



Fotograma de *ORG* (Fernando Birri, 1979)

# A 'Sum' of Ideas: Fernando Birri's *ORG* Among the New Cinemas

Federico Windhausen  
Investigador independiente  
fjw2031@nyu.edu

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**TITLE:** A 'Sum' of Ideas: Fernando Birri's *ORG* Among the New Cinemas

**Abstract:** This article shows how Fernando Birri's film *ORG* can be placed in a productive dialogue with two "new cinemas" of the sixties, the post-1967 art cinema that is often referred to as political modernism and the branch of experimental cinema commonly labeled "underground". Of particular importance for Birri's project is the ability of cinematic montage to directly impact viewers' consciousness, an effect the filmmaker explores in ways that resonate with the work of a few contemporaneous experimