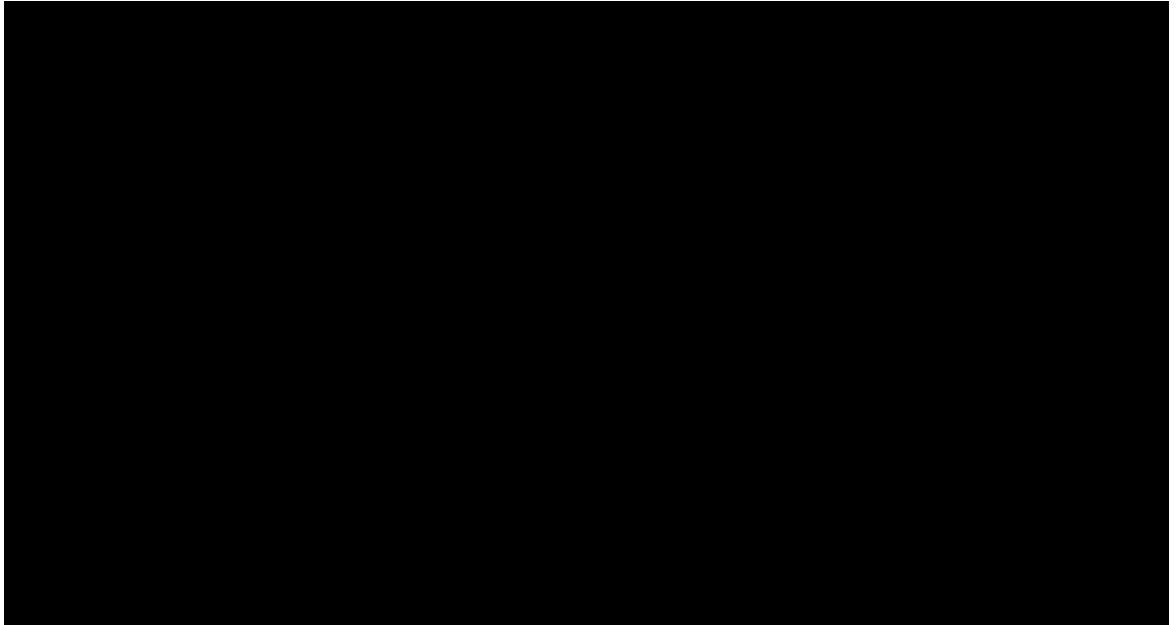
Figure 5.5 - The Giant Rat-Puppet

According to Sigmund Freud (1909), in *Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis* - an assessment of the case of a patient obsessed by a form of rat torture: the idea of being sexually assaulted by rats in a forced act of passive sodomy – the image of the rat is literally defined as "the great obsessive fear".[506] The obsessive image of the sodomising rats presents several uncanny layers swinging among the anguish of a corporal "sanction"[507] - in the form of the rat punishment - for not paying back a debt and the resulting distress that "something might happen"[508] from one moment to another. As we can see from Freud's definition, the fear of rats is either connected to the threat of passive violence, to the idea of money or to the collapse of the present order.[509] In fact, this memento is transformed from the individual punishment into the fear of an imminent and violent change that might hit

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[506] Freud, S. (1909). *Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis*, In. J. Strachey, tr. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, London: Vintage, vol.10, p.165.

[507] Freud, S. (1909), p.168.

[508] Freud, S. (1909), p.158.

[509] See Freud, S. (1909), p.166: "He expressed himself so indistinctly that I could not immediately guess in what position –'… a pot was turned upside down on his buttocks… some *rats* were put into it….and they…' – he had again got up, and was showing every sign of horror and resistance – '…*bored their way in*….'- Into his anus, I helped him out".

the entire human race, as it is not only limited "to our present life, but also to eternity".[510] The moment the giant rat puppet flashes against Eric's limousine, Vija Kinsky, Eric's Chief of Theory, who is in that moment in the limousine with him, explains to him the reasons for the protest: if successful, they will subvert the capitalistic order, turning the exploiters into the exploited, for which the dead rat acts as a constant warning: "This is a protest against the future" she explains to Eric, "they want to hold off the future. They want to normalise it, keep it from overwhelming the present. The future is always wholeness, a sameness. We are tall and happy there. This is why the future fails. It always fails. It can never be the cruel, happy place we want to make it".[511] This is why in *Cosmopolis* the rat not only stands as a symbol of contamination or exploitation, as previously stressed, but is also embedded in political implications which, according to Nick Heffernan (2007), "implies a desire to reverse the abstracting logic of exchange by re-grounding it in some organically incarnated natural life form, as opposed to Eric's pursuit of an 'evolutionary advance' by pushing money's abstraction to a new level".[512]

This is why the highest metaphorical level with which the image of the rat is associated is prophetically summarised in the opening caption of the movie: "The rat became the unit of currency".[513] This awareness both introduces and foregrounds the dynamics of the film since the beginning, in its ambivalence between the immaterial but ubiquitous power of money and its consequent effects of exploitation in the material world - a kind of exploitation that is here symbolised by the threatening and obsessive image of the dead rat. In addition to this, the balance of this exploitation system ruled by digital finance is about to collapse and break down: the world of *Cosmopolis* is subject to an immediate change, a constant feeling that something is going to happen soon. According to this, Eric too is the prophet of this imminent change: "Why do I see things before they happen?" he keeps on asking himself and

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[510] Freud, S. (1909), p.169.

[511] *Cosmopolis* (Cronenberg, 2012) min. 37-38.

[512] Heffernan, N. (Autumn/Winter 2007). 'Money is talking to itself" – Finance Capitalism in the Fiction of Don DeLillo from 'Players' to 'Cosmopolis', *Critical Engagements: a Journal of Criticism and Theory 1.2*, Vol. 1(2), p.70.

[513] The verse "The rat became the unit of currency" is taken from the poem *Report from a Besieged City* by Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert. This verse is placed as the opening caption in both Cronenberg's film and DeLillo's novel. For extended readings see Herbert, Z. (2010). *The Collected Poems, 1956 – 1998*, London: Harper Collins.

the other characters. However, Eric does not know anything about the dynamics of the change, or what this change is going to result in, he just feels that something is going to happen soon. A possible answer to this obsessive question takes place in the final sequences of the film where the main representatives of the two colliding realities have the chance to meet. This Dantesque face-to-face confrontation still takes place inside the dystopian premises of the city, however temporarily it is removed from the damned crowd. Here, Eric, the highest representative of the exploiting digital finance gets rid of both his security guard and his limousine to meet Benno Levin, the highest representative of the world of the protesters. After remaining completely alone and without the protection of any security guard Eric now becomes the connection between the exploiters and the exploited: in fact, not only has he lost a fortune in just one day, but he has also been physically undertaking a journey through the infernal mass of the rioters. The final sequence reveals to us the moment before the fall. What can this sequence tell us about the prophetic value of the protest in the light of all the considerations outlined before? With regards to the fears of contamination between the world of the exploiters and the world of the exploited, the final sequence reveals Eric to be physically connected to his stalker. This stalker is Benno Levin, a former employee of Eric's company who lost everything and now lives in perpetual disgrace. With this in mind, it is not difficult to assume that Benno and Eric might function as the two shades of this collapsing world. As evidence of this, they are intimately connected by the same asymmetrical prostate, a peculiar inner joint that recalls the image of Ulysses and Diomedes that Dante meets in the XXVIth canto of the *Inferno* and thus some critics have made possible a comparison between Eric Packer the modern figure of a Dantesque Ulysses.[514]

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[514] See e.g. Shehori, S. (2012). 'The off-topic interview: Paul Giamatti', *The Huffington Post*, 17th August. Full text available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/steven-shehori/the-offtopic-interview-pa_b_1775350.html "The two characters are opposite, but there's something very similar about them. They're almost the same guy; the extreme spectrum kind of dovetail and they become the same person in a weird way". See also Orange, M. (2012). 'Cronenberg's Ulysses crosses Manhattan, becomes Person 2.0', *Politico New York*, 17th August. Full text available at: http://www.politico.com/states/new-york/city-hall/story/2012/08/cronenbergs-ulysses-crosses-manhattan-becomes-person-20-067223 "Like the Ulysses of late-capitalist Manhattan, Eric Packer (Robert Pattinson) just wants to get across town". Also see Hearth, G. Jr. (2012). 'Cannes 2012: David Cronenberg's Cosmopolis', *Indiewire*, 25th May. Full text available at: http://www.indiewire.com/2012/05/cannes-2012-david-cronenbergs-cosmopolis-134078/ "During his Ulysses-like journey, Eric's professional and physical worlds quickly collapse".

