signs
STUDIES IN GRAPHIC NARRATIVES

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STUDIES IN GRAPHIC NARRATIVES

"Una nuova industria"
Looking for witnesses of early movies in Roman periodicals for children*

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Preliminary remarks

The birth of comics and that of cinema have traditionally been considered to have occurred within the same turn-of-the-century period, and, in the widespread success of both *media*, to have heralded modern consumerism.[1] Such a traditional view has been often taken to task over the last two decades. Indeed, if the mechanical tools developed by Edison and Lumiére represent a possible *post quem* for the beginning of the cinema, the flourishing of graphic narratives is much older, dating back at least to Töpffer's seminal work in the 1830s.[2] These recent studies should lead us to rethink the pattern so far claimed regarding the flow of narrative techniques from cinema to comics: indeed, we might safely say that graphic storytelling has often been a source of inspiration, both technique- and story-wise, for the movies, and as such their relationship should then be considered anew.[3]

As a first step towards such a rethinking, it seems meaningful to look for traces of the newer *medium* inside the older one, that is, the explicit mentioning of cinema in texts or vignettes, as well as the occurrences of themes and jokes exploited both in early movies and in late XIX to early XX centuries comics. Indeed, this is the main focus of my contribution. In order to dutifully perform such a task, though, I have to restrain my scope. To this end, I investigate a narrow timeframe, namely, from 1898 up until 1914.

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* A preliminary version of this article appeared in the proceedings of *XV Convegno internazionale di studi sul cinema*, held in Udine on March 2008. In the current version I was able to fully explore and report findings for the whole publication output for children of the Roman publishers Calzone&Villa and Scotti. For the present version I am indebted in various ways to Sergio Lama, Matteo Stefanelli, Ron Stewart, and Mirko Tavosanis.

1 Without addressing the literature on this topic, for the specific issue of comics and consumerism I refer to Gordon (1998).

2 This renewal of "comics studies" has occurred over roughly the last two decades. The seminal work is Kunzle (1990), now see also Smolderen (2009). For an early assessment of Töpffer see Groensteen & Peters (1994) and for a recent take see Smolderen (2010).

3 I refer in particular to the analysis of cutting techniques in Smoldereen (2007) and to Rickman (2008) for an extensive study of the graphical sources of the celebrated short L'Arroseur arrosé.

Moreover, to be able to reach a firm, albeit provisional, conclusion, I need to identify a limited series of *specimen* that are sufficiently representative. In any case, I believe that venturing into territory such as this should help in charting consumption practices as well as popular acceptance of cinematography in Italy, thus providing an additional step in the construction of a social history for the cinematographic *medium* in its formative years.[4]

The starting point

My curiosity was aroused by the reading of *I want to see this Annie Mattygraph* by Stephan Bottomore. It contains a selection of occurrences of movies (of movie-goers and movie-makers) in caricatures, appearing during the years 1896-1914, the final limit symbolically demarcating a coming of age of the *medium*. I found surprising that among the roughly 230 cartoons appearing there, only 5 of them are from an Italian source: one specimen each year from 1908 on, but with no occurrence in 1910. Moreover, those from the 1911-13 period should have been expected, since after the 1911 appearance of the movie(s) based on Dante's *Inferno*, the perception of the Italian public towards cinema was definitely elevated.[5] It is perhaps telling to point out at an inaccuracy of Bottomore's volume: it estimates (p. 243) at 16 the number of satirical periodicals appearing in this 20 years period in Italy, while more recent counts come to a tally of at least 50 magazines.[6]

As the author points out, *Annie Mattygraph* focuses on the satirical production of France, Britain and Germany. Thus, we thought a worthwhile task to further search the Italian output. The aim was not merely philological. Indeed, after Bernardini's *opus* of the early 1980s, the importance of scrutinizing newspapers and periodicals for the early history of Italian movies has been clear. However, the influence of cinema on other cultural artefacts has been glaringly underexplored. Such research for witnesses' accounts should serve as an additional building block in the recreation of the environment in which the *medium* was born, e.g. as an exemplification of reception by its audience. Our survey here could at least serve as "a revelation of impressions and attitudes from the cinema's misty beginnings", as David Robinson aptly describes Bottomore's book in his Foreword.

First cut: children periodicals

In browsing the Italian humoristic output for this period, however, much of it clearly extended beyond the scope of our work. In order to restrain the range of search, I preferred an oblique path, focussing on *children's* cartoons. More precisely, I chose a selection of children's periodicals from 1898 until 1914. As I argue later, during the first decade of the century comics were becoming the *medium* for children' humour, steering away from satirical and "all age" magazines.[7]

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4 The history of movie influence on Italian press, and the presence and relevance of paratexts for national cinema, is still largely to be written. For a recent analysis, even though for the period immediately after the one we are focussing in, see (De Berti 2000).

5 See Gherardi & Lasi (2009) for a survey on the dissemination of Dante's images, and the essays edited by Michele Canosa that appear in the booklet included with Bertolini & Padovan & De Liguoro (2011) for a general overview.

6 The standard reference for the history of Italian caricature is (Gianeri 1977). The most complete survey of periodicals so far is (Aloi & Moretti 2006).

7 For similar remarks, as scattered in the text, we usually refer to our own survey of the development of graphic narratives in Italy see Gadducci (2006), now updated in Gadducci (2012).

