

that relation between us, or among us 2

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Lottando la vita (Videobase, 1975) 3–6

that relation between us, or among us

A life of struggle 7

a screening programme initiated by Maria Iorio and Raphaël Cuomo

Archive journal

that relation
between us,
or among us

a cinema situation

Displaced outside of the cinema, the films invite us to form a new assembly. The series *a cinema situation* concentrates not only on the films but also on the potentiality of this assembly and, more widely, on the social practices that have contributed to the creation of new film cultures – film societies, cineclubs, film-makers clubs within decolonial movements, video salons, film workshops, etc. – by establishing other modes of production and distribution, by setting up spaces of freedom, sites for emergent subjectivities. The series would have us question our relation to the films, to their images, complicating it by a “situation”, *a cinema situation* that opens up new aesthetic and political issues and encourages us to imagine new practices and futures for film.



that relation between us, or among us

Maria Iorio / Raphaël Cuomo

That relation between us, or among us follows bodies on the move, their action, retracing displacements and transitions, but also those passages from one place to another constituted by acts of translation. The programme recovers some of those moments recorded by the camera: it examines the process of an “experimental archaeology of the present”; it exposes diachronies, the shifts between different border regimes, the continuities of power and the subjectivities that resist it. The programme reconstructs transnational counter-histories as they emerge from the productions and practices of “minor”, decolonial, accented cinemas: they oppose the fiction of an ever-present migration emergency – an “emergency” produced and perpetuated by European policies that make people illegal, by borderisation and spectacularisation mechanisms, and which goes from one “crisis” to the next. What comes to light in the films of this programme, and what is also at stake for the praxis they invented, is a relation. This arises from the action of bodies that appear, speak out, take up the camera, became visible or imperceptible, when they act in concert and invent new forms of alliance, solidarity and commonality. Beyond the chronicles of this action that articulates a principle of equality, what is therefore at stake here is nothing less than freedom – that “relation that can and does happen between us, or indeed among us” – and, ultimately the politics of the possible.

Taking the form of an occasional film society, the screening programme *that relation between us, or among us* is a section of a multipart project by Maria Iorio / Raphaël Cuomo. It will accompany their exhibition at Archive Kabinett (December 2018 – January 2019) and develop autonomously thereafter.

That relation between us, or among us unfolds in the itinerant series *a cinema situation*, a long-term project initiated by Maria Iorio / Raphaël Cuomo, which involves research, workshops, lectures, screenings and performances.

Maria Iorio and Raphaël Cuomo are an artist duo based in Geneva and Berlin. In the recent years, their collaborative artistic practice involving long-term research has investigated the economies of visibility in relation to past and present mobility regimes over the southern and northern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Their last projects examine the intertwined histories of migration and cinema and manifest a counter-memory of the “economic miracle.” www.parallelhistories.org

Annamaria Licciardello completed her PhD at Roma Tre University, Rome, in 2004. She is a film historian and programmer. Her main interest is in experimental and independent cinema. She collaborated with Tekfestival, independent film festival in Rome, the Rome Film Festival and now the Pesaro Film Festival. She has published articles and essays in books and reviews. In 2009, she edited with Sergio Toffetti Paolo Goli. Imprint Cinema. Her book *Il cinema laboratorio di Alberto Grifi* was released in 2018. She currently works for the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia.

Screening programme initiated by Maria Iorio and Raphaël Cuomo

Saturday 26 May 2018

Presentation and screening at 7 pm
Lottando la vita (1975)
by Videobase

Introduction and discussion
with Annamaria Licciardello,
Maria Iorio and Raphaël Cuomo

After the screening
Aperitivo and informal discussion
at Archive kitchen

UPCOMING

Saturday 8 September 2018

Presentation and screening at 7 pm
Il deserto e il mare
[The desert and the sea] (2007)
a film by Dagmawi Yimer, Sintayehu
Eshetu, Solomon Moges, Mengistu
Andechal, Adam Awad

Introduction and discussion
with Dagmawi Yimer,
Maria Iorio and Raphaël Cuomo

Archive Kabinett
Müllerstraße 133, 13349 Berlin

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Cover image: Presentation of *Lottando la vita*, Berlin, 1975.
Photograph by Anna Lajolo and Guido Lombardi selected
from their personal archive.



Videobase
Lottando la vita
1975

1/2", standard EIAJ,
b/w, sound, 99'

- Good morning.
- Good morning
- Talk, talk!
- What are you doing ?
Are you filming me, for God's sake !
- No, they are telling us the story of...
The story of...
Their story...
- Of their lives ?
- Yes, of their lives in Berlin.
- Ah. I have nothing to tell.
My story is a long one.



– What was the struggle for ?

– A struggle for... a reform.
A land reform.

We were struggling...
With my comrades from the
Communist Party...

– At that time they were good people !

– At that time
the Communist Party...
still had a voice.

We were always struggling.
Here and there.

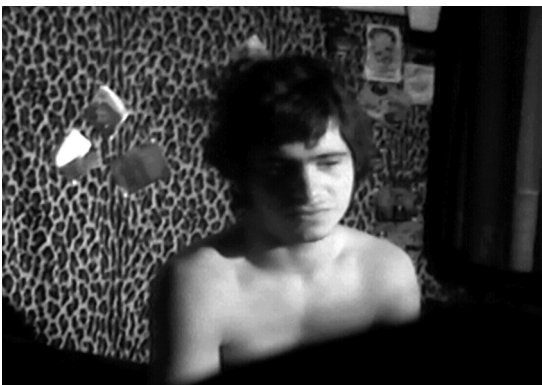
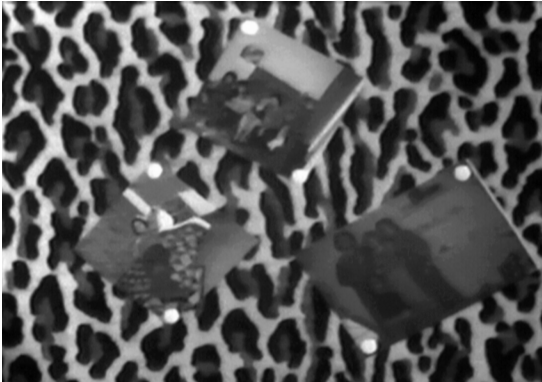
Against the police.
They were beating us with bludgeons...

In the fields.
Here and there.

A life
of struggle !

After this, I couldn't find any jobs
anymore in Maremma.

At a time when the Communist Party
became bourgeois.



...

I couldn't find any job in Italy.

– Because they knew you...
After all the struggles.

– Yes. After all of this fighting.
Here and there.

Struggling...
Here and there.

It was impossible to find work.

...

In 1958 I decided that it was time to
migrate to Germany.





– And with the kids, do you speak
in Italian, in Neapolitan, or in German ?

– Oh well...
It is a mess, for me, because...

I don't understand the kids.

And the children don't understand me.

The girl, Daniela...
She was born here, in Germany.

And then... Anna...

She was 3 years old when she came
to Germany.

She went to "Kindergarten".
Now she goes to school.

She speaks German.

I always try to bring them up the right
way, so that they have a bright future.

– But when you speak to them in Italian or
in Neapolitan, do they understand you ?

– No.

They don't understand.
They don't understand anything...

It is... Exactly this...
This is the problem.

The language.



– The situation for foreigners...
is difficult.

Moreover there is a law
that is discriminatory,
called "Ausländergesetz".

It is a law against foreigners...

that forbids them to participate in politics,
to create parties,

and so on.

This allows the German government
to kick you out at any moment.

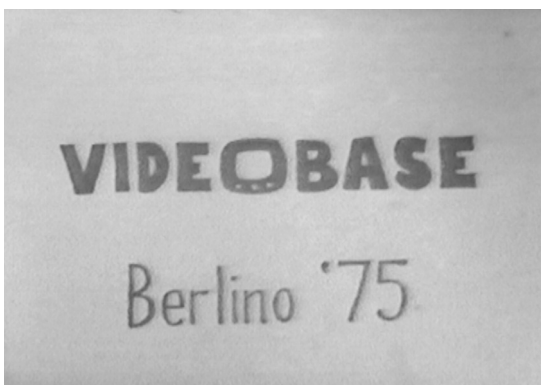
We have seen this, for example,
when the protest in Munich took place,
for the Palestinians.

They sent away a lot of Arab people
who had nothing to do with it.



↑ Photograph by Anna Lajolo and Guido Lombardi selected from their personal archive.

← *Lottando la vita* (Videobase, 1975, 99'), video still.