Clearly, Benno is an intimate part of the world of the exploited. He does not get a job anymore – he is an ugly, overweight man living in a nauseous suburb of the city where the toilet is just a hole in the floor going down through every level of the building. He is simultaneously linked to Eric both at the physical level of the asymmetrical prostate and at the level of Eric's company, an organisation of which he could never make his way to the top. On the other hand, Eric is young, rich and handsome, and is living in a luxurious apartment in the East Side. He has experienced enormous financial loss that day, as well as the burgeoning riot, and he has shown a willingness to proceed with his journey through all this. This strengthens the force that pulls him towards the world of the damned, towards the world of corporeality. As evidence of this, if the world of the exploiters, to which Eric belongs, is ruled by digital dynamics, then at the same time his falling into the damned world is constantly underlined by the insistence of physical acts throughout his journey: his high desire for sex, the constant necessity of eating something and the willing of shooting his own hand during the last sequence with Benno Levin. (Figure 6)
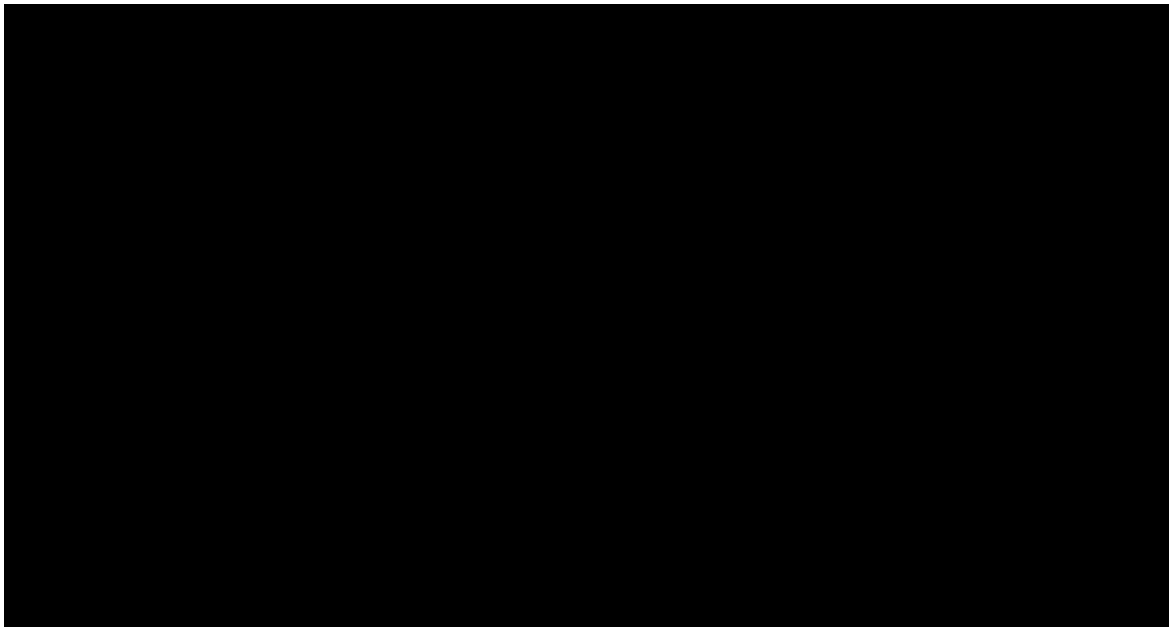

Figure 5.6 - Eric voluntarily shoots his own hand

But despite the fact that a perpetual fall seems to be inevitable, the final confrontation between Eric Packer and Benno Levin - the highest representative of the two poles of the capitalist order ruled by digital marketing which is about to

collapse - does not end with a clear answer. Indeed, the movie ends in a breathtaking cliff-hanger, in which we are not sure whether it is Eric or Benno who dies; neither do we know whether the protest has had any broad or lasting effect. Finally, we remain uncertain about whether the world really has been subverted and if the capitalistic order has eventually collapsed. Nevertheless, the dystopian and infernal world of *Cosmopolis* remains a snapshot of those 21st century societies ruled by the logic of digital capitalism and encourages them to reflect upon the social, financial, environmental and ethical sustainability of its dynamics. In the light of these considerations, what can the reception of *Cosmopolis* tell us about the impact of this movie in relation to a wider understanding of the nature and impact of digital capitalism?

5.4   Out of the White Limousine: *Cosmopolis* and *Occupy Wall Street*

When *Cosmopolis* first came out in 2012, it received a mixed reception. World premiered in the Official Selection at the 65th annual Cannes Film Festival, the film did not receive any significant awards.[515] This kind of apparently indifferent reaction to the film is clear from the main film reviews coming from the leading newspapers in the USA which were published immediately after both the American premiere of the film and its screening at the Cannes Film Festival.[516] Throughout these reviews, we notice a plethora of contrasting voices ranging between the idea that *Cosmopolis* "is a movie that dares you not to like it. I accept that dare"[517] and the accusation that its "story of a spoiled and amoral rich guy who plays by his own rules

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[515] As listed by the film's official IMDB page, between 2012 and 2016 *Cosmopolis* has been nominated for a total of twelve awards, winning only three of them, including the prize "Achievement in Music – Original Score" to Howard Shore and "Achievement in Music – Original Song" to Emily Haines, James Shaw and Howard Shore at the 2013 Canadian Film Awards along with the "Best Supporting Actress in a Canadian Film" to Sarah Gordon at the 2013 Vancouver Film Critics Circle. For a complete list of award nominations see http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1480656/awards?ref_=tt_awd. Moreover, even at the time when this chapter was written in May 2016 - and therefore four years after from the film's first launch - the users of IMDB rated *Cosmopolis* 5/10 stars, showing once more the ambivalent reception of this film in a longer perspective. More specifically, the IMDB data are updated at May 30th, 2016. Total number of votes from online users is 37.331. More info can be found at the film's official IMDB page: http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1480656/

[516] According to The Alliance for Audited Media ranking the 25 most sold daily newspapers in the USA in 2012, in this section I have considered the film reviews published in the top-five *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Post* and finally *The Los Angeles Times*. A more detailed list can be found here: http://auditedmedia.com/news/research-and-data/top-25-us-newspapers-for-september-2012/

[517] Smith, K. (2012). 'Much ado About Nothing', Film Review, *The New York Post*, 17th August, online version available at: http://nypost.com/2012/08/17/much-ado-about-nothing/

is nothing new. Weighed down by inert storytelling, hollow characters and alternatingly pretentious and inane dialogue/non sequiturs, this nihilistic tale of conspicuous consumption is stultifying".[518] The leading newspaper of the West Coast made its mind up: from the pages of *The Los Angeles Times* Betsy Sharkey (2012) bemoaned the manner in which "in this visual world, the debates become pedantic – ranging from esoteric provocation at best to college professor tedious at worst. Since so much of the movie hangs on their power, so goes 'Cosmopolis'".[519]

However, despite these negative evaluations of Cronenberg's *Cosmopolis* in the USA - both in terms of adaptation issues or film aesthetics - the reviews from the main national newspapers seemed to possess a similar urgency: the acknowledgment that the possibility of an economic collapse which is at the foundation of the world of *Cosmopolis* did not differ too much from the one which existed in the West since 2000. As a matter of fact, from the pages of *The Wall Street Journal*, John Anderson (2012) has pointed out how "like the novel, Mr Cronenberg's screen adaptation is keyed to the off-kilter economics of a present-day Manhattan, even if the story is set a few moments in the future".[520] This helps us to shift the main focus of the investigation from an essentially negative reception to the acknowledgment that, in *Cosmopolis*, "the topic is provocative, but certainly timely".[521] This consideration seems to suggest that there might be a deeper link between the film and contemporary political or social discourses. This claim was not an isolated case, but was supported by other film critics writing at the time. In *The New York Times* Manohla Dargis (2012) outlined her position:

"Taken as a commentary on the state of the world in the era of late

[518] Puig, C. (2012). 'Cosmopolis: Snarky, Sermonizing, Bewildering', Film Review, *USA Today*, 16th August, 2012, online version available at: http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/life/movies/reviews/story/2012-08-16/cosmopolis-robert-pattinson/57101504/1

[519] Sharkey, B. (2012) 'Review:'Cosmopolis' Money and Mind Games Spin their Wheels', Film Review, *Los Angeles Times*, 16th August, online version available at: http://articles.latimes.com/2012/aug/16/entertainment/la-et-mn-cosmopolis-review-20120817

[520] Anderson, J. (2012). 'Fine Cosmopolis: Limo on a Slow Road to Hell', Film Review, *The Wall Street Journal*, 16th August . Online version available at http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10000872396390444508504577593201253582894

[521] Sharkey, B. 'Review:'Cosmopolis' Money and Mind Games Spin their Wheels,' Film Review, *Los Angeles Times*, 16th August 16th., Online version available at http://articles.latimes.com/2012/aug/16/entertainment/la-et-mn-cosmopolis-review-20120817

capitalism (for starters), 'Cosmopolis' can seem obvious and almost banal. But these banalities, which here are accompanied by glazed eyes, are also to the point: the world is burning, and all that some of us do is look at the flames with exhausted familiarity."[522]

With this in mind, it is interesting to note how many aspects of the capitalistic apocalypse the film explores which can be taken as a specular and imminent anticipation of the real world. In a similar vein, in an interview released in June 2012 for the British press David Cronenberg commented: "Don [DeLillo] wrote this book 12 years ago and it seems that the world is catching up. It felt like we were making a documentary because everything we were shooting was happening in the streets at the same time".[523] Here the Canadian director is referring to at least two different political episodes. In relation to the first one, in the second half of the film, Eric Packer receives a cream pie in the face from a character named 'The Pastry Assassin', that of an anarchist protester who enacts this kind of political demonstration against the main representatives of the capitalistic power - here embodied by the young multimillionaire - while an accomplished photographer documents the scene in real-time. As this scene was being shot, something remarkably similar was occurring in the real world, when News Corp boss Rupert Murdoch got attacked by what the press has later defined as "part-time stand-up comic"[524] Jonathan May-Bowles, who threw a shave-foam cake in Murdoch's face, while he was intervening at the Culture Media and Sport committee under the world's gaze of CCTV and media cameras.[525] However, despite this individual but apparently limited *deja-vù* bridging fiction and reality, many critics have felt *Cosmopolis* was an anticipation of the Occupy Wall Street movement - a major

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[522] Dargis, M. (2012). 'Master of a Shrinking Universe – 'Cosmopolis', directed by David Cronenberg', Film Review, in *The New York Times* (New York edition), 17th August 17th, 2012, p.C1.

