CALL FOR PAPERS

Shadowed Screens
Dante's Inferno in Cinema
and Audio-Visual Media

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
TORINO
16-18 December 2021
Università degli Studi di Torino

From the dawn of the 1900s to present day, **the first Canto of Dante's *Comedy*** has been the subject of countless images and stories of film and audiovisual productions. Coherent to the vast and multiform iconographic tradition which has accompanied the diffusion of Dante's work, for modern media cultures the *Inferno* represents **not only a challenge to the limits** of what can be represented (what first comes to mind is *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* by Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1975, or Federico Fellini's painful renouncement of his Dante project), but also a powerful **creative space for western imagination** to experiment, often during technological and aesthetic turning points, new expressive possibilities (L'*Inferno* by F. Bertolini, A. Padovan and G. De Liguoro,1911; *A TV Dante* by P. Greenaway-T. Phillips, 1990 and R. Ruiz, 1991; *What Dreams May Come by V. Ward*, 1998). The re-elaboration of Dante's Inferno by the media seems to be a point of convergence where, through the re-elaboration of a centuries-old artistic and staging tradition, **new hybridizations** between attractional function and narrative function are experimented. At the same time, Dante's poetry has proven to be an **endless reserve of visionary images,** recurring *topos*, poetic tropes, situations, characters and citations to re-situate, re-enacting, reinterpret (even through parody) in productive contexts or heterogeneous genres and with the most diverse choices of *miseen-scène*.

While the *Inferno* produced by Milano Films in 1911 has remained a model of referral for the adaptations that claim to be, at least in intent, completely faithful stagings of Dante's text (relatively few), mainstream production, on the other hand, has often reinterpreted the first Canto as moral tale (e.g. the two American *Dante's Inferno*, the one directed by H. Otto in 1924 and the one directed by H. Lachman in 1935; but even indirectly, *Seven* by D. Fincher, 1995) or as an authoritative cultural myth secularized by laughter (from Maciste and Totò, to T. Danielsson's *Mannen som slutade röka*, 1972). The most experimental production, on the other hand, has proposed hallucinatory reinterpretations (*The Dante Quartet* by Stan Brakhage ,1987; *La commedia di Amos Poe* by A. Poe, 2010), while animation cinema has drawn many different inspirations from it (*L'Enfer* by J. Lenica, 1971; *Dante's Inferno: An Animated Epic* by M. Disa et al., 2010; *Dante's Inferno* by S. Meredith, 2007). Finally, television has taken cues from it to verify and rethink its own educational potential (*A TV Dante episodes*, A. Rajnai's *Pokol* of 1974, the recordings of Dante readings

by Vittorio Gassman, Vittorio Sermonti, Carmelo Bene and Roberto Benigni and the wealth of documentary production on the theme).

In the last decade, perhaps due to the upcoming anniversary of Alighieri's death, the media seems to be even more swept up by the *Comedy.* Echoes of Dante, for example, reverberate in Hollywood blockbusters (first and foremost, Ron Howard's Inferno, 2016), in television series (*Hannibal* by B. Fuller, 2013-2015), in 'film d'auteur' (*The House That Jack Built* by L. von Trier, 2018; *Onirica-Fields of Dogs* by L. Majewsky, 2013), in documentary production (L. Nero's *Il Mistero di Dante* 2014; R. Loop's *Botticelli Inferno*, 2016), to the Dante parodies published on the most popular video-streaming platforms.

This ongoing proliferation and regeneration of the media Infernos, a sign of a renewed popularity of the universe of the *Comedy*, as well as of a certain dispersiveness, brings up a few fundamental questions. Is Dantesque imagination capable of proposing itself as a **"low-intensity" myth**? And, if so, i**n what form and with what connection** to history, to traditions of their own audiovisual representations and to the powerful iconographic tradition on the theme (pictorial, illustrative, theatrical)?

A wealth of literature exists on cinematographic and media works inspired by *Inferno*, though dedicated, above all, to the most famous names and authors, and only rarely committed to taking into consideration lesser-known cinematographic productions. There is still space for research in less-developed and unexamined areas of research, at least potentially, on new filmographic discoveries, unpublished documental research and other interpretive hypotheses.

The Conference *Shadowed Screens* proposes to tackle these questions and to put such potentiality to good use, opening up a **space for exchange** and opportunity to reflect on **new research perspectives** tied to **the representation of the *Comedy's* Inferno in the sphere of audiovisual media**, by taking into consideration the very research proposals that emerge throughout 2021, the year dedicated to celebrations for the 700th anniversary marking the year of the poet's death.

We thus invite those scholars interested in these themes to send us **their proposals**.