SYNOPSIS

Lottando la vita is a video made by Videobase (a collective comprising Anna Lajolo, Guido Lombardi and Alfredo Leonardi) in 1975 in West Berlin during a three-month residency facilitated by the DAAD / Berliner Künstlerprogramm. The three film-makers, who emerged from the Rome underground scene of the 1960s – early 1970s, disseminate counter-information on video, a medium well suited to grappling with a critical analysis of the real. Taking advantage of the specificities of early video and the autonomous modes of production it allows, their working process involves filming and presenting the recorded material to the protagonists in order to elicitate new comments that are further documented, in pursuit of an “experimental archeology of the present.”¹ *Lottando la vita* describes the situation of Italian *gastarbeiter* in West Berlin

via the accounts of bricklayers, pizza-makers and labourers. The video recounts the exploitation and marginalisation these workers experience on a daily basis. It also builds up a picture of the ways in which the migrants organise and resist, charting the steps leading up to the opening of the Casa di Cultura Popolare, an informal meeting place offering support to migrants on a host of specific issues – work, schooling, women’s rights. The participation of those actually involved in these social struggles and their free, direct articulation of them, in their own words, radically transforms the investigative-film format into a new, unconventional form whose unusually long takes allow arguments to be developed, and for changes in emotional intensity.

Videobase is a collective comprising Anna Lajolo, Alfredo Leonardi and Guido Lombardi. Active from 1972 to 1979, the collective produced militant videos and independent documentaries, as well as investigative reports for RAI. The film-makers were previously active members of the underground cinema scene in Rome. Alfredo Leonardi ceased his activity as a film-maker a few years after the collective ended its collaboration, and devoted his time to teaching. Anna Lajolo and Guido Lombardi continued to work together on film projects until the 2000s, in parallel with their practice as writers.

¹ Videobase, “Perché il video”, in *Altro Cinema*, July-September, 1976

a life of struggle

Videobase

West Berlin is not, of course, a typical example for Italian emigration. Numbering some 6,000 up to last year, even fewer now, Italian emigrants are not concentrated in big factories or particular districts, but are scattered about the city and tend to work in pizzerias or Italian restaurants. So the situation is somewhat different from places like Monaco or Frankfurt, where there are much denser Italian emigrant communities.

Thanks to a grant for foreigners from the German Academic Exchange Service, we were able to spend three months in Berlin and videotape this investigative report.

In the first month, we collected around 13 hours of material recorded at a wide variety of locations – the station, *Wohnheime* (hostels for *gastarbeiter*), pizzerias, popular haunts, workers' homes, the Italian day nursery in the working-class district of Wedding and the Casa di Cultura Popolare. Then we used a TV monitor to show parts of the material to groups of workers in different situations, recording the discussions the screenings prompted as a kind of instant feedback. We processed all of this material into a 90-minute summary, which is a selection of the most significant aspects of reality as it was told to us by the emigrants during our intervention: a condemnation of the current situation in Italy, which has forced millions of workers to emigrate, and of the immigrants' exploitation by German capitalism in menial, low-paid jobs.

But even those prepared to graft for piece rates, sparing no effort even when they should be off sick, can tell that Germany's days as a destination for immigration are over, the crisis is here now and they're starting to lay off. If you're elderly, everyone back home has forgotten about you and your pension isn't enough to get by on. Just about everyone, except maybe the youngest, tells you that the sacrifice emigration entails, the uprooting, has been pointless, in the next breath lambasting those responsible.

The youngsters at AEG Telefunken, who came from the south and the islands, had been hired on contracts signed in Italy.

The hourly rate, 6.50 marks, seemed good if you put aside the high cost of living in Berlin. But the money soon went on living expenses and after a few months the lay-offs began. Now they've taken on Indian workers, at a rate of four-and-a-half marks. Factory work is tough and the foreman never takes his eye off you. That's why many of the youth prefer to make pizzas – 1,200 marks a month, plus they can eat at the pizzeria and save money on food. The pizzerias and the other Italian places are mostly owned by people who have made fortunes by gambling. "They're vultures," says Totò, a waiter from Sicily, "they're waiting at the station or the airport when the new ones arrive, they take them off to work and it's all so they can make more out of them. Old hands like us, who know our way around, we won't work for a pittance anymore. The pizzerias are like miniature assembly lines."