[523] Masters, T. (2012). 'David Cronenberg Says Cosmopolis 'was like Making a Documentary'', *The BBC News*, 14th June. Full text available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-18353385

[524] 'Comedian who Threw a Foam Pie at Rupert Murdoch jailed for Six Weeks', *Daily Mail*, (2nd August 2011). Full text available at: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2021580/Rupert-Murdoch-pie-attacker-Jonathan-May-Bowles-jailed-6-weeks.html

[525] In relation to this specular episode in the real world, Cronenberg has commented: "Paul Giamatti texted me and said: 'You won't believe this, but Rupert Murdoch just got a pie in the face [...] I switched on my TV and there is was, endlessly. We has just shot that scene where our lead character got a pie in the face, so even on that comedic level it was very clairvoyant". In Masters, T. (2012). 'David Cronenberg Says Cosmopolis 'was like Making a Documentary'', *The BBC News*, 14th June. Full text available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-18353385

political protest that was hitting the city of New York in the same weeks the film was being shot and post-produced.[526] According to the overview provided by Sarah Van Gelder (2011), the Occupy Wall Street movement was first "inspired by the Arab Spring and uprisings in Europe"[527] and refers to the massive political protest that eventually gained more power and media attention when it hit Zuccotti Park, in the heart of the financial district of New York City, where the protest held its main base. The movement "named the source of the crisis of our time: Wall Street banks, big corporations, and others among the 1% are claiming the world's wealth for themselves at the expense of the 99% and having their way with our governments".[528] This description of the various movements around the world makes three things evident which are also at the core of the protest of *Cosmopolis*: first, the reasons behind the need of a change in the economic structure are the same; second, both protests involved a huge number of participants; finally, both groups of protestants were able to catalyse mass media attention in real-time and therefore spark the movements of new supporters all around the world. However, despite both protests having their core base in New York, the real Occupy Wall Street movement did not remain confined to the city, but was both inspired by other recent and worldwide similar organisations and also helped to inspire a public change of consciousness towards a necessary political and economical change. However, contrary to the protest of *Cosmopolis*, the Occupy Wall Street-inspired movements did not express their opposition to the ruling system using violent and destructive methods, and instead held a strategic occupation of a few public "spaces" of "symbolic importance",[529] in which they eventually "built an intentional community - attempting to create, in miniature, the kind of society that they wanted to live in – a society that took care of all its members' needs for food, clothing, shelters".[530] In this

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[526] See also e.g. Scott Tobias, who outlined how *Cosmopolis* was "updating DeLillo's book to reflect the contemporary backdrop of Occupy Wall Street" in Tobias, S. (2012). 'Cosmopolis' Captures Decadent Spirit of Age', *NPR,* 16th August. Full text available at: http://www.npr.org/2012/08/16/158871168/cosmopolis-captures-decadent-spirit-of-the-age

[527] Van Gelder, S. (2011). *This Changes Everything: Occupy Wall Street and the 99% Movement*, San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., p.2.

[528] Ibidem, p.2.

[529] Writers for the 99%, (2012). *Occupying Wall Street: The Inside Story of an Action that Changed America*, New York and London: OR Books, p.8.

[530] Ibidem, p.8.

way, these spots that previously symbolised the core of the financial system in the Western metropolis could be turned into a new space, and these new communities could experiment with alternative forms of micro-social and micro-economical dynamics. In fact, here, "the encampments gave them a sense of community and family, as well as set a location to talk to one another and to the press".[531] In relation to this, digital information technologies were used as the main tools to organise and update other similar movements all over the world and to spread the awareness of a need for immediate change. In the fictional world of *Cosmopolis* something different happened. As previously discussed, for the ruling class in the film digital technologies act as the main stronghold of their power and influence in the world. We do not actually see any representative of the protest - nor the mass of the rioters themselves - employing or even displaying a single digital device in the whole film. Indeed, we just see them getting *surrounded* and *affected* by the effects and the impact the ruling class generates through their mastering of the digital sphere. Back in the real world, as the collective 'Writers for the 99%' pointed out (2012), in many cases:

> "while Facebook and Twitter were unevenly censored in some of these countries, many of the protesters carried smartphones – allowing highly organised movements to quickly mobilize massive numbers of people. This partly explains not only the wildfire spread of the 2012 protests but also their preference for non-hierarchical organizing and 'horizontal' decision-making – which resembled online social networking, rather than traditional governing structures".[532]

In this way, we do not just notice how the protesters of the Occupy Wall Street movements could organise and structure their own network through the mastering of the digital sphere too, but also how this kind of organisation – which, contrary to the ruling class of *Cosmopolis* is mostly visible and public – was able to rearrange the economic sphere with alternative and non-hierarchical strategies. Today, five years after the release of *Cosmopolis* and the burst of the Occupy Wall Street-inspired movements the outcomes of this protest are still not easy to identify and evaluate. In an attempt to investigate this ambivalence, the writer Paul Mason (2015) has provided a useful qualitative analysis of the economic changes of the past

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[531] Ibidem, p.8.

[532] Ibidem, p.8.

decade by underlying how:

> "The 2008 crash wiped 13% off global production and 20% off global trade. [...] The solutions have been austerity plus monetary excess. But they are not working. In the worst-hit countries, the pension system has been destroyed, the retirement age is hiked to 70, and education is being privatised so that graduates now face a lifetime of high debt".[533]

In this apparently negative perspective derived from the "absence of any alternative model"[534] the role of the digital sphere - and more specifically within the range of information technology mediated by digital devices – may move once more to the centre of our creation and revision of a new range of economic models. Indeed, "the technology is at the centre of this innovation wave [as] it does not demand the creation of higher-consumer spending, or the re-employment of the old workforce in new jobs".[535] From this perspective, "information is a machine for grinding the price of things lower and slashing the work time needed to support life on planet".[536] Mason is not isolated in his opinion. Scholars such as Alex Stephany (2015) and Dora Francese (2015) have pointed out how, after the global economic crisis hit in 2008, other forms of more sustainable economies have arisen, such as practices of 'sharing economy' and the re-discovery of the 'zero kilometre' production and consumption system, which combines the possibility of sharing goods, producing and consuming locally with the ability to sustain and feed these systems by interconnecting users and consumers through the digital world of smartphone devices and the Internet network.[537] However, while on the one hand,

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[533] Mason, P. (2015). 'The End of Capitalism has Begun', *The Guardian*, 17th July 17th. Full text available at: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jul/17/postcapitalism-end-of-capitalism-begun

[534] Ibidem.

[535] Ibidem.

[536] Ibidem.

[537] See e.g. Stephany, A. (2015). *The Business of Sharing: Making it in the New Sharing Economy*, Houndmills and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, p:.1 "Sharing Economy. This is an economy built on people sharing assets, often ones that they already own. The sharing unlocks value in downtime of those assets. [...] This economy is not only empowering people to share their cars with strangers. Today people are sharing everything from their hard-earned cash and expensive apartments to their beloved pooches. It is an economy that is already estimated to be worth over $15 billion a year" and Francese, D., (2015) *Technologies for Sustainable Urban Design and Bioregionalist Regeneration*, London: Routledge, p.41: "The intersection between globalization and the consumerist society is one of the main issues that the present era faces in order to comprehend the processes of anthropic evolution in the third millennium. [...] Among all the green movements and approaches to the new economy, the conception of zero kilometer materials has become, by now, one of the main goals to be achieved

tycoon entrepreneurs and corporations may still orientate their investments towards practices able to "innovate their way to a new form of capitalism",[538] new practices in more sustainable economies are also considered to be "growing like wildfire".[539] In the light of these considerations, it is not possible to draw a unique conclusion from these very recent economic changes. What is possible to declare is that a movie like *Cosmopolis* was able to describe with incredible precision dynamics of separation, exploitation and violence generated by the economic system ruling its world, which, as we previously saw, had many characteristics in common with the world beyond the cinematic screen in the years in which it was first shot and distributed.

Conclusion

I have argued throughout this chapter that *Cosmopolis* (CAN, FR, ITA, POR, 2012) by David Cronenberg plays a key role in exploring both practices of film adaptation in relationship with digital technologies and the wider impact of the same digital technologies on the political sphere. On the one hand, this final example has shown – as well as Milano Film's *Inferno* (ITA, 1911) and Pasolini's *Salò* (ITA, 1975) did in the previous chapters - how practices of film adaptation cannot be taken only as a one-way oriented process starting from the literary page and ending up to the cinematic screen. Indeed, the complexity of the phenomenon emerges throughout the preliminary requirements dealing with the various dynamics around the intertextual dialogue that influences both the different literary sources and their re-worked cinematic production. In exploring the adaptation process of *Cosmopolis*, we identified the various ways through which Dante's infernal imagery has first been remediated by the novel of Don DeLillo and then re-worked within the dystopian scenario of a 21st-century-hyper-technological New York City. Further, the subsequent focus on the practical stage of the screenwriting process has discovered once more the necessity for the screenwriter to cope with the issue of fidelity. Despite Cronenberg's *Cosmopolis* preserving the dialogic parts as intact and almost unchanged, whilst maintaining the quasi-totality of the storyline, the theoretical

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with any sustainable urban policy".

[538] Mason, P. (2015).

