

Luca Ferri

Q1Q: As a first thing, I would like to ask you how you would describe home movies to a person who has no familiarity with the term.

Q1A: I would say I am the less indicated person to give such kind of suggestions. I have reused only twice home movies in my work. Both times I tried to sabotage somehow the use that they have been made of until now. For sure I feel an effect of nostalgia, of passion towards the materiality of the reel; there is no fetish approach towards archive footage. Therefore I have difficulties offering an answer to this question.

Q1Q: Ok, I understand, you did not approach this kind of material in a way that maybe a researcher or an archivist would do it.

Q1A: Yes, there are different choices to be made. Lets say that this is also present in ECCE UBU, the first work I did based on archive footage, where this type of images are not even necessary to the functioning of the work. In the sense that the foundation of the film is the structure itself, done from a sequence of home movie scenes, run in a loop, that becomes a mathematic calculation. Therefore its working mode is connected to the structure. I needed film footage that was shot either by me or by others that could become functional to the film structure and become also the compositional part. This renders the archive images in a certain sense not necessary, it becomes simply material that is useful for the movie, that becomes physical and helpless as it is used for another purpose.

Q2Q: From a theoretical point of view, do you think that the audience for movies that reuse home movies has changed during the past years?

Q2A: Surely in Italy there have been associations and movements that have contributed to the development of this type of research; in the sense that the archive has become not only a repository of memory, but also a source of material for artists and filmmakers and their personal research, not regarding language. Therefore it got a second life: on one hand the archive, the memory and its preservation, on the other hand the use of this memory from a contemporary perspective. I think there has been this sort of a double passage.

Q2Q: Ok, so you refer to the artists' approach and the archivist approach.

Q2A: yes, there are to types of different approaches, sometimes specular, as the same person can adopt at the same moment also an artistic language. So this is material that is adapted for reuse and a new life. Yes, these are two parallel aspects.

Q3Q: Which do you think are the success cases for the reuse of this material from an artistic point of view?

Q3A: Definitely the work of Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi. At least speaking about the Italian case. I remember one of their best works 'e deju', which I had the opportunity to see during a screening in Milan. They are for sure a couple who have done very interesting and important things.

Q3Q: So why did you choose exactly this couple, considering that in the Italian panorama Alina Marazzi is considered somehow the exponent in this field?

Q3A: In this specific work, that in my opinion remains their best work, is this aspect of detaching themselves from ethnography, from the perspective of the structure of the work and the language used. For me this was the most interesting aspect. Then they did also other films, that were very interesting; lest say they had many moments in which they somehow pushed their personal

research on the edge, in a very decisive way and without doing many compromises. In my opinion, when they did this, it reflected in a positive way inside their work. This is the case when they chose to detached themselves completely from archive footage and the risks, which such kind of material bring along; I refer here to risks connected to artistic processes that have been 'already seen' or that offer already consolidated structures. In my opinion they managed in through their work to do something personal and authentic.

A5Q: Which do you think are the easy aspects and the difficult ones in working with archive material?

Q5A: the major risk that I see is connected to the state of 'falling in love' with this kind of material (both with its content and the materiality of the reel), brought by a nostalgic feeling. This romantic approach seems to me the most risky one, from which I tend to stay away, but it is obviously my personal point of view. I always try take a distance from this aspect because I see it as the aspect that is apparently the most seductive one but at the same time also the most repulsive one. Me personally when I see it in others it keeps me away. So I try to have an approach that is much more analytic and structural and less emotional. Then there are different levels also of emotional approaches. But also when it is well-read and sophisticated, there is still a level of nostalgia for the medium, rather than for a certain cultural heritage, that this type of image carries with it. Fact is that when I do interviews and talk about my recent work, I talk about the use of the analogic medium, which is prevalent. I approach this kind medium with lots of self-critics, many doubts and questions that I ask myself. I always try to understand if what I am doing is polished and represents what I really want to narrate, or it is rather a whim/caprice, an authorial position, that I do not like very much. I therefore try to be very critical with my own work, because I see much danger reflected in this kind of medium. I try to be as much as possible lucid; then again I do not know if I manage to.

Q5Q: or to fall in the opposite direction, that of the so-called aestheticism that this sort of material brings with it. Given that archive footage is for you material just as any other material, why did you choose to approach this kind of material? Why specifically this and not other kind of footage?