Among possible **research themes**, we point out the following topics, without excluding other possible research paths:

- **The iconographic sources of the Dante adaptions** (e.g., research on the circulation of Dante illustrations at the time the films come out, in relation to their production and reception; direct collaborations between visual and audio-visual artists).
- **Dante's verses on screen**: strategies of poetic translation: from verbal to audio-visual; the practice of literal quotes; the problem of translation in non-Italian productions; filmed verses in examples of *lectura Dantis*; parody and updating of the Dante language; toponymy (e.g., the frequent use of Dante names and places in science fiction cinema).
- **The production history of Dante adaptions.**
- **Promotional strategies, censorship and critique of Dante adaptions.**
- **'Dantesque' authors**: analysis of the influence of the first Canto of *Comedy* in the work of individual directors and video-makers, even in relation to any of their parallel theatrical, literary, figurative or graphic production (among others, P. P. Pasolini, J. L. Godard, P. Greenaway, Gō Nagai).
- **Making Dante known**: Dante's Inferno used for experimenting audio-visual strategies for spreading culture.
- **The Inferno as a metaphor for the present**: strategies of contextualizing Dante's myth, even politically, into the present. From the nationalism of the Alighieri film biographies which came out in the early 1920s (*La mirabile visione* by L. Sapelli, 1921; *Dante nella vita dei tempi* suoi by D. Gaido, 1922) to the more recent examples of 'civil cinema' (*Girlfriend in a Coma* by B. Emmot, 2012; *The Sky Over Kibera* by M. Martinelli, 2019), through the anarcho-hippy re-readings of the 1960s (*The Comoedia* by B. Pischiutta, 1980) and its rewrite involving conspiracy theorists and rebus-solvers which also became popular in cinema after Dan Brown's novel *Inferno* came out.
- **Building the Inferno**: set design, special effects, staging strategies from silent film, digital experimentation from the past decade. Inferno cinema as an example of hybridization between narrative and attraction strategies.
- **The "sounds of the Inferno"** in audiovisual representations: accompaniment procedures in the silent film era, music, noise and soundscape.

- **The betrayed and hybrid Inferno**. When media production betrays the Dantesque source and why (adaption to common morality, conditioning of *auteur* poetry, influence of its context, etc.). How is Dante's echo hybridized in cinema and in audiovisuals with the influence of other literary concepts of the Inferno (e.g., the Greek-Roman mythological tradition, Faust, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the different adaptions of the tale of Francesca da Polenta for theatre and opera).
- **In Dante's shoes**: the representation of the Dante-character. Variations and influences in the construction of its visual and narrative role (to cite some of the more extreme examples: the psychopathic Matt Dillon in *The House That Jack Built*, the violent crusader Dante of the videogame-world in *Dante's Inferno*); interpretive styles (the search for physical similarities to the model of traditional iconography in silent films; the collective experiment in *The Sky Over Kibera*; interpretations of *lectura Dantis*).
- **The genre Inferno**: re-reading of the poem in light of cinema codes of genre. Comedies (with what instruments and why does mocking the Comedy make us laugh?), westerns, science fiction, horror, etc.
- **'Spin-offs' of characters from the Inferno**: influences and structure of audiovisual reelaborations dedicated to the reconstruction of the damned lives which are particularly cinegenic, first and foremost Francesca da Polenta and Count Ugolino della Gherardesca (among the most well-known examples, *Il conte Ugolino* by G. Pastrone [?], 1909; *Francesca da Rimini* by U. Falena, 1910; *Drums of Love* by D. W. Griffith, 1928; *Il conte Ugolino* by R. Freda, 1949; *Paolo e Francesca* by R. Matarazzo, 1950).
- **The influence of Dante's Inferno in animation cinema.**
- **The influence of Dante's Inferno on filmed live performances** (theatrical, musical, reading adaptations, etc.), in video art, in dance video, in musical videoclips and in video-games.
- **'Widespread' Dante**: Web-addressed phenomenology of audiovisual production inspired by Dante's Inferno.
- **Unproduced projects of films or media productions** inspired by Dante's Inferno.

Of particular interest are those proposals which emphasize interdisciplinary perspectives, unpublished documental sources, the analysis of less-researched or noncanonical films and audiovisual products, or those which were done in less-researched production contexts like Asia, Africa, Latin America, etc. (provided that there be a direct and documented connection with the Dante's first Canto).

The deadline for **proposals** (in Italian or in English), of a maximum length of 300 words, along with a short curriculum (max. 200 words) to be sent to the following e-mail addresses, is **June 30, 2021**: **schermi.oscuri@unito.it**

Conference participants are required to pay a conference fee of EUR 100,00, or EUR 70,00 for PhD, Graduate and Undergraduate Students of other Universities.

The results of the evaluation of the proposals will be communicated by **July 15, 2021**.

The conference proceedings are expected to be published in 2022.

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