[539] Stephany, A. (2015), p.1.

interpretation of the faithfulness of this specific film adaptation shows the complexity of the phenomenon of film adaptation and accepts Dicecco's invitation (2015) to reconsider the issue of fidelity from more than just an aesthetic angle.[540] The subsequent shooting and editing phases show how filming on a digital camera not only represents a mere aesthetic choice, indeed it also represents the privileged medium through which re-thinking the cinematic experience becomes both possible and necessary. A further evaluation of the impact of digital technologies in relation to the remediation of Dante's infernal imagery has been conducted in the third section of the chapter, where the investigation of the image of digital technologies in the film has taken us to an understanding of their implications as they intertwine with the dynamics of economic regulation and subsequent mass-exploitation. Finally, the reception of this film has shown in the last section of this chapter, *Cosmopolis* cannot be considered as confined only within its fictional premises. Indeed, it plays a key example of how films can have a profound impact beyond the screen, functioning both as a mimetic mirror and as a productive invitation to both investigate the complexity of the present and propose possible sustainable changes for the future.

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[540] Dicecco, N. (2015). 'State of Conversation: The Obscene Underside of Fidelity', in *Adaptation* Vol.8(2), Oxford: Oxford University Press., as previously discussed in the Literature Review.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to investigate the compelling legacy of Dante-inspired infernal imagery in the cinema of the digital era (2005-2015), more than seven centuries after the poem's first circulation. The main inspiration for this study came from the 750th anniversary of Dante's birth celebrated in 2015 and a developing awareness that investigating the digital as an apparatus and not solely as sterile technology leads Film Adaptation Studies towards a necessary revision of its core theoretical approaches. As a result, after discussing the limits of a merely aesthetic investigation, particular focus was then put to instead evaluating the cultural, social and political outcomes derived from practices of adaptation in the digital era from an intertextual, intermedial and transnational perspective. The main film case studies considered throughout this work were *Inferno* (Milano Films, ITA, 1911); *Salò - 120 Days of Sodom* (P. P. Pasolini, ITA, 1975) and *Cosmopolis* (D. Cronenberg, FR, POR, ITA, CAN, 2012).

Throughout the chapters of this thesis, and more specifically in the Literature Review, this work situates itself within current academic debates. Chapter One has evaluated the seminal importance of Geoffrey Wagner's work which first established the field of Film Adaptation Studies in the mid 1970's.[541] We could see that this kind of theoretical framework aimed to explore the phenomenon mainly by complying with the issue of fidelity, therefore identifying and debating what narrative components remain as unchanged in the transfer process between literature and cinema. This approach moved within the discourse of medium specificity and involved the centrality of the 'reference text' in the comparative evaluation of literature and film adaptations. For this reason, this approach has been defined as being predominantly *text-centered*. I have also evaluated a possible counterargument which addresses the issue of fidelity as the authority of the text and the perception of the audience - by repositioning adaptation as the ability to perceive the literary precedents in the spectatorship experience. As a result, I highlighted the impossibility of tracing the origin of images with impeccable

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[541] Wagner, G. (1975). *The Novel and the Cinema*, Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, as previously discussed in Chapter One.

precision. I then defined this issue as the *adaptation paradox*. This should not, however, prevent scholars from further investigating the impact of adaptations beyond the screen, especially in the social and political sphere. With this in mind, Chapter One has further explored the branch of Film Adaptation Studies which have challenged the aforementioned *text-centered* framework through an assessment of the the intertextual and intermedial relationships that occur in practices of adaptation, accounting also for the seminal role played by digital technologies in redefining and questioning the relativity of media boundaries.**[542]** I have also argued along the same line the contributions of Syd Field and Francis Vanoye that one of the main weaknesses of the broad field of Film Adaptation Studies throughout the decades was the underestimation of the screenwriting contribution in practices of film adaptation.[543] Finally, by keeping in mind the seminal contribution of Jacques Rancière's theory of the image, I have shown the complexity of the sole visual perception of imageries and their possible cultural implications.[544] I have thus identified in Dante's *Inferno* a need to understand the social and political spheres.

Likewise, in the past two decades the parallel field of Dante Studies has been progressively rethinking the exclusive centrality of the *Commedia* as a piece of literature in practices of adaptations of Dante-inspired infernal imagery on the screen. Instead, greater consideration has been applied to exploring the plethora of interrelations that exists among the different arts and media**.** This revised perspective promoted by the works of Amilcare A. Iannucci, Antonella Braida and Luisa Calé has also resulted in a more comprehensive understanding of the transnational, social and political impact of the the infernal imagery through practices of adaptation and therefore this model represented the core upon which I

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[542] See e.g. Bolter, J.D. (1999). *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, London, Cambridge: The MIT Press; Bruhn, J., Gjelsvik, A. and Hanssen F.E. (2013). *Adaptation Studies - New Challenges, New Directions*, London: Bloomsbury and Hutcheon L. and O'Flynn S., (2013). *A Theory of Adaptation*, New York: Routledge, as previously discussed in Chapter One.

[543] See e.g. Field, S. (1998). *Screenplay - The Foundation of Screenwriting*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group; Field, S. (1984). *Selling a Screenplay, The Screenwriter's Guide to Hollywood*, New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group; Field, S. (2003), *The Definitive Guide to Screenwriting*, London: Ebury Press and Vanoye F. (1991). *Scénarios Modèles, Modèles de Scénarios*, Paris: Armand Colin Cinema, as previously discussed in Chapter One.

[544] Rancière, J. (2013). *The Future of the Image*, London: Verso, as seen in the Introduction to this study.

developed my research.[545]

With this in mind, Chapter Two further showed that both Film Adaptation and Dante Studies are not mutually exclusive within academia. On the contrary, the constantly burgeoning adaptations remediating the infernal imagery contribute to nourishing and enriching the current debates. Among others, the seminal cases of *The Divine Comedy - Translated by Clive James*, Roberto Benigni's *Tutto Dante* show and the selection of Youtube fan tributes which have been considered, prove that many adaptations keep appearing in the digital era, and especially in 2005-2015, on which this thesis placed its focus.[546] Interestingly, we find that this phenomenon relates equally to the branches of official cultural industries in the West and the spontaneous production of popular culture. In the past few years, this growing awareness has contributed to encouraging the academic world to redefine their theoretical lenses and chart the boundaries of the different arts and dynamics of media interaction. Thus the infernal matter was chosen as the suitable tool through which to explore this phenomenon. In the first instance, this work has consistently addressed its enquiries towards the ways the digital intervenes in the creation and conservation of infernal images on the cinematic screen. However, the adaptation process does not only intervene to redefine aspects of film aesthetics. This is the main reason why this thesis has also explored the social and political influence of these films in the contemporary era, helped or hindered by the intervention of digital technologies. For these reasons, this thesis has adopted a suitable methodology – here defined as being predominantly *image-based* – through which it was possible to better evaluate the impact of the digital in the creation and conservation of the infernal imagery first, and concomitantly explore its social and political outcomes beyond cinema. This methodological approach has involved combining contemporary elements of film production of the age where the selected films were

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[545] See Casadio, G. (1995). *Dante nel Cinema - Dante and Cinema*, Ravenna: Longo Editore; Iannucci A. A. (2004). *Dante, Cinema and Television*. Toronto-Buffalo-London: University of Toronto Press and Braida A. and Calé L. (2007). *Dante on View*, London: Ashgate, as previously discussed in Chapter One.

[546] See James, C. (2013). *The Divine Comedy - Translated by Clive James*, London: Picador. See also Benigni R., *Tutto Dante Show* (ITA, 2006-2015). See also MugglebornSweethart (2007). *Barbie's Inferno*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBMzUPmSS1k&t=36s (Accessed 30/01/2017); Allmanknack (2011). *Lego Dante's Inferno*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97_IhOr4dMc&t=33s (Accessed 30/01/2017) and finally alexgwaller (2007). *Dante's Inferno (Clay Animation 16mm)*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XW8L7O8qGgg (Accessed 30/01/2017), as previously discussed in Chapter Two.

first produced with moments of film analysis, and evaluating the circulation and the reception of these films beyond the screen. The relevance of this methodology is enhanced by the fact that no other consistent study on Dante and the cinematic screen in the digital era have been produced in the academic world yet. This pioneering approach merging Dante and Film Adaptation Studies together through the centrality of the cinematic images in the digital era is in fact the essence of the contribution to knowledge of this work, and I hope it will inspire others to follow this path.