Q5A: I think that I reused two times archive footage but I do not believe to reuse it again. I had the desire to immerge my hand into this kind of material, but I wanted to do it while having behind me a really strong structure, that in a movie such as *Ecce Ubu* becomes a mathematic calculation, something that is very rigid. For 'Dog dear' ('Cane caro') instead it is a completely different kind of work, where the literary part determines the development of the narrative. In this case the structure is a linguistic formula, in the other case a mathematic formula. I needed to use this footage as a sort of crutches or something similar.

Q5Q: It is obviously difficult to handle and approach. Nevertheless, do you consider the intimacy and the fact that these images were shot by people in the past as being part of this trap in reusing home movies?

Q5A: Exactly, it is similar to reading a book by Kafka. You know exactly who the author is, and that he didn't want that his writings were published. Then we need to be thankful that someone disobeyed and published them, but either way a bitter after-taste remains, that sensation of being on the edge between the legal and illegal. Above all when we talk about people who are not alive anymore and they cannot express their will, while having recorded these images only for a private scope. Then suddenly after 50 years someone decides to digitalise this material and make it public. It is always ...I don't know Kafka came to my mind when thinking about this situation, but there are

obviously more cases like this, in the field of music or other forms of art. Yes you are fortunate to hold in your hands, to be looking at, reading, listening or whatever is that you are able to do with this material, but the legality of your act emerges as a question mark. Sometimes there is also a sense of unpleasantness.

Q5Q: So the situation would change for you in the case that you would know the author very well and had his approval or is it something that goes beyond?

Q5A: If a filmmaker decides to leave his reels to a public archive I find it quite a natural gesture. But when a thing is born with a specific reason and in time someone else appropriates this material to make another use of it, I do not know what to say. I do not want to make it a moralistic, a problematic issue but not all the existing material can be divulged to the broad public. This is valid also for me, I have written and done things that I would not want to see for them to become public. If someone would do it I would be very disturbed about it, so at this point it is better destroying this material.

Q5Q: just like a diary where you have your most inner thoughts that become exposed in public space

Q5A: Well yes.

Q5Q: As I work with various home movie reels, I am also curious about this fact of sharing. Searching a lot on Youtube I found much material belonging to Sicilian migrants that was shared online. I am doing now small interviews to see their personal approach, to understand their desire to make public such material.

Q5A: Yes, it is for sure a delicate issue. I think this is one of the aspects on which to put the accent.

Q6Q: In the process of selecting the images from the archive, was there any mathematic calculation behind it, or how did you select the scenes?

Q6A: As I said before, the fact that the organisation and the structure was so strong, rendered the images secondary. They were chosen mainly for their aesthetic value, for their beauty as a means to itself, for what they were able to tell. Then in some cases there are some small traps too inside the film; traps because they are difficult to individuate, because they are complete sequences, where the last scene of the sequence of scenes is identical to the first one. The scene of the lady in front of the banana tree is made of two fragments of the same reel. It served me as a ploy to render the reading of the film even more complicated, because otherwise you can understand that it is a constantly repeating sequence. This effect instead enables me to build small traps, illusions that have been built inside the film. There are many images connected in such a way that they create visual short circuits.

Q6Q: So you approached the images directly, as a necessary instrument. You declare at some point that in *Ecce Ubu* you make use of 'non-filmed scenes', that have been recorded through forgetting the camera on. In a certain way you somehow deny this basic characteristic of the home movie. What makes these non-filmed scenes different from more typical kind of home movie scenes and how did you approach them?

Q6A: Well I approached them in a very surgeon-like manner and logical manner. It was a sort of cataloguing process. We identified the images that interested us and then we catalogued them according to themes such as trips or Sunday events. One curious aspect about this was the fact that we chose almost exclusively scenes shot on events taking place Sundays. The issue is that most of the selected footage is part of Sunday events of festive events. It is as if a certain part of the week was cancelled, and didn't exist anymore, because it is the day dedicated to the trip on the

countryside, or the trip in the Bergamo Mountain; all in all it is a festive occasion or Sunday event. I assume that these are main characteristics of the amateur footage. But again the choice is peculiar because of this festive aspect. This is one of the first things that we understood, that all these images were part of the same category, the festivity, which was again divided into various other situations: from car races to motorbike races.

Q7Q: In contrast to this surgery-like approach, did it happen to you to become attached to certain images?