The potential for such an enterprise, and indeed one of the first finds of our research, was evidenced in *Le scene comiche*, a 1913 book of fables by Vamba (the Florentine writer and artist Luigi Bertelli), part of a series of four books[8] called *Cinematografo poetico per i ragazzi*. The title of the series was following the tradition established by Edmondo De Amicis with his successful short-story *Cinematografo cerebrale*, which appeared in 1907.[9] And indeed, the book contained brief moral apologues, as if they were scenes in a movie. In addition to the nice, early illustration of the audience of a movie theatre (Fig. 1), which seems the work of artist Ugo Finozzi,[10] a revealing passage of the introduction (p. 5) tells the readers that "voi non trovete i celebri allegri o buffi eroi d'altri cinematografi, come a dir *Tartufini*, *Beoncelli* o *Max Linder*". Living first in Rome and then in Florence,[11] middle-class Vamba was aware early on of the movie fascination, and naming names implicitly acknowledges the success of such movie characters among his readers.



Figure 1.
Early illustration of a children audience at a (Florentine?) movie theatre, opening the first chapter of Vamba's collection of short stories, **Le scene comiche**.

Admittedly, the choice of the final year in my range has been dictated by the intention to cover the same time span as Bottomore. There are however two further reasons, both linked to the development of Italian periodicals for children (yet another reason, a cinematographic one, is argued for later on). One motivation is internal to the chosen material, and the editorial history of the publisher we are going to consider, and it is presented in the following section. The other one is external, the appearance of *Corriere dei Piccoli*, the weekly supplement for children of the influential daily *Corriere della Sera*. Often considered the first venue of comics in Italy, *Corrierino's* formula was somehow inspired by its predecessors,[12] yet its publication marks the end of the pioneering phase of picture periodicals for children, which subsequently firmly entered into the market mainstream. In any case, the offspring of the Milanese daily would change the rules of the game, due to its early success, as witnessed by a survey performed in Spring 1911 on readership in primary schools.[13] The maga-

8 The titles of the Bemporad in the series, as advertised in *Le scene comiche*, are *Storia di un naso* (1906; interestingly, it becomes part of the series only with the second, 1912 edition), *La cronaca della settimana* (1921) and *I drammi commoventi*. Note that *La cronaca* appeared only much later and posthumously, while the latter is apparently missing in all Italian libraries (see http://www.sbn.it/, 12 December 2012) and likely never appeared.

9 For a recent reprint in a volume, and an overview of contemporary stories with a similar theme, see the annotated edition in (Portinari & Baldissone 1995).

10 The vignette is actually unsigned, and it is a personal attribution. The other illustrator of the book was Filiberto Scarpelli.

11 To the best of our knowledge, the most recent summary of Vamba's career is still Nissim Rossi (1966).

12 The standard reference for *Corriere dei Piccoli* is Carabba (1998): see now the analysis of the early period by Ginex (2009) in the catalogue of the celebratory exposition for the periodical. See Gadducci (2007) for an historical analysis of the editorial format, now also in Gadducci & Stefanelli & Tavosanis (2012).

13 See Fiore (2005): summing up the whole audience, *Corriere dei Piccoli* is around 70% of the readership, while *Novellino* (*Novellino Rosa* included) around 15%.

zine, especially after the adoption of a larger format with the first issue of 1915, would impose a standard for comics contents and presentation that persisted until the 1930s, obliterating and making obsolete the productions we are going to consider, as well as potentially altering the relationships between the two *media*, comics and cinema.

Second cut: a Roman publisher

As a further choice, we focussed on the output of a single publisher in Rome, Calzone & Villa (replaced in the early months of 1904 by Scotti).[14] In particular, we searched most carefully its periodicals for children, looking at both the textual and the graphic content. I argue that these magazines offer a privileged point of view for catching "impressions and attitudes" towards movies, separate from the newspapers and trade magazines so extensively studied after Bernardini. Of course, my survey just represents a first attempt at cataloguing a large mass of materials, an initial step in the screening for witnesses of early cinema in the press and in the identification of common themes and mutual influences between the two *media* in the first decade of the XX century.

We can now add a few more reasons for our narrow focus and timeframe. On the *cinephile* side, we note that by March 1896 Romans were already exposed to the first Italian projections of Lumières' movies.[15] When *Novellino* appears, two years later, Rome was a ripe market for "fotografia animata": this demand proved to be a persistent one, as evidenced by the production there of the first full-length Italian movie in 1905, the well-known *La presa di Roma*.[16] An additional reason is the stature of Fregoli, the Italian quick-change artist, and his adoption of the *cinématographe*.[17] Lumières' pictures, as well as Fregoli's own short production, were prominently displayed in his shows, and they were addressed to a middle-high class audience, the same group were the buyers of Calzone & Villa magazines. The 1914 ending coincides with the appearance of the innovative (technically and content-wise) movie *Cabiria*, and the popular spread of Italian cinema. However, even if the coincidence with the debut of Pastrone's visual masterpiece is appealing, any cut point after 1911 would likely do, after the appearance of the early trade magazines and newspapers sections devoted to cinematography, and the launch of the first Italian full-length movie, Milano Films' *Inferno*: we believe that these events clearly demarcate the beginning of a new era for cinema, both in the market and in the perception of the *medium* by the audience.

On the comics' history side, we first have to sweep away an old misconception. *Sequential art* has a long tradition in Italy, since at least the late 1840s, with a strong French and German influence. Graphic journalism was the quintessential expression of the press in Rome in the 1880s, and many illustrated satirical magazines flourished here.[18] Moreover, Rome always held a leading role in innovative periodicals for chil-

[14] The history of these late XIX century publishers still need to be investigated. A first step is represented by Gigli Marcheti (*et alii* 2004: *ad vocem*). For their immediate predecessor, Edoardo Perino, see now the recent work by Mori (2012).

[15] The literature is currently quite large. Unless otherwise specified, for our general remarks we implicitly refer to the by now standard reference by Bernardini (1980-81).

[16] The standard reference on the movie is now Canosa (2006).

[17] For an overview on the cinematographic activity of the artist see Bernardini (1980: 91-107); for a detailed list of the appearances of Fregoligraph see Bernardini (2001: 84-87).