Building upon these premises, the impact of the digital on the remediation of the infernal imagery through the cinematic screen was further explored in Chapters Three, Chapter Four and Chapter Five, each one dedicated to one of the selected film case studies. In particular, Chapter Three traced the steps of the birth of the infernal imagery inspired by Dante's *Commedia* on the cinematic screen in conjunction with the birth of the Italian film industry. As previously discussed, many scholars and critics have elected Milano Films' *Inferno* (ITA, 1911) as the greatest expression of this phenomenon, taken as the very first Italian *kolossal* that remediated the infernal imagery with the creative power of the cinematic medium. Its incredible success at the time was not confined to only Italy but also internationally, and, specifically, in the USA. Its influence did not only contribute to corroborating the experimental and creative nature of the cinematic medium itself, but also inspired other American directors with diverse backgrounds, among which African-American director Spencer Williams is a clear example. The case of his *Go Down Death!* (USA, 1944) is seminal in being circulated internationally several years from Milano Films' *Inferno* (ITA, 1911) first release in Italian and American cinemas, and shows how practices of film adaptation do not necessarily involve the centrality of the 'reference text' in the film adaptation process. Rather, images and imageries can also circulate specifically through the cinematic medium and might well end up manifesting as other movies. Through this renewed circulation, infernal images therefore gain new meanings and interpretations, playing a fundamental role in the construction of audiences' identities, far beyond the original Italian context. Further, this chapter went on to chronicle digital technologies' interventions in practices of film conversion between 2005 and 2015. These can occur within official institutions such as - among others -

Cineteca Bologna. The launch of the restored edition of Milano Films *Inferno* (ITA, 1911) as a DVD edition is a prime example.[547] Finally, the case of the Riverbends Channel and its playlist including a non-restored version of Williams' *Go Down Death!* (USA, 1944) have shown how unofficial and non-governmental institutions have also employed digital platforms to renew the circulation of these films between 2005 and 2015.[548]

Parallel to the positive intervention of digital media in providing new forms of accessibility to films produced in the analogue era, Chapter Four has further shown that technologies might also be employed in practices of film censorship. The pivotal example of Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò – 120 Days of Sodom* (ITA, 1975) was investigated in the light of the fortieth anniversary of the director's brutal murder and the film's first release. This chapter assessed the history of the film's hampered circulation over the past four decades both at a national and international level. At the beginning of the new millennium, even if governmental institutions have progressively retracted their restrictive policies on Pasolini's final work and instead contributed to producing several DVD editions and restorations. In 2015 the Internet has become the new means with which to hamper its availability. In fact, the obscurantist practice of not providing information of the only screening of the film in Rome and the suspension of Gabriele Muccino's Facebook account provide new insight into the ambivalent use of digital technologies in practices of film circulation, and especially in affecting the social and political results of *Salò*'s forty-year anniversary.[549]

Finally, considering the role films play in bringing political awareness to their audiences, Chapter Five showed how digital techniques can also be employed in the actual production of cinematic images and not exclusively in relation to practices of film restoration and conversion, as discussed instead in Chapter Three and

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[547] *Inferno* (Milano Films, ITA, 1911) - DVD edition by Cineteca Bologna, ITA, 2011. As discussed in Chapter Three.

[548] The Riverbends Channel (2012). *Go Down Death! (1944) Spencer Williams Film*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSoUctLslis&t=61s (Accessed 01/02/2017), as previously discussed in Chapter Three.

[549] See Gabriele Muccino's official Facebook page available at https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100009886084386&fref=ts (Accessed 30/01/2017), as previously discussed in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four. This contributing factor should not be underestimated, as shooting on digital has recently become the main filmmaking praxis in the West. This final chapter investigated how digital images remediating the infernal imagery on the screen may have a profound impact in contemporary societies, as they may operate as mementos and prophecies in relation to the possible forthcoming collapse of the capitalist order. The seminal case of David Cronenberg's *Cosmopolis* (FR, POR, ITA, CAN, 2012) has shown once more how practices of film adaptation cannot be considered exclusively as a one-way process, starting from the literary page and terminating at the cinematic screen. Rather, they should be read as a creative process that equally affects all stages of film production and distribution, without forgetting the social and political impact beyond cinema. This common thread is enhanced by the varied potential of the digital which is able to connect practices of screenwriting directly to film audiences, providing mutual nourishment and engagement in each direction. This evidence should therefore orient the academic world towards a greater understanding of this complexity, with a comprehensive eye on both film aesthetics and films' political and social impact. With its unquestionable success and never-ending source of inspiration among different centuries, media and audiences, Dante's infernal imagery has represented for this work the material to complete this investigation and, hopefully, to take the academic investigation into new territory.

This should be particularly relevant as, building upon the last decade, since 2015 the field of Adaptation Studies seems to be constantly growing in terms of conferences and publications.[550] At the same time, adaptations of Dante's imagery continue to grow worldwide, as the seven-year project *Dante2021* shows. In Italy, this cycle of events, which aims to celebrate the 700th anniversary of Dante's death, is already being organised.[551] However, as the history of the past seven centuries have shown, this phenomenon is not exclusively limited to Italy. Rather, it continues to be

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[550] In 2017 alone two major publications are expected to be issued. The first one is Hermansson, C. (2017). *Where is Adaptation?*, USA: John Benjamin Publishing Company along with Grossman J. and Barton-Palmer R. (2017). *Adaptation and Visual Culture: Images, Texts and Their Multiple Worlds*, UK-USA: Palgrave MacMillan. In terms of conferences see e.g. The 12th Annual Conference of the Association of Adaptation Studies which is going to be held in Leicester, 18-19 September 2017 or the new *Film Adaptation: Theory, Practice, Reception* conference which is going to be held in Thessaloniki, Greece, May 25-27 2017. For a more comprehensive list of the conferences promoted by the Association of Adaptation Studies see www.adaptation.co.uk

[551] As we can acknowledge from the official website www.dante21.it where it is possible to read the full list of events programmed up to 2016, *Dante21* counts the support of many governmental institutions such as the High Sponsorship of the President of the [Italian] Republic.

felt on an international level. After 2015 films like Ron Howard's *Inferno*[552] in the USA and the play *Dante's Inferno*[553] by Synthetic Theatre in Crystal City, Virginia seem to confirm this trend. Parallel to this, it will also be important to keep an eye on the ways audiences and fans respond to the spontaneous production of adaptations, which I am confident will start to appear very soon.

Limitations of the Study and Future Perspectives

While I dedicated myself to complete this investigation with rigour and coherence, I am also aware that this work may present a number of issues. First of all, this thesis does not aim to provide an exhaustive investigation on the phenomenon of film adaptation, nor on the specific case of the remediation of Dante's imagery through the cinematic screen. Such a claim would in fact be hazardous and ignorant of the complexity of the phenomenon, which features constant and unpredictable change at the core of its essence and nature. Rather, this study aimed to question the employment of the criterion of fidelity through only aesthetic lenses and instead to actively use it in combination with other methods belonging to film studies. This predominantly *image-based* approach, shifting the investigation from the centrality of the 'reference text' towards a greater attention for the ways infernal images are remediated and circulate through the cinematic screen has developed through three seminal films with an intermedial perspective in order to address the complexity of the digital in practices of film adaptation. A second claim might be addressed specifically towards the methodology applied to this work which, as it ranges across the branches of film history, film analysis and reception, could be considered of being too general. This is the reason why, despite the fact that the films considered were first produced in different decades and national contexts, this investigation has been

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[552] *Inferno* (R. Howard, USA, 2016). The film is based on Dan Brown's homonym novel. The film cast includes the Oscar-winning Tom Hanks and co-star Felicity Jones. According to the film official IMDB page available at http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3062096/ the "75 million dollar" budget film earned an estimated "14.860.425" dollars in the first release weekend, in October 2016.

[553] *Dante's Inferno* (USA, 2016), created by Paata Tsikurishvili and director: Irina Tsikurishvili. Synthetic Theater, Theater at Crystal City, Arlington, Virginia, USA, September 28th – October 30th, 2016. Following the description available at the theatre's official website, the play is a "revitalized, wordless version of Synetic's emotionally-charged production promises to be a wicked whirlwind of stunning visuals, hauntingly vivid original music, and powerful physicality. This production will not have dialogue". Full info available at http://synetictheater.org/event_pages/dantes-inferno/

narrowed down to the decade 2005-2015, finding in the rapid proliferation of digital technologies the perfect means with which to reconsider the transnational and historical dialectic through the redefinition of aspects of film production, conversion, distribution and reception. In addition and in support of the research methods adopted, this thesis has proved that this predominantly *image-based* approach was not randomly superimposed to the selected film case studies. Rather, the assessment of the three case studies itself has proved that a multidisciplinary methodology is much needed in the contemporary debate to evaluate practices of film adaptation with a transnational and transhistorical perspective, in order to better comprehend the complexity of film adaptation in the digital era, simultaneously impacting aspects of film production, circulation and reception beyond the screen. Another final claim might be addressed towards the limited number of Dante's inspired films considered in this thesis. As previously discussed in Chapter One, I am aware that other films could have been included in this project, such as *Francesca da Rimini* (U. Morais, ITA, 1908); *Francesca da Rimini* (U. Falena, ITA, 1910); *Inferno* (Psyche-Helios, ITA, 1911); *Back to God's Country* (D. M. Hartford, 1919); *The Drums of Love* (D. Griffith, USA, 1928); *Paolo e Francesca* (R. Matarazzo, ITA, 1949); *Se7en* (D. Fincher, USA, 1995); *Taxi Driver* (M. Scorsese, USA, 1976); *Illuminated Texts* (B. Elder, CAN, 1982); *The Devil Advocate* (T. Hackford, USA, 1997); and *Deconstructing Harry* (W. Hallen, USA, 1998). However, the selection has been made by prioritising those adaptations whose impact on the social and political sphere have been heavily actualised by the intervention of digital technologies in the years between 2005 and 2015 and this is the case of both Milano Film's *Inferno* and Pasolini's *Salò.* Equally, I have also included those films produced directly in the digital era which have addressed the issue of ethics towards the mastering of the digital and acts of mass exploitation. This is the case of Cronenberg's *Cosmopolis*, which has also shawn the dialectic between the cinematic screen and contemporary social and political discourses and this is why, above the others, this film has been chosen as the conclusive focus of this study.