Q7A: Lets say that there are images, which struck me. For example in the choice of the images for *Ecce Ubu* the images come from an archive called Cinescatti, located in Bergamo, which in time has collected, preserved and digitalised this important part of footage belonging to the Bergamo area. The quantity of material I had access to was really huge, incredible. I tried not to choose only the images that have struck me most, in the sense that there were very beautiful and evocative images that I decided not to include. I had the need to construct what I was saying first, tricks and traps inside the structure of the film. Many images have been selected for assonance rather than for an aesthetic or dependency reason. There were very beautiful images but representing also a sort of 'unicum', places and situations that would have not rendered the whole work as compact as it is.

Q8Q: I would like to know what you think about the following statement: ' family films are doodles of the soul, invisible writing, that contain such magmatic, germinal and radical material, that they contribute to the renewal of the moving image'.

Q8A: I think that in these images there is this thing and it cannot be denied and needs to be shared. The only thing is that who approaches this sort of material needs to be careful, as the situation is very delicate; in the sense that I do not know, I have done these two works of which I am very pleased, but it is a really delicate situation when approaching pre-existing images. I see also big traps where you can fall and hurt yourself. One needs to be very careful about it. But it clear on the other hand that these are images that carry inside of them beautiful and magnificent things, with which I would have different issues in handling in the case of a reuse. I do not know, now I am trying to keep some distance from this world.

Q9Q: Talking about 'Dog dear' could you details the creative process behind? How was the film born?

Q9A: As I said 'Dear dog' is born from a text, just like in *Ecce Ubu* the mathematic calculation is the foundation. For 'Dear dog' there is no type of post-editing work, in the sense that I live in a small mountain village, where I have a very bad internet connection. I found this footage on Archive.org that are beautiful and depict these surgeries possibly done in Russia during the 1900. I decided to re-record this material with my own connection so I started pulling together all structures for downloading, asking neighbours for lending me their computers to render the connection more problematic, and I began to see how beautiful these images were being disrupted by the bad internet connection. Therefore this archive material hasn't been touched at all, but rather recorded again from the screen, with all the problematic aspects of the Internet connection. It is therefore a further reflection on the medium, on the digital nowadays and on the slowness of the image that was pulled back, whose pixels were moving freely on the screen. It represents a little the key of the film, as it decides to show itself to the world.

Q9Q: In fact I had the instinct of trying to stop the film and see if the quality of the image improved, which is connected to the same slowness of the connection that is found also in Sicily.

Q9A: the curious thing about this is the fact that during many projections of the film, the technicians responsible for rendering it visible on the screen, appeared very preoccupied by the technical aspect, believing it is the fault of the DCP or a corrupted or ruined file. We had to explain that the images was ok that way and it was a wanted process. Then we got used to it. It is similar in the case of the archive, isn't it? In many circumstances we watch this footage on tablet or computer so the connection keeps being a medium also here. For sure where I live it is a crippled medium.

Q9Q: Here in Sicily we are not very far from the situation you describe. For *Ecce Ubu* you did not want to work on the historical and narrative meaning of the images, but rather on a fixed mathematical structure. Is there a way to describe this type of approach to the home movie? Could you find a definition?

Q9A: It is difficult for me to define it, as it is part of my artistic development, of a first period between 2011 and 2013/2014, where I focused very much on this strand of research. It is very much connected to the submission of the image to something else, where the narration of the movie and not the movie itself would be enough. Maybe in *Ecce Ubu* the mere narration of what is going on is enough to get the idea. Then it is a film that has been for sure enriched from a compositional point of view and musical one, through the wonderful work of Dario Razzi, who has done an incredible job. But then a definition is very difficult for me, as it is part of a singular trajectory of a person and I cannot identify many epigones.

Q10Q: Now I would like to close the interview by addressing one last question that contains a link.

Q10A: Ok, I have got the e-mail. I am watching it. Ok, finished.

Q10Q: So this is rather a surgery-like experiment to see what the audience thinks and feels about these images.

Q10A: Remarkable. The image of the Valley of Temples I think, sticks to my mind. The sunset colours are beautiful. Then seen without audio it is much more analytic and I like it as an approach. I would not know what other to say.

Q10Q: Is there something that stuck to your mind or a specific aspect that has raised your curiosity?

Q10A: To tell the truth I was thinking about this fact of how the home movies will look like 50 years from now, seen by someone in 50 years time. What would we leave behind? Would they still have this ingenuity? I do not know. Maybe it is an ingenuous, stupid thought. I am thinking more about the issues of ingenuity connected to the medium. What shape will these home movies have? Will they be done on cell phones?

Q10Q: This is indeed a good question to think about.