[18] See Gadducci (2006: 9-12).

dren, starting from *Giornale per i Bambini*, edited by Ferdinando Martini, that published Busch's *bilderbogen* (most likely, piracies) for a whole decade.[19]

In particular the weekly *Novellino*, born on Christmas' Eve 1898 and merged with other magazines in the late 1927, is the first children's periodical to consistently offer comics in every issue, and the first known one to import (actually, swipe) American cartoons. From its beginning it used a standard presentation for comics that would widely be adopted later on: a simple joke of either 2 or 4 panels on the front cover, and another one on the back cover. With the new century all the editorial sections, including games and riddles, disappear, and the contents are mostly restrained to short stories for children. The same direction would be more or less followed by the other magazines of the publisher, albeit aimed at an older audience.

From the point of view of our search, it is also noteworthy that the best-known contributor of *Novellino* was Yambo (pseudonym of Enrico Novelli): he was a caustic commentator of the times with his own satirical hebdomadaire *Il Pupazzetto*,[20] and one of the main protagonists of the Roman cultural scene in the early years of the XX century, as well as the principal engine, via his father, the famous theatre actor Ermete, of the movie studio Novelli Film in the 1910s.[21]

[19] See Gadducci (2006: 13-16) for such a reconstruction, and Lama (2000) for a rich iconographic trove. The most complete survey of the life of the magazine founded by Ferdinando Martini is in Carli (2007: 29-61): see also Gadducci and Tavosanis (2011) for the working environment at the editorial office in its early years, under the writer Guido Biagi.

[20] The erratic periodical appeared from 1899 until 1909, with many temporal gaps and different periodicity. As for the other periodicals we investigate, it was also published by Calzone&Villa (later Scotti).

[21] A modern biography of the artist is still missing. The primary source is the work of his son Novelli (1982). See also AAVV (1987).

Textual and graphical witnesses

The publisher output we focus on are three periodicals for children and young adults which appeared on Christmas Eve 1898 or immediately after: *Messaggero dei Fanciulli* (1899), *Messaggero della Gioventù* (1899-1902) and its successor *Letture per la Gioventù* (1903-1910), and finally *Novellino* (1898-1927) and its supplements, the yearly *Almanacco* and the weeklies *Novellino Rosa* (1908-1910) and *Novellino della Domenica* (1913-1914), available either in private collections or at Biblioteca Alessandrina in Rome.[22] Edited by writer Emma Perodi, the weekly *Messaggero dei Fanciulli* merged in 1900 with *Messaggero della Gioventù*, initially a monthly and a weekly after the fusion, continuing until 1902, changing the name in *Letture per la Gioventù* afterwards. *Novellino* and *Novellino Rosa* appeared on Thursdays and Sundays, respectively, making the series a biweekly, and the same timing would occur for *Novellino della Domenica*. The cumulative offering was as inclusive as possible. Indeed, *Letture* targeted young adults, first mostly as a vehicle for Yambo's serialised novels and from 1907 on by focussing on explorations and exotic locales, similar to the classical *Giornale Illustrato dei Viaggi*. However, both *Novellino* and its supplements instead looked for a younger audience, mostly presenting short fables and apologues. The demise of both *Letture* and *Novellino Rosa* in 1910 can also be considered as resulting from, and bearing witness to, the growing influence of *Corriere dei Piccoli*. After the folding of *Novellino della Domenica*, the main magazine (as well as the publisher itself) went on to play a less and less relevant role in the field, until its final demise during the late 1920s.

[22] For an overview of the collection we refer to Dagasso Bernard (1998). For a detailed report on the history of the periodicals we now refer to Lama (2010, 2011).



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MAGÌA BIANCA

Volle esser chiamata così per prudenza... Dicendosi bianca questa magia, dichiarava di rifiutare ogni parentela con quell'altra magia *nera* e di essere pura di ogni diabolico intervento, d'ogni collaborazione degli * abitator dell'ombre eterne. „ Zoroastro sarebbe stato lo scellerato inventore di questa nera magia in cui si invocava Belzebù e tutto il suo esercito

* *Dov'è Zoroastro*
Che fu dell'arte magica inventore? „

domanda Petrarca.

Quest'esercito di diavoli e diavoletti, salterelli, drusi, efialti, strigi, lupi manari e folletti era anche descritto... Secondo Giovanni Weier era composto di 72 generali e di 7405982 gregari, non uno di meno, tutti peggiori dei loro capi.

Ma quando leggiamo che avevano paura dei maghi e degli stregoni, anche degli uomini di studio, perchè scrissero come se davvero avessero creduto a questa sciocchezza, sorge il dubbio che quegli antichi, come qualche moderno, non abbiano scritto così come pensavano.

Lo scrittore è sempre un'artista e l'arte vive un po' di contrasti e molto più di adattamento alle idee del tempo.

Il popolo credeva allora alle maleficbe influenze della nera magia ed il seguire la corrente delle idee è, purtroppo, il segreto... magico dei furbi.

Inoltre, nel Medio Evo, se era prudente non immischiarsi nelle influenze diaboliche, sarebbe stata cosa imprudentissima l'affermare che erano fole.

Invece la magia bianca era l'arte delle illusioni. La prestidigitazione, i ventriloqui, l'illusionismo appartenevano a questa candida magia.

Oggi si rappresentano nei baracconi delle fiere degli spettacoli d'illusionismo che avrebbero fatto impazzire molta gente nei secoli passati, come le ondine, le naiadi, la fanciulla-ragno, la metempsicosi. Sono scherzi di specchi opachi o trasparenti, effetti di riflessione della luce e di illuminazione.

Non occorre la scienza di Michele Scotto

* *che veramente*
Della magiche frode seppe il giuoco „

per indovinare il segreto. Alla magia bianca spettano pure gli *automi*. Nei vecchi libri si narra della *testa parlante* che possedeva Alberto Magno. Lo stesso Bacone sarebbe stato proprietario di una testa che non solamente parlava, ma ragionava come un filosofo in carne ed ossa... il che, per una testa di legno, è più difficile a credersi.