For these reasons, in the light of these outcomes and despite its possible theoretical and methodological limits, I hope this research would still be of inspiration to different readers. First, I hope this work would inspire both young and more experienced scholars specialising in Adaptation and/or Dante's Studies who

would like to adopt a *transnational* and *intermedial* perspective when exploring the impact of adaptations in the digital era. I believe that the current field would certainly benefit from more studies oriented towards evaluating the ways technologies are employed by production companies, governmental institutions and different audiences. This would help the academic world investigate practices of film production, conversion, conservation and circulation in the light of this interconnected context. Secondly, I hope this work would interest film critics or simply film lovers with no academic background who would like to trace the steps of cinematic imageries among different media. I hope this work has proven that the creation and the circulation of cinematic images are the product of historical, social, political and technological factors. Finally, I hope this work would be of inspiration to peer screenwriters, who - like me as a young professional – are exposed almost on a daily basis to the limitative hierarchies of the many film industries, constantly apportioning insubstantial cuts of the budget on the 'immaterial' contribution of this category of professionals. I hope this research will encourage them to start thinking of the profession with a broader awareness of the academic world and on how practices of screenwriting and adaptation do not necessarily imply the overwhelming centrality of the 'reference text', but, on the contrary, may also start from pre-existing footage. In light of this awareness, I hope this research may help to restore the centrality of their creativity to the unique contribution that practices of writing for the cinematic screen does play, more than ever, in the digital era.

APPENDIX

Detail of the *Index of the Prohibited Books*, published in 1747 by the Catholic Church and currently archived at Drew University Library, Madison NJ, USA.
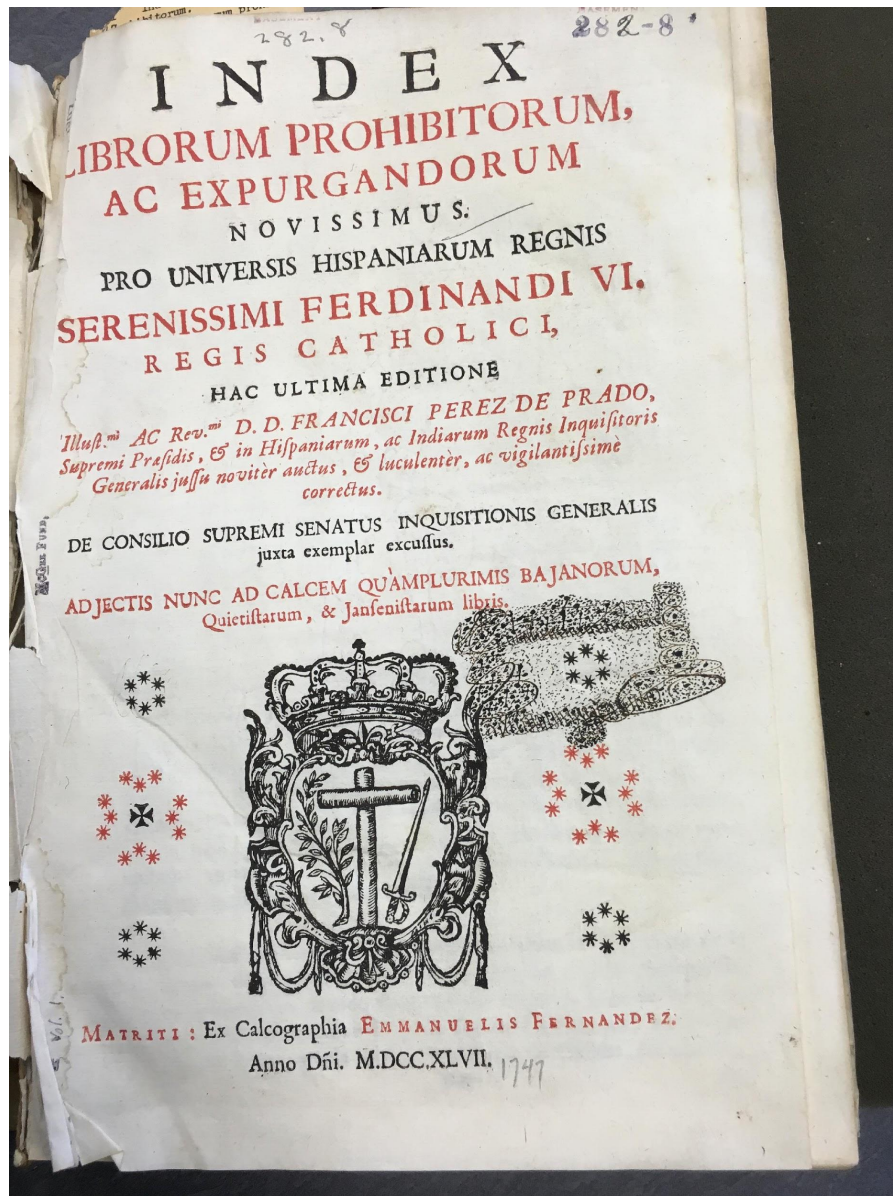
Figure 1 - *Index of Prohibited Books:* Cover Page

DIEGO de Saa, y Fr. DOMINGO Baltanas,
Como arriba fe dixo en Caftellano.

EN ITALIANO.

El Dante con expofitioni de Chriftopho-
ro Landino , & de Aleffandro Velutello , fo-
pra la fua Comedia , &c. En Venecia
por Gio Battifta 1596.

En el Canto 1. del infierno, fol. 8. col. 1.
defpues de *Dove è Roma , la quale* , quitefe
hafta *E piu oppreffa di quefti*, excluf. — En el
Canto 3. del infierno , fol. 17. defpues de
altra Schiera di anime , quitefe hafta *Giunti
poi fu* , excluf. — Cant. 3. fol. 20. col. 3.
defpues de *refiuto da duratione* , quitefe haf-
ta *& arrogano che piu* , excluf. — Col. 4. def-
pues de *Effemptio fenza nome* , quitefe hafta
o forfe fece , excluf. — Canto 3. fol. 21. col.
1. defpues de *refiuto per viltà*, quitefe *in con-
tanenti intelfi* , excluf. — Canto 10. del in-
fierno , fol. 60. col. 6. al fin de *ridurgi à la
luce* , quitefe hafta *Ovis enim errabunda* , ex-
cluf. — Canto 11. del infierno , fol. 65. def-
pues de *grandifsima puzza* , quitefe hafta *in-
tende de Virgilio* , excluf. — Canto 11. y fol.
65. pag. 1. en Dante , defpues de una *fcritta
che diceba* , quitefe hafta *lo noftro fcender* , ex-
cluf. — Canto 11. fol. 65. col. 2. defpues de
fi à grave fetore , quitefe hafta el fin de la
expoficion, que acaba , *qui peccat, habetur.* —
Canto 11. fol. 65. col. 3 defpues de *De un
grande avello* , quitefe hafta *& qui vi per
affuefarfi*, excluf. — En la col. 4. defpues de
di un grande avello , quitefe hafta el fin de la
expoficion, que acaba , *qui peccat, habetur.* —
Canto 19. del infierno , en Dante , fol. 102.
pag. 1. defpues de *Levando i pravi* , qui-
tefe hafta *& mentre gli cantava* , excluf. —
Canto 19. fol. 102. col. 1. que comienza,
Uvole in quefto luogo , quitefe hafta *mentre
che io gli cantava* , cafi al fin de la column. 3.
excluf. — Canto 19. y fol. 102. col. 3. fe
quite defde el principio de la expoficion,
que comienza ; *Il poeta fpone* , hafta *& me-*

Xy 2 *tre*

Figure 2 - *Index of the Prohibited Books:* **The banning of the Commedia**

Chapter Three

Interview with Alessandro Marotto and Andrea Meneghelli – Cineteca Bologna

1.   **Please introduce yourself and explain the role you have played in the 2006 restoration and digitalisation of the film *Inferno* (Milano Films, ITA, 1911)**

MAROTTO: My name is Alessandro Marotto. In 2007 I supervised all the technical aspects of the restoration of the movie. These aspects include: first, the comparative analysis of the photographic elements of all the film copies that were available to us. Second, the critical choice of the photographic material to be employed in the restoration process. Third, the duplication of the selected material in order to reconstruct the negative of the restored edition. I have personally worked on the digitalization of all the Italian titles and captions (which were based on the ones found in the Bulgarian copy coming from Sofia). I then printed out all the positive copies in 35mm that were subsequently circulated for the film screening. The restoration process was carried out entirely with the photochemical procedure – this included also all the captions that have been reconstructed digitally and subsequently printed on photographic paper and reported on a specific machine. The digitalisation was then realised by scanning the restored edition and the colors were then reconstructed on the restored 35mm positive copy by working on a color correction post. The restoration was carried out in 2007 and the subsequent DVD edition was distributed in 2011.

MENEGHELLI: My name is Andrea Meneghelli, I work at Cineteca Bologna. Here I take care of film collections. My work here deals with film collection, conservation, cataloguing and distribution.
I haven't taken part personally in the restoration and the digitalisation of *Inferno* (Milano Films, ITA, 1911) made by L'Immagine Ritrovata Lab. However, I have curated the subsequent DVD edition and taken part in its distribution, both film-based and digital-based, at various film screenings.

2.   **Could you please explain the reasons for restoring this film in particular?**

MAROTTO: Restoring *Inferno* (Milano Films, ITA, 1911) was an ethical responsibility. In fact, *Inferno* (Milano Films, ITA, 1911) is the most important Italian movie of the whole Silent Phase. This film changed everything back in those days: it revolutionised the idea of cinema itself, in both its production and distribution dynamics.