One big problem for the emigrants is the language, of course, not only for the adults, who have to learn it, but also for the children. Antonio and Immacolata come from Naples and have six children. Their youngest daughter was born in Germany and speaks German, like her siblings. Their mother, however, speaks the Neapolitan dialect and they don't understand each other. This is tragic enough in itself and it gets worse when unemployment forces parents to return to Italy with children who either never learned or who over the years have forgotten how to speak Italian. Life's a long, hard struggle, especially in cases like that of Antonio who, back in 1941, was sentenced to 15 years for refusing to obey a fascist militia officer, then taken from prison in Gaeta by the Nazis in 1943 and deported, in turn, to Dachau, Buchenwald and Mauthausen. Liberated by Russian troops and back in Italy, he was imprisoned again in order to serve out his sentence. Then it was back to Germany, to work. Physically exhausted, he has had surgery to remove a lung and a kidney. Families like his stay on to claim benefits that, in Germany, seem slightly better, and live in houses that seem better than the rat-infested slum dwellings of Naples, even if Immacolata has to work for two weeks to earn one month's rent.

But Germany, the girls at the Casa di Cultura Popolare tell us, is moving to the right and has approved fascist legislation like the *Berufsverbote*, professional disqualification from civil service posts for anyone who doesn't see eye to eye with the (right-wing) parliamentary parties; and recent changes to the penal code that make calls for strike action or demonstrations liable to be punished as "incitement to violence". What use are trade unions anyway when any strike action is conditional on 75% of members voting for it?

Many of the emigrants who took part in the report have been working their way around Germany and Europe for years, developing

an international awareness of the problems of immigration as they do so. The recorded material presents a wide variety of human and social situations, ranging from the condition of the long-term unemployed, who survive resignedly on benefits and believe emigration no longer offers a minimum of security and economic prospects, to young pizza chefs for whom the illusion persists, and other young workers and students who, while we were making our report, founded the Casa di Cultura Popolare, to which we also contributed through our screenings and the opportunities they created to discuss the situation and the problems of Italian workers in Berlin. The video proved useful for bringing people together and making their needs and opinions known; as a tool for communicating and organising, for contributing in this case to the creation of an adequate framework for assistance, as the Casa di Cultura Popolare is intended to be, a meeting place for Italians, where structures are in place to deal with such problems as schools, after-school activities, work, issues affecting women and access to information.

From Berlin we travelled to Frankfurt, to the hall, packed with Italian emigrants, of that city's Casa di Cultura Popolare. There we showed the edited videotape *Lottando la vita* and recorded a long debate on emigration. The comrade workers of Frankfurt, like those of Berlin, accused the Italian governing class and the capitalist system of abandoning them, uprooted and exploited, to a very uncertain future.

Videobase, "A life of struggle"
Text previously published in
Nuova Cultura, no 7: 9, 1975.
Translation: Simon Chapman

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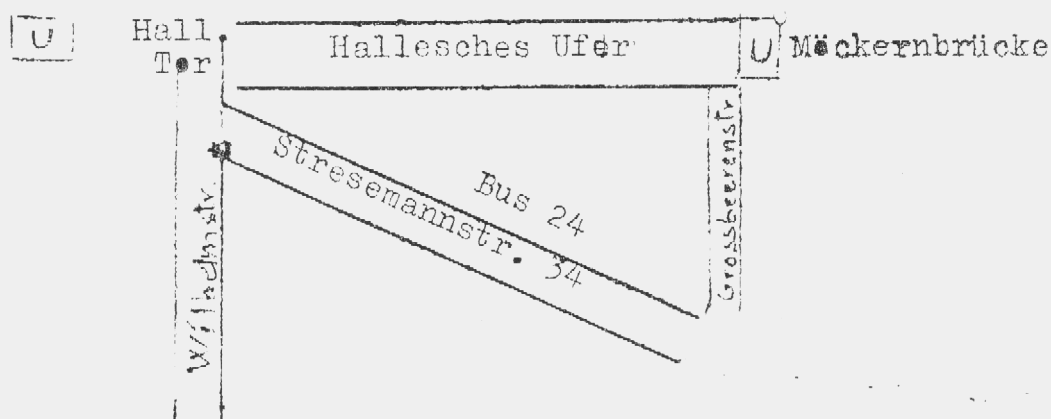
CASA DI CULTURA POPOLARE

di 1 Berlino 61 (Kreuzberg), invita gli emigrati italiani nella
Stresemannstr., 34 alla proiezione-dibattito del film (video-
nastro):

"Lottando la vita" lavoratori italiani a Berlino
domenica 7 dicembre 1975, alle ore 16

girato recentemente dal gruppo Videobase.

Venite tutti. Ingresso gratuito!



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