

THE CINEMA

I discovered the cinema when I went to the oratory of Salesians on Sunday afternoon.

In my town we all used to go there, it was for free, we went together and made noise.

The boys stood at one side, and the girls at the other. The ladies wanted "Gone with the wind", we had to chase Indians and when they surrounded us and there were no ammunitions left, 7th Cavalleggeri always arrived to save us with trumpet call, which electrified us.

After the movie, put back the smoking guns inside the holster, we always wondered if even the 8th and 9th Cavalleggeri existed.

At the end of the movie, the Priest, maybe for calm us down, asked if we wanted "Topolino", a jubilant chorus raised up amongst the dusty benches and the day ended in style.

In the way back to home, we commented on the movie just seen before. Since then this involving custom had last, and became gradually an habit to the criticism and comment of what we saw.

We started to discuss about the cowboys actions, repeating the traps of the Indians amongst the trees, and we divided into good and bad kinds. Indians were the "redskins", bad people, and they always had to give up in front of the good people shootings. We got back home covered by dust and happy.

When I grew up, I crossed the threshold of the cinema. My uncle and my cousin, lovers of any kind of film, came with me.

It was exciting entering for the first time in that theatre full of grown-ups and where were projected movies which the priests censure couldn't get.

Who knows which sinful scenes I would have seen, maybe some uncut kisses of the bright star of that times.

You had to walk on a carpet of stubs to arrive at your wooden seat; it was like a soft and brown fitted carpet.

Cigarette smoke was so thick that worked as a heavy hood on the head of the members of the audience standing in the upper part of the theatre. We couldn't see the people on the balcony.

A pale blue light permeated everything, and the guys competed to do smoke circles, introducing the same cigarette inside.

The most important scenes were commented aloud and funny sketches started between the lines.

You laughed with Totò, and the next day you imitated him; you commented the first French movies which undoubtedly "showed" beauty actresses, the plot wasn't very important.

You crowded in front of the firsts kolossal movies like "The 10 commandments" with that completely bald actor, Yul Brynner, you tried to identify a fellow acting as an extra in Cinecittà and make fun of him the next day as an actor of poor quality. An example of that was Sandrone who was part of the Ulysses sailors entering in the cave of Cyclopes and the first to be caught by Polyphemus.

The same night somebody wrote on his parents' shop shutter "appetizer of Polyphemus".

Fiction took back as teasing in reality.

Huge crowds of back actors found some kind of support in that productions and lots of Roman families can be proud of their relatives cameos, which still keep with them posters of that period.

All the back interpreters and even the ones who became stars took a tram which left from Termini and stopped in front of the factory of Cinecittà.

Cinema surrounded us and offered occupation, dreams, show, culture, you couldn't ignore it.

Furthermore it was a great type of mass media, of propaganda but even revealing of a society otherwise not known.

Cinema linked the occupations of the Roman suburbs, the struggle for the day nurseries, the

life's guys, the labor struggles , emigration from North to South and gave ideas for thousands of debates in political clubs, or bars, or at the tavern. Not all the people read newspapers, often old people were updated by us, the young people, only staying with them at the bars or in the political section or in the streets.

We went throughout the movie commentary to the need of going into lots of arguments.

We never did debates after the movie! Also because we never saw "The Battleship Potemkin", but from the movies we took the ideas for knowledge.

We got out of the town, the world was bigger and various. The film opened new spaces to fill and replaced fallacies or part certainly.

We re-evaluated the Indians with "Blue soldier" against the fascist John Wayne who offered his best face expression stretching his brow and raising his hat, we didn't see him doing nothing else. Oscar expression. With "Clockwork Orange" we started the fear of a possible existence of real and youth violence and we began to grasp any signs among our peers. "With "Zabriskie point" and "Blow-up" we discovered the masters of the cinema, the north American streets of freedom, a cultural breathe who fascinated us.

With our radical change of vision of world we could only support with Vietcongs against the huge marines. Here the friendship among lot of us ended. It was the age in which you have to stand here or at the other side. There were no compromise. You were on the side of the Americans, so with the Cristian Democracy party, so with the Power or you were on the side of Vietcongs, Ho Chi Min, Che Guevara, the Communist party and at the opposition. You couldn't find a job, you were exposed and sometimes chased away from your family.

But everything strengthened and encouraged us. We had an idea, a project, a future for a new society to be built up.

We carefully read on the "Unità" the reviews of new films and we went to find out them, maybe at the

avant-garde theatres as the Olimpia or the New Olimpia situated in San Lorenzo in Lucina square. After dinner we pushed us in 5 or 6 inside a FIAT 600 and we went to see movies.

Often the dawn surprised us while we were discussing about what we saw.

When the television arrived, we snubbed it, a little because there were few families that could afford it and even because we were not attracted by it.

When it started to make a kind of pitch invasion on Thursday or Saturday night inside the cinema theatres showing fashion programs, we started to hate it.

The betrayal came when movies had been broadcasted on Tv.

No! It was too much. How can you see a movie inside that little box? Where are the colours? And the sound? You can't hear a dialogue and even a soundtrack.

What can I say, we were "old", not ready to the coming of the advertisement which caught us aware and shocked for that invasion of idiocy.

So we started to show films in our political section.

We chose the movies to be seen, often we linked them with the most recent socio-political matters, we focused what we read in our newspaper. From there originated political courses took on for free by university comrades.

The path was: political activity-newspaper-contact with people, their needs, - reality and imagination - knowledge-culture.

We were filled, involved, our private life sacrificed to the public, cheerful and dreamers.

Then some of us, thanks to the job done in Politics or in the trade union or inside the institutions, started to be important.

Newspapers, televisions, radios and films "taped" us in our task.

We happily laughed when we "saw" us or when we read us. But we were there, always at the side of the viewer.

Yes, we had become grown-ups but the spirit was always the same: sarcasm, self-criticism, and impulse. We were muddlers, fighters, always on the

frontline and curious. We were always looking for real innovation who let us know our limits and fight for overcome them. We knew, for lots of motivations, all the directors, from the neo - realists until the most recent like Scola, Monicelli, ect; with them we didn't feel unconfident about discussing nor them looked at us from above with their culture.

With same actors or actresses we even "shot" memorable documentaries. We shot with Gian Maria Volontè, I mention only one of them, and his cameraman, a comrade of the same political club. We shot in Piazza di Spagna with the workers, men and women of the Roman occupied factories. He was arrested, and I put to flight policemen and carabinieri which wanted to beat him, helped by the female workers of a parachutes company. It took only to yell them that Volontè had to be protected and they were next to me screaming with indignation.

Some months later, Gian Maria and me were sitting close talking about that experience, while we were going to Moscow to support the renovation of Gorbaciov. I remind the commentaries of Segre and Bovet on that happenings of struggle shot and seen by all.

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