MENEGHELLI: Cineteca Bologna has always been involved in the restoration and consequently in the rediscovery of the Italian Cinema of the Silent Phase. *Inferno* (Milano Films, ITA, 1911) is considered as a cornerstone of the Italian Film Industry (and, by quoting Prof. Michele Canosa who is one of the biggest experts of Italian Cinema of the Silent Phase: "*Inferno* is a unique and extraordinary film. After

it, cinema won't be the same anymore"). Before our restored edition, you could only find a few incomplete copies, which were very different from the film screened in 1911. Moreover, these copies were all black and white and the quality of the prints was generally very poor. This is why we decided to produce our new restored edition of the film.

3. **Which organisations financed the restoration and the DVD edition of *Inferno* (Milano Films, ITA, 1911) and what was the budget invested in this project?**

MAROTTO: The restoration has been entirely financed by Cineteca Bologna (now Foundation). I cannot calculate the exact budget, but I would say it was in the region of the tens of thousands euros circa. This was for the restoration process only. The digitalisation was then a much easier and less expensive process.

MENEGHELLI: Moreover, for the realisation of the DVD edition we could also count on the financial contribution provided by of Edison Studio. (For a more detailed explanation of this, please see answer to question n.5)

4. **How many people took part into this project and where did they come from?**

MAROTTO: First of all, we had to collect all the available copies of the film in order to start a comparative analysis for the restoration. These copies came from different film archives and, in particular from the British Film Institute of London, the Danish Film Institute of Copenhagen, the Bulgarska Nacionalna Filmoteka of Sofia, USA, Montreal and Rome. After collecting these copies all Film Institutes stopped to play an 'active role' in the restoration process. In fact, this work was then entirely carried out in Bologna, at the film laboratory named *L'Immagine Ritrovata*. There, our team of experts and technicians was composed of 5-7 people. Of course, all of them might have then asked other experts for advice or consultancy.

MENEGHELLI: It is interesting to point out that the first stage of the restoration process, meaning the collection of the 14 copies analysed, was possible only thanks to the cooperation of different Film Institutes belonging to the FIAF network, to which Cineteca Bologna belongs as well.

5. **After the restoration, the movie has been digitalised and distributed in DVD, in a special edition that was also curated by Cineteca Bologna. Could you please indicate all the steps involved in the digital conversion of this restored edition?**

MAROTTO: For a more detailed explanation of this please see point 1.) However, we scanned the negative countertype with an APRI scanner. After the digitalisation we operated the colour correction (imbibitions and toning) straight on to the digital draft by following the restored 35mm copy.

MENEGHELLI: The digitalisation didn't cause any particular problem. The initial material for the digitalisation was indeed very good, as it came from a restored film tape. Consequently, the digital conversion didn't really need any complicated intervention. The same happened for the two short films we included in the extras of the DVD (these two short films can be considered as a "variation" on the infernal theme, that of the comedy "Come fu che l'ingordigia rovinò il Natale a Cretinetti" and the fable "Il diavolo zoppo"). These two short films have been digitalised from two film-based copies that were previously restored analogically. For the DVD edition we decided to also incorporate two different soundtracks – as the film-based restored copy is in fact mute. However, it is still possible to watch the movie on DVD without any soundtrack. The first one contained in the DVD is a piano soundtrack composed by Marco Dalpane, while the second one is more experimental, and produced by Edison Studio. It is important to underline that the realisation of the DVD edition of *Inferno* (Milano Films, ITA, 1911) came from Edison Studio, which also partly founded the project.

6.   **To what extent do digital technologies intervene in the restoration techniques of films belonging to the Silent Phase, like *Inferno* (Milano Films, ITA, 1911)?**

MAROTTO: Nowadays, digital technologies and digital techniques are very helpful in the process of film restoration. Unfortunately for us, when we carried out the restoration of *Inferno* (Milano Films, ITA, 1911) in 2007, we were employing the new digital techniques of restoration in a very experimental way, rather than with a unified range of aware methodologies. However, if back in 2007 we could have used the set of digital techniques and technologies available in 2015, it would have helped us to make all the photographic material employed for the final restored copy more homogeneous. In fact, in order to approve the final version of the restored copy, we originally had to employ several frames coming from different copies of the 1910s (and that was possible only because all these copies came from the same negative). Of course, the photographic definition of the different copies is very heterogeneous. Consequently, this set of differences is visible and audible in our restored edition. With the set of digital technologies available in 2015 we could have minimised these differences.

MENEGHELLI: With *Inferno* (Milano Films, ITA, 1911) we cannot properly say that we operated a *digital* restoration. In fact the restoration process was carried entirely analogically, that of from film-tape to film-tape. Subsequently, we have converted the restored film in digital.

7. **After completing the restoration of *L'Inferno* (Milano Films, ITA, 1911), how did you promote the movie inside and outside the Italian territory? In particular, in which occasions was the movie screened and what was the audience response to the screening?**

MAROTTO: The restored movie had a very limited distribution in Italy, and it was even more limited out of Italy I think. However, we registered a positive response and especially when the movie was screened with an orchestra playing live.
The DVD edition contains also a booklet in Italian. In conclusion, our restored edition has been appreciated much more by experts and intellectuals rather than by a wider and more popular audience.

MENEGHELLI: We presented the movie at Cinema Ritrovato Festival in 2007 (where the restored film has been screened to the public for the first time). We held special screenings in the following cities: Berna, Zurich, Florence, Canberra, Rome, Milan, Paris, South Brisbane, Bruxelles, Mumbai. Edison Studio has organised a series of cine-concerts in and out of Italy.

8. **Was the restored movie then distributed in cinema theatres? If yes, what was the audience response? If not, why didn't you decide to distribute it in cinema theatres too? What main obstacles for its distribution in cinema theatres did you face?**

MAROTTO: The restored movie has not been distributed in cinema theatres, but only screened in a few festivals or celebrations of Dante, or during some events related to live sound sync. I think there has never been an interest in re-distributing this movie in cinema theatres, or maybe no one has ever believed in this kind of option. I believe too this film should not be distributed in cinema theatres, except for some special occasions. There are no particular obstacles for this, but I strongly believe this film would interest only film experts and therefore would not reach a wider audience.

MENEGHELLI: The restored film did not have a mass-scale distribution in cinema theatres. It was just screened in special events, such as the ones reported above.

9. **Could you please provide any data related to the number of copies sold of your DVD edition (e.g. number of copies sold, countries that have bought more copies etc.)**

MENEGHELLI: We sold around 2500 DVDs. Our distribution related just to a few Italian film stores. We allow costumers out of Italy to order the DVD online through our official website but I don't know

the exact data about the international orders.

10. **Are you aware of any possible pirated copies of your restored edition that might be circulating illegally on the Internet? If so, how have you dealt with this phenomenon?**

MAROTTO: We don't exclude that there might be some pirated copies of our restored edition currently circulating on the Internet. However, no one inside of our company has complained about this side phenomenon. *Inferno* (Milano Films, ITA, 2011) is not a box-office movie and relates only to a specific and selected audience. It doesn't generate a high income. Consequently, we haven't adopted any particular protection towards the circulation of our movie, apart from the routine ones.

MENEGHELLI: We are aware of that but we didn't adopt any particular protection. Personally, I don't think it is necessary, pirate downloading and streaming are physiological factors and the current no-piracy strategies are evidently ineffective. Moreover, we are talking about a mute Italian film from 1911 and I don't think that pirate downloading might affect too much the income of the official DVD distribution or of any possible screening events.

11. **On Youtube we can find at least another digitalised version of the movie, which was uploaded by independent users and without reporting any official source. Is it possible for you to recognise the original copy and would you be able to say whether this is one of the copies you took into account in your restoration process?**
(See the following links https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oP-wgPyawsQ or https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VoCnN1qCCb8&list=PL5BA0D14445FDCF2B).

MAROTTO: All the copies available at the links provided are American, and more specifically, they relate to the re-distribution of the film in the 1920s in the US. We have considered many of them (American edition of the 1920s) when we were first collecting all the available copies. And these ones which you linked are similar to the ones we have considered at the beginning of our research. However, I cannot affirm precisely whether they are exactly the same we could physically handle. Despite that, this was not a fundamental element for our restoration edition as the aim of our project was to reconstruct the 1911 Italian first release and not the American re-distribution of the 1920s. In fact, the American ones present very inaccurate captions and titles, they generally have a very bad photographic quality and contain several gaps, as they were, obviously, all reprints.

12. **As Cineteca Bologna aims to preserve and promote Italian cinema worldwide. What is the significance of the restoration, the digitalisation and the commercialization in**

digitalising this movie?

MAROTTO: Going digital allows for a new fruition of movies: a different one, but still more accessible.

MENEGHELLI: I think digital technologies are an extraordinary tool to spread cinema culture, and this should be one of the main aims of each film institute. Digital opens to new distributional and developmental perspectives that were not possible until a few years ago. However, I support less the effectiveness of digital technologies if employed for conservational purposes in the long term. Maybe this is just my own personal opinion, and maybe time will prove me wrong.

Chapter Four

Gabriele Muccino's Facebook post on Pasolini's, Malibu, 4ᵗʰ November 2015

"Pier Paolo Pasolini.

I have been reading a lot about him at the moment. Everywhere. Let me speak my mind, what I think since I started dreaming about becoming, one day, a director. I was eighteen and had many role models that are still of inspiration, and very great ones too.