Anche nel *Don Chisciotte* si trova una testa che parla.

Si legge persino che Napoleone I abbia giuocato una partita a scacchi con uno di questi uomini meccanici. Ma giuocando, al solito, da prepotente fece perdere la pazienza anche all'uomo automatico, che gettò in terra gli scacchi e la scacchiera.

Questo racconto — che è stato scritto come storia — non puzza di Medio Evo, al pari dell'esercito dei demoni di Giovanni Weier?

Oggi abbiamo il telefono ed il fonografo, con cui si fanno parlare le teste di legno e le bambole di porcellana. Abbiamo anche le comodissime macchine calcolatrici, che vi fanno le operazioni dell'aritmetrica, dell'algebra e della trigonometria, senza fatica del cervello, per un occulto congegno di ruote dentate e di catene.

Fig. A. — L'appa recchio fotografico ottiene delle fotografie istantanee di ciò che succede sopra un tavolino.

La bicicletta non è una macchina che moltiplica?

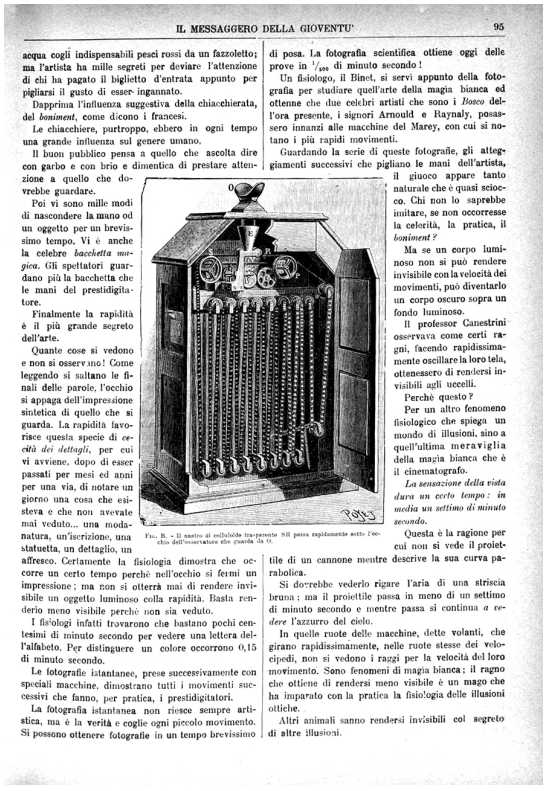
Leggesi che il grande filosofo Leibnitz spese più di 100,000 lire senza riuscire in un suo progetto di macchina che avrebbe dovuto fare le quattro operazioni fondamentali dell'aritmetica.

Convenite che il cervello umano le fa anche per meno.

L'illusione è il segreto dei giuochi di prestidigitazione e di prestigio.

Bisogna anche notare che vi è nel pubblico una buona preparazione all'inganno.

Gli spettatori non crederanno che l'artista abbia realmente fatto uscire uno zecchino dalla punta delle sue dita, un uovo, una gabbia ed un boccale pieno di acqua cogli indispensabili pesci rossi da un fazzoletto; ma l'artista ha mille segreti per deviare l'attenzione di chi ha pagato il biglietto d'entrata appunto per pigliarsi il gusto di esser ingannato.



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Dapprima l'influenza suggestiva della chiacchierata, del *boniment*, come dicono i francesi.

Le chiacchiere, purtroppo, ebbero in ogni tempo una grande influenza sul genere umano.

Il buon pubblico pensa a quello che ascolta dire con garbo e con brio e dimentica di prestare attenzione a quello che dovrebbe guardare.

Poi vi sono mille modi di nascondere la mano od un oggetto per un brevissimo tempo. Vi è anche la celebre *bacchetta magica*. Gli spettatori guardano più la bacchetta che le mani del prestidigitatore.

Finalmente la rapidità è il più grande segreto dell'arte.

Quante cose si vedono e non si osservano! Come leggendo si saltano le finali delle parole, l'occhio si appaga dell'impressione sintetica di quello che si guarda. La rapidità favorisce questa specie di *cecità dei dettagli*, per cui vi avviene, dopo di esser passati per mesi ed anni per una via, di notare un giorno una cosa che esisteva e che non avevate mai veduto... una modanatura, un'iscrizione, una statuetta, un dettaglio, un affresco. Certamente la fisiologia dimostra che occorre un certo tempo perchè nell'occhio si fermi un impressione; ma non si otterrà mai di rendere invisibile un oggetto luminoso colla rapidità. Basta renderlo meno visibile perchè non sia veduto.

I fisiologi infatti trovarono che bastano pochi centesimi di minuto secondo per vedere una lettera dell'alfabeto. Per distinguere un colore occorrono 0,15 di minuto secondo.

Le fotografie istantanee, prese successivamente con speciali macchine, dimostrano tutti i movimenti successivi che fanno, per pratica, i prestidigitatori.

La fotografia istantanea non riesce sempre artistica, ma è la verità e coglie ogni piccolo movimento. Si possono ottenere fotografie in un tempo brevissimo di posa. La fotografia scientifica ottiene oggi delle prove in $^1/_{500}$ di minuto secondo!

Fig. B. — Il nastro si cellulòide tra-parente SII passa rapidamente sotto l'occhio dell'osservatore che guarda da O.

Un fisiologo, il Binet, si servì appunto della fotografia per studiare quell'arte della magia bianca ed ottenne che due celebri artisti che sono i *Bosco* dell'ora presente, i signori Arnould e Raynaly, posassero innanzi alle macchine del Marey, con cui si notano i più rapidi movimenti.