I know that what I am about to say will sound unpopular and maybe, sacrilegious? However, despite loving Pasolini as a thinker, journalist and writer, I have always thought that Pasolini as a director was in the wrong place, or better, simply a 'non' film director, who used the camera in an amateur mode, without any style, without a purely cinematic point of view on the things he wanted to narrate, in the years where Italian cinema was the pinnacle, leading the world of cinema and storytelling. In those years Pasolini unconsciously opened the doors to this illusion that being a film director could be accessible to anyone, interchangeable or even something to 'improvise' at. The deconstruction of the elegance that Italian Cinema had built up - accumulated and created by Rossellini and Vittorio De Sica, up to Fellini, Visconti, Sergio Leone, Petri, Bertolucci and many, really many other Masters, made the cinema a product that could be approached by the ones who were incapable of making it. Being a writer does not transform you into a film director. Viceversa, Pasolini's cinema opened the door to what was, de facto, the anti-cinema in relation to matters of aesthetics and storytelling. Italian cinema died very soon afterwards with a long series of improvised film directors who misinterpreted cinema with something else. They fought with (like Nanni Moretti did) those Masters who had nurtured Italian cinema for decades and essentially destroyed it, along with the ones who followed that arrogant intellectual idea, by refusing, indeed demolishing, the necessity for Cinema to be a POPULAR art and they deprived it of an important legacy which took us from being the second greatest film industry in the world to being one of the most invisible ones.

I have legitimate and immense respect for Pier Paolo Pasolini as a poet and narrator of our society when only a few were able to question, provoke and analyse it. However, cinema is something else.
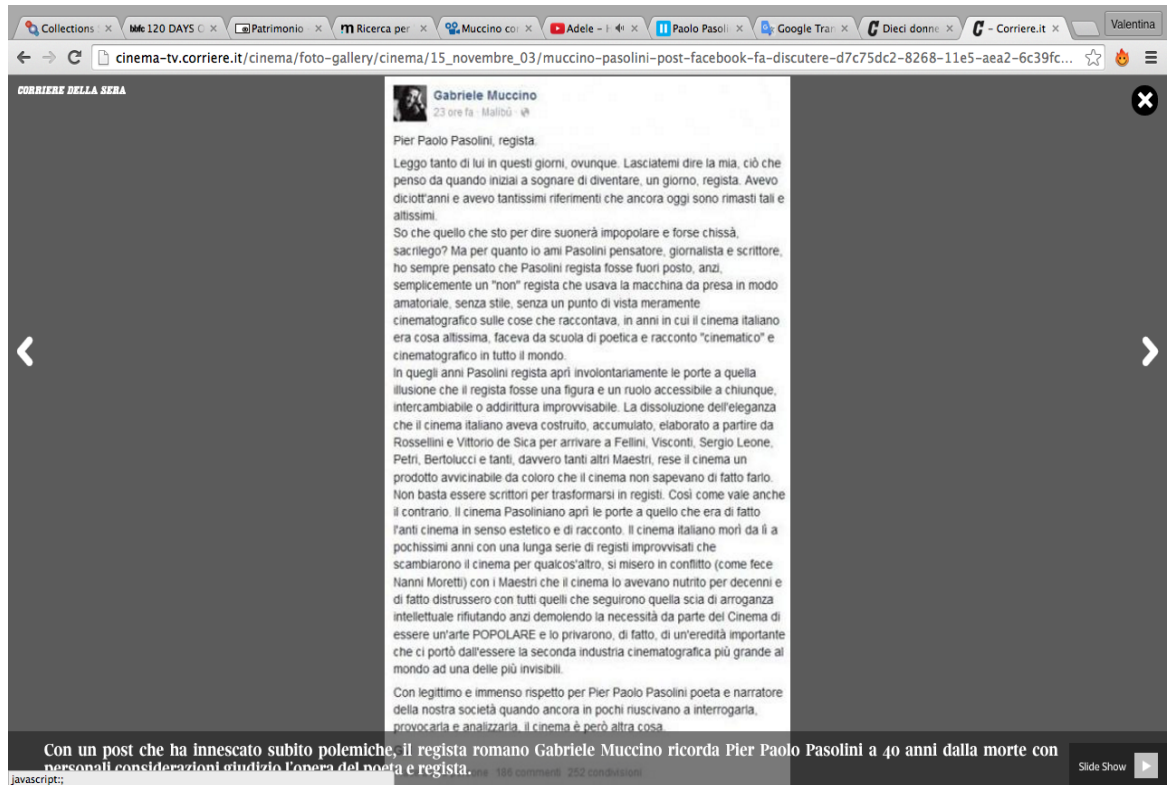
GM"

Figure 3 - Screenshot of Gabriele Muccino's Facebook Post on Pasolini

Questionnaire forwarded to Cineteca Bologna, before the release of their restored edition in Italian cinemas on November 2nd, 2015 and the following DVD edition.
(Note: The Institution replied only to some of the first eight questions)

1. **Could you please introduce yourself and explain the role you have played in the 2015 restoration and digitalisation of Pasolini's *Salò – 120 Days of Sodom* (ITA, 1975)?**

   Project Manager

2. **What is the significance of this film restoration in the light of its 40th anniversary from its first release? When was this idea conceived and how has it been supported?**

   Pasolini's final work, Salò, or The 120 Days of Sodom, is one of the most controversial films ever made. The movie is a profound exploration of fascism and the psychological and socioeconomic conditions that spawn it. Salò is also Pasolini's ultimate work of art and one of cinema's masterpieces.

3. **Which organisations/institutions have financed the film restoration and digitalisation and what was the budget available for this work?**

   The restoration work was carried out by Cineteca di Bologna at *L'Immagine Ritrovata Laboratory* (Bologna, Italy) and CSC - Cineteca Nazionale in collaboration with Alberto

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Grimaldi.

4. **How many people took part in the film restoration and digitalisation and where did they come from?**

(Not answered)

5. **Could you provide an overview of the technical steps necessary for the film restoration?**

The film was restored in 4k. The physical damages were repaired, all the splice checked and it was cleaned with HFE in ultrasonic system. Following scanning, the images were digitally stabilized and cleaned to eliminate signs of ageing such as spotting, scratches, and visible splices. Photography has been the real challenge of the restoration and in order to bring back the original color of the film, the digital grading was supervised by Carlo Tafani. As for sound restoration, after digitization the soundtrack was digitally cleaned and background noise reduction eliminated all wear marks, without losing any of the dynamics and features of the original soundtrack.

6. **Which and how many copies of the film have been considered for the film restoration? What was their origin and what differences in the editing did they present?**

This film was restored from the camera negative (OCN) scanned at 4K, and the Italian magnetic mix soundtrack.

7. **How and by following what criteria did you face the possible differences among the films available and which choices have been operated in order to produce the final cut of this restoration?**

(Not answered)

8. **What were the main issues and obstacles you had to face for this restoration? (including material, cultural, financial and technological obstacles)**

Being a color film, one of the main problems was the color deterioration. For this reason, all new technologies have been used for the restoration, giving new life to the film. The images and the colors have been greatly improved as close as possible to the original negative.

9. **How do you consider, forty years later, the censorship applied to the film and its distribution in 1975?**

(Not answered)

10. **How did you face the sequences originally seizure by the Italian censorship in the 1970s?**

(Not answered)

11. **What kind of restoration techniques did you apply to this film and to what extent have digital technologies been employed?**

(Not answered)

12. **Can we define your restoration as carried out 'in digital'? Have you also produced a copy in analogic? If yes/no, why did you operated this choice?**

(Not answered)

13. **When I first interviewed Doc. Alessandro Marotto and Doc. Andrea Meneghelli in relation to the film restoration of *Inferno* (Milano Films' ITA, 1911 – Chapter III) carried out by *L'Immagine Ritrovata* Lab in 2007, I was told that if their restoration had been entirely completed in analogic. Subsequently, the restored copy has been scanned and digitalised in order to produce the relative 2011 DVD edition. Moreover, I was told that if they had the chance to employ the same kind of digital techniques available in 2015 back in 2007 they would have helped in making the resulting images more homogeneous, as their restoration included the employment of different film copies. To this extent, do you agree on this view regarding the restoration of *Salò*?**

(Not answered)

14. **Your restored edition of *Salò* was presented at the Venice Film Festival in September 2015 and won the prize as a best restored film. What were the reasons given by the jury about this prize? How did you interpret this interest in the festival circuit? Did you have any other feedback at an international level in relation to the 40th anniversary of *Salò*?**

(Not answered)

15. **On November 2nd, 2015 your restored edition of *Salò* will be screened in the Italian cinemas to celebrate its 40th anniversary from its first release. How was this initiative born and why did you decide to first re-release it in Italian cinemas than adopting other distributions strategies such as a possible DVD edition?**

(Not answered)

16. **Will you produce a DVD edition of your restoration? If yes, would it be related only to a possible Italian marked or would it involve also a international distribution)**

(Not answered)

17. **Have you planned any other promotional/distributional initiatives for this film in and out of Italy?**

(Not answered)

18. **Today *Salò* is also available online, through an unofficial and illegal distribution (e.g.**

link VIMEO https://vimeo.com/68045309). Did you know about this parallel circulation on the Internet? If yes, how are you planning to contrast this phenomenon?

(Not answered)

19. Can you recognise the origin of the film version available at the Vimeo link? If yes, did you consider this copy too for your restoration?

(Not answered)

20. In 2015 *Salò* turns 40 and, at the same time, we are celebrating the 750th anniversary of Dante Alighieri's birth. How would you consider *Salò* in relation to Dante's infernal imagery? To what extent does your restoration contribute to promote both these strongholds of Italian culture?

(Not answered)

21. Finally, Cineteca Bologna aims to preserve and promote Italian cinema worldwide. In the light of this, what is the significance of the restoration, digitalisation and distribution in digital of *Salò*?

(Not answered)

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