Guardando la serie di queste fotografie, gli atteggiamenti successivi che pigliano le mani dell'artista, il giuoco appare tanto naturale che è quasi sciocco. Chi non lo saprebbe imitare, se non occorresse la celerità, la pratica, il *boniment*?

Ma se un corpo luminoso non si può rendere invisibile con la velocità dei movimenti, può diventarlo un corpo oscuro sopra un fondo luminoso.

Il professor Canestrini osservava come certi ragni, facendo rapidissimamente oscillare la loro tela, ottenessero di rendersi invisibili agli uccelli.

Perchè questo?

Per un altro fenomeno fisiologico che spiega un mondo di illusioni, sino a quell'ultima meraviglia della magia bianca che è il cinematografo.

La sensazione della vista dura un certo tempo: in media un settimo di minuto secondo.

Questa è la ragione per cui non si vede il proiettile di un cannone mentre descrive la sua curva parabolica.

Si dovrebbe vederlo rigare l'aria di una striscia bruna; ma il proiettile passa in meno di un settimo di minuto secondo e mentre passa si continua *a vedere* l'azzurro del cielo.

In quelle ruote delle macchine, dette volanti, che girano rapidissimamente, nelle ruote stesse dei velocipedi, non si vedono i raggi per la velocità del loro movimento. Sono fenomeni di magia bianca; il ragno che ottiene di rendersi meno visibile è un mago che ha imparato con la pratica la fisiologia delle illusioni ottiche.

Altri animali sanno rendersi invisibili col segreto di altre illusioni.

While *Messaggero dei Fanciulli* is basically silent, most of our early textual witnesses come from *Messaggero della Gioventù*. On the journalistic side, the first traces are from issue 3 of (the first half of) February 1899 of the biweekly: an unsigned article (just two paragraphs) on *mutoscopio* (p. 89), which is mentioned as "un nuovo tipo di cinematografo". It is apparently a description of the *mutoscope* apparatus, and its "flip-book" principle, and it seems worthwhile because it mentions that "questo nuovo strumento si fa muovere con l'introduzione di una moneta da 10 centesimi": since no additional information is given, it might hint that it was available in Italian arcades at the time. The paragraph was anticipating another article in the same issue: authored by Carlo Anfosso, a well-known science popularizer, it is titled *Magia Bianca* and presents Edison's *kinetoscopio* (pp. 94-96: Fig. 2A-C). The American origin and diffusion of the machine is clearly stated there, but it is noteworthy since it is illustrated by three vignettes, the last two detailing the interiors of the machine and signed "Poyet" (thus apparently of French origin, attributable to the renowned technical engraver Louis Poyet).[23]

[23] The first of the two Poyet's images is also the first one devoted to kinetoscope at http://www.victorian-cinema.net/machines.htm, accessed May 19, 2016. We were not able to trace its actual source.

The follow-up is an article signed "L'amico della gioventù," on pages 475-476 of issue 30 (July 27, 1902). Aptly titled *Una nuova industria*, the subtitle *Artisti per fonografi e cinematografi* clearly explains the focus of this early issue: the need of singers, actors and music performers for the new industry, as aptly represented by a vignette (see Fig. 3), of unknown author, representing a recording session for a *cilindro per fonografo*, to be played during at a movie theatre during a show.

From the literary side, the short story *Il cinematografo a colori*, by Roberto Tanfani (a minor writer for young adults of the 1890s), appears on pages 77-78 of issue 5 (February 4, 1900): a simple tale of a conservative mayor of a small town, sceptical of the possibilities offered by color movies with sound, as perfected (in the tale) by Italian manager Catullo Merangoli, inventor of "cinematografo Merangoli a fotografie colorate". Despite its simple-mindedness, the two-page story is noteworthy in that it appears to be one of the earliest tales where cinematography plays a major role.



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Di tutti gli apparecchi scientifici moderni il fonografo è il più interessante dal punto di vista del quale ci occupiamo.

In tutte le grandi città sono sorte delle case la cui specialità è la vendita dei cilindri per fonografi. E' una industria delle più fiorenti da qualche anno. Artisti che hanno una eccellente dizione, cantanti di secondo od anche di terzo ordine dotati spesso di una graziosissima voce, pianisti e suonatori di altri strumenti diversi, senza essere specialmente addetti a queste case vi danno lunghe sedute, la retribuzione delle quali aumenta in proporzioni sensibili, la somma dei guadagni fatti in qualche teatro o in qualche concerto.

Non v'ha alcuna cosa più divertente di queste sedute quando vi si assiste la prima volta. Gli attori vi possono fare il loro comodo, tenere il loro *pardessus* se han freddo, mettersi in maniche di camicia se han troppo caldo, il pianista fuma un sigaro e si rinfresca frequentemente se i suoi lunghi capelli, indizio del suo talento, danno al suo cranio già riscaldato dall'ispirazione, una temperatura elevata. I padiglioni dei fonografi sono disposti in modo che almeno cinque cilindri in una sol volta possano essere impressionati come è indicato nella illustrazione. Ecco un signore che si mette davanti alla loro imboccatura e declama una poesia di D'Annunzio o di Carducci, eccone un altro che pronuncia con voce squillante un brano saliente d'un discorso parlamentare attribuendolo a questo od a quel deputato più in voga.

E' adesso la volta di un artista di caffè concerto che canta la canzonetta di moda mentre il piano lo accompagna.

Viene quindi un pezzo d'opera. I due attori che entrano per primi in scena si avanzano e cantano le loro parti, mentre non lungi da loro, altri artisti, uomini e donne aspettano di venire a prender posto davanti l'imboccatura.

I rumori della folla, gli applausi di spettatori immaginari, i " bravo „ e l'entusiasmo delirante alla fine del pezzo son prodotti senza parsimonia dagli stessi attori, ai quali i pianisti e le altre persone che assistono a questa operazione sotto titolo diverso portano un efficace e disinteressato concorso. I rumori di guerra, colpi di fucile, di cannone, ecc. sono riprodotti, quando occorre con artifici analoghi a quelli che in teatro si adoprano dietro le quinte.

La trasmissione del canto, della musica e delle parole degli attori a grande distanza è lo scopo del *teatrofono* già abbastanza comune. Ma in questo caso non v'ha retribuzione speciale. Non è per la stra vibrante di metallo che parla o canta l'artista, ma per i numerosi spettatori seduti davanti a lui. Gli spettatori che sono a più leghe di distanza da lui possono pure intendere la sua voce, ma questo è un dettaglio che gli sfugge e di cui egli non si cura.

L'AMICO DELLA GIOVENTÙ.

... un artista di caffè concerto che canta una canzonetta di moda mentre il piano l'accompagna.

Figure 3.
An unsigned illustration accompanying the article **Una nuova industria**, appearing on p. 476 of issue 30 (July 27, 1902) of **Messaggero della Gioventù**.

It is somewhat surprising that, except for very few short news items, no other trace of cinema can be found in these magazines. The situation is similar for *Letture per la Gioventù*. Up to early 1906,[24] it sports a constant presence of comics on the cover and of the popularizing *Notiziario* and *La pagina scientifica* (the latter by Carlo Anfosso), the only remaining editorial sections of the magazine. These textual sections are going to be present in one form or the other until the demise of the magazine, and they are the only place where a few scattered remarks on cinematography can be found. The most notable are, a review signed "n." on page I of issue 43 (October 28, 1906) of the book by Guglielmo Re *Il cinematografo e i suoi accessori*, published by Hoepli and one the first Italian manuals devoted to the industry; and the short piece *La storia del cinematografo*, in the series *Intorno il mondo* by "Il viaggiatore", which popularises some technical concepts concerning the perception of moving images (page 235 of issue 30, dated July 28, 1907), a clear indication of the arising visibility of the *medium* among the intended audience of the magazine. Visually, in the whole run of both *Messaggero* and *Letture*, the only vague reference to cinematog-

[24] The change starts with issue 10 of March 11, 1906. Fro the remaining of 1906 the name becomes *Letture per la Gioventù e la Famiglia*, and it acquires four extra pages, called "ali" in the comics jargon, offering among other things a rich readers' letter section.

raphy is a comics advertisement for magic lanterns on the last page of issue 1 (January 6, 1907: Fig. 4).
The situation does not fare much better for *Novellino*, even if here some of the jokes indeed show the influence of cinema over the themes and content of its comics. It should be remarked that this is in general a two-direction flow: as shown e.g. by Lance Rickman, the versions of *L'Arroseur arrosé* produced by the Lumiére brothers are clearly indebted to the same joke, copied and reproduced over and over by German and French artists. The current research on Italian magazines does not allow one to make a definite pronouncement as to what degree such foreign magazines may have influenced the development of Italian comics, even if they clearly did influence. Nevertheless, we believe that the entry of *Novellino* in such a list (Fig. 5), the cover of issue 24 (June 15, 1899), is indebted to the Lyon brothers: the cartoons appear after the famous short, and it is presented here through its mediation. Possibly, the author Roberto Raimondi (one of the staples of the magazine) might have been a guest at one of the many projections in the Italian capitol. However, note the use of a handle for stopping the water flow: apparently missing in Lumiére's variants, it is reminiscent of a graphical version of the gag dating to the 1880s.[25] As a further witness of the relevance of the French firm is the carton published on *Almanacco Novellino del 1903*, the yearly supplement given away to subscribers: *Cretinetti e la pubblicità*, drawn by Menotti Scagliarini, tells in rhyme the story of a bill poster and an annoying boy, the latter ending up stuck to the wall (Fig. 6).
On the content side, the magazine is nowadays mostly remembered for the appearance of Yellow Kid in issue 24 of (June, 13) 1901, even though American cartoons already appeared inside some all-age magazines in the decade before.[26] A more interesting contribution to the comics' lore is the introduc-



Figure 4.
An unsigned strip advertising a shop selling magic lanterns and cameras for beginners: on the back cover (p. 8) of issue 1 (January 6, 1907) of **Letture per la Gioventù**.



Figure 5.
An Italian variant of the timeless joke, **L'Arroseur arrosé**: authored by Roberto Raimondi and gracing the cover of issue 24 (June 15, 1899) of **Novellino**.

[25] See Rickman (2008) figs. 4,5.

[26] As an example, our research uncovered many cartoons by Opper in the 1890s satirical magazines by Milanese publisher Verri.



Figure 6.
A simple story (told in rhymed verses), drawn by Menotti Scagliarini: on p. 2 of **Almanacco del Novellino 1903** (December 1902).

tion beginning in that same year of a loose cast of stock characters. Indeed, various characters such as the previously mentioned Cretinetti (mostly on *Novellino*) and Turaccioletti (mostly in *Messaggero della Gioventù*) appear in many 2-vignettes jokes in the pages of the Calzone&Villa periodicals. These jokes are hardly continuities in the modern sense: many name variants are used (Cretinowsky, Stupidini,…) and even the physical semblance (and age) of the characters vary from each issue. From the point of view of the present article, it is noteworthy how its use in *Novellino* confirms that Cretinetti was a stock name earlier than the birth of the character by actor Andree Deed: albeit the derivation from cartoons to movies seems unlikely, it strikes as a meaningful correspondence between the sensibilities of the consumers of the two *media*.[27]

Despite such a contemporary attitude towards the comics, *Novellino* is silent on any reference to the movies, even if most trappings of modern life are prominently displayed and featured in countless visual jokes. Theatre is a favourite topic, as it was in *Messaggero/Letture*, but as far as projections are concerned, up-to 1907 only a simple 2-vignette gag on a *Lanterna Magica* appears on a cover. Furthermore, in order to get a better feeling for the period we also checked *Il Pupazzetto*, the satirical magazine edited by Yambo. We investigated 1899-1901 and the later years 1904 and 1907: despite the many costume satires and theatrical news it contains, just the Fregoligraph is mentioned *en passant* in very few issues in 1904 and 1907, and apparently just for the sake of the artist.[28]

Two worthwhile exceptions to such a deafening silence appear in the last months of 1908. Let us look together at the two issues. The cover of issue 35

[27] The first appearance of Cretinetti as a nickname actually dates from March, 1901 in *Novellino*. The standard reference on the artist is now Gili (2005). The first Italian appearance of Boireau is dated there at 1906 with the name Beoncelli, as indeed mentioned by Vamba: the nickname Cretinetti is introduced in 1909 when the actor moves to Turin (and it is temporarily reverted to Beoncelli in 1912). More interestingly, Gili (2005: 43) claims that the nick was actually inspired by the character appearing in *Novellino*!

[28] As for 1907, this is possibly due to the final shows (on May, 4) in Rome of the apparatus: see Bernardini (2001: 87).



Figure 7.
Is it a true representation of the interiors of an Italian **Kinescopio**? The joke ("By Jove, Gigi is right: the sea as seen here is so real that feet seem to get wet from the waves"), drawn by R.C. and titled **The Reality... of Illusion (At the Kinescope Parlour during Cleaning Time)**, appears on the cover of issue 35 of **Novellino** (August 27, 1908).

(August 27; Figure 7) has a 2-vignette joke titled *La realtà… dell'illusione. (Al Kinescopio nell'ora della pulizia)*. The fun is on a naïve peasant that does not understand the special kind of "reality" of the movies, as advertised by a fashionably dressed guy (possibly an "imbonitore") on the outside. This kind of joke implicitly assumes that the children readers are instead able right away to properly understand such a "reality". Most surprisingly is the fact that, so late in the game, kinetoscopes could be still around, and inside a building, instead of a tent.[29] Unless, of course, this contrast is actually chosen for adding to the humour of the joke, since the peasant is not even able to relate with such old news as kinetoscopes. Common sense would suggest that such parlours would have to have been a familiar view to the readers, for the joke to be effective. However, the previous considerations has to be tackled with some care, since the joke itself seems a direct swipe of a much older vignette taken from a 1897 issue of *Judge* (Fig. 8). Indeed, the peasant and the boy are clearly mirrored in the Italian panel, suggesting the use of a copying device. Thus, the vignette would probably sound like the reaction of the artist to the arising of the new *medium* via the reuse of a much older *topos*.

The cover of issue 42 (October 15: Fig. 9) is the earliest page authored for *Novellino* by renowned artist Sergio Tofano: The signature is a still rough version of his distinctive treble clef. *I fratelli Cretinetti al Cinematografo* portrays a joke on the Cretinetti brothers, who want both to pay half of the ticket price (the sign states 20 cents for *Sedie*, but only 10



Figure 8.
The likely source for the authors of **Novellino**: it appears in the December 12, 1897 issue of the American magazine **Judge**, as reprinted in (Bottomore 1995: 40).

[29] Additionally, the vignette would be noteworthy since, to the best of our knowledge, no pictorial depiction of the interiors of an Italian kinetoscope parlour has been so far reported.



cents for *Bambini Accompagnati*), since they are accompanying each other. As with the parlour example above, the half-price solution had to be well known to the readers, in order for the joke to be effective. Despite the awkward layout of the characters (Are the brothers inside or outside the building? Why is the gramophone there?), we are still able to distinguish a janitor, preventing a crowd from entering a building clearly indicated as a *cinematografo*, as well as the partial title of a few *proiezioni*: *I drammi*…, *Nelle minie[re]*…, *Una mosca*…, while the final word is unreadable.[30] The joke might still read well also in other languages, yet, the depiction of the establishment definitively seems more in touch with the times, and it should accurately represent a scene often occurring in Roman everyday life, as confirmed by the 1910 *specimen* below.

Also the analysis of *Novellino Rosa* is less than satisfactory. A very simple joke is on the first page of issue 35 from 1908 (August, 30): the obvious punch line of *Cinematografo rivelatore* is possibly revealing only the rising acceptance of the medium in the public consciousness (Fig. 10). Possibly of note is the presence of a moving train on the background, a key *topos* of early movies, which is instead placidly viewed by the audience. More interesting is the illustration of the fable *La moneta d'argento* on page 101 of the issue 13 of 1910 (March, 27). There, the "distributore di programmi del cinematografo" is offering to Lino,



Figure 9.
The **Cretinetti** brothers are the protagonists of the lame joke (on issue 42 of **Novellino**, dated October 15, 1908) about the discount available for **Accompanied children**: for them, a ticket should cost only 10 ¢, instead of the 20 cents to be paid for single Chairs.

Figure 10.
The "revealing cinema" is adapting to the new medium the same joke for cameras on Figure 4: it appears unsigned on the cover of issue 35 (August 30, 1908) of **Novellino Rosa**.

[30] We were not able to find any similar title among the Italian production: see Bernardini (1996).

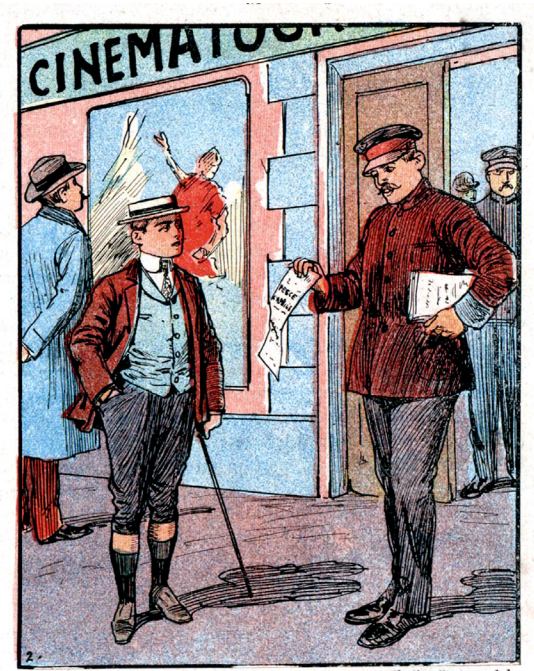
the main character of the apologue, the day program outside of a movie theatre (Fig. 11). It is telling that in one of the few tales with a contemporary setting, the boy decides to spend the Sunday afternoon at the movies with some friends: as also witnessed by the Sto vignette, it was a leisure pattern that by then should have been already well-established.

Closing remarks

The 1909-1914 run of *Novellino* has many gaps in all the collections I accessed, and unfortunately I was not able to check the whole run for the years 1909, 1911 and 1913. However, the 1910 and 1912 issues, as usual standardised with comics on front and back cover, plus a fable inside, show no mention of the movies. I may at least note the occurrence of Cretinetti as the main character of most of the jokes from 1912 on, perhaps as a side effect of the success of Deed' shorts. Indeed, its appearance seems now reminiscent of its film counterpart. A last vignette with a cinematographic theme appears in 1914 on the cover of issue 10 (March 5: Fig. 12), for a simple, unsigned and probably out-dated joke. In any case, as argued in the beginning of our contribution, the analysis of *Novellino* after 1911 is much less relevant. As a confirmation, there is nothing to report on in *Novellino della Domenica*.

The object of my study is very focussed, and it might be unsound to derive a general conclusion: despite the representativeness of the publisher, the analysis should be confirmed by scrutinising a much greater number of periodicals. For example, one of the main centres of cartoons periodicals *for adults* was Turin: not just respected venues such as *Il Fischietto* and *Pasquino*, the oldest Italian satirical magazines, but more salacious publications such as *La Luna*, making fun of stage *vedettes* of *café chantant*.[31] However, my research is a witness of the success of cinema in Italy in the late-Nineties, albeit more as a novelty item than as an art form: the tone of the essays and stories in *Messaggero dei Ragazzi* points into such a direction. Up until 1908, movies do not enter the arena again. And when they do, we register the persistence of likely out-dated images (as Fregoligraph, Kinetoscope…). This may be evidence of a late acceptance of the *medium* by the artists, and by their middle-class readers, at least as an object of social commentary. Perhaps, due the nature of the periodicals, it might boil down to a pedagogical concern towards the intended audience.

[31] Besides Gianeri (1977), the origins and aims of *La Luna* are described in the biography of his founder, the caricaturist Dalsani, in Moraglio (1988).



— Non entra signorino? - gli disse a un certo punto il distributore del programma.

Figure 11.
A boy waiting for his friends outside of a cinema, on page 101 of issue xxx (xxx) of **Novellino Rosa**: "- Aren't you coming in? - the program handler told him".

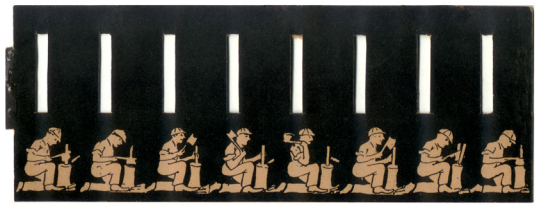




Figure 13.
This zoetrope is a giveaway from issue XVI (mid–1909) of **Enciclopedia dei Ragazzi**. The toy is said to be "illustrating the principle on which cinema is based".

A final detour

It seems worthwhile to close our contribution by looking at the monthly *Enciclopedia dei Ragazzi* by the Milanese firm Cogliati. The series was an adaptation of the British *The Children's Encyclopaedia*, edited by Arthur Mee some years before. In various incarnations, after being sold to Mondadori, continued to be on the shelves until the Sixties. Its 56 issues—starting around mid–1908[32] and forming a small encyclopaedia of six, richly illustrated volumes—were divided into sections such as poetry, history, geography and so on. One section was explicitly titled *Gli oggetti familiari*, and among its topics such as bike riding, phones, and planes, no reference to cinema is present. The only exception is the toy given away with issue XVI (Fig. 13): the cover (no further reference appears inside) says "Giuochetto di questo fascicolo: *Un Kinetoscopio*." The truth was, it was a Victorian zoetrope, even if mentioned as a toy that "illustra il principio sul quale è basato il cinematografo." Likely, no mention of the medium was present in the original edition of *Enciclopedia*. It is our impression that the same kind of exploitation occurred for comics. Indeed, they started to appear after a few issues, in the section aimed at children. The art itself came from foreign artists, with short *Corrierino*-style rhymes below the panels, often authored by renowned writer Camilla del Soldato. Comics thus seem to have been added as a reaction to the success of the weekly, and indeed the material presented is mostly German, possibly recycled from previous publications. Clearly, the Milanese magazine was perceived as the strongest competitor for the attention of the audience, even if the interest for cinema was just rising, as the toy should testify.



Figure 12.
It is once more Cretinetti who, **In Africa**, as a "cinematographic operator is able to shot exceptional movies thanks to an embalmed lioness". The crude, unsigned joke was on the cover of issue 19 (March 5, 1914) of **Novellino**. By then, such real-life shorts likely were out of fashion...

[32] Only issues from 35th on (November, 20 1911) are dated, and the starting date is supposed. Comics appeared since issue 25, with two pages of *Nani Burloni* by Lothar Meggendorfer, rhymed by children's writer Camilla del Soldato. For a history of the series we refer to (Landi 2008), reporting 1909 as the starting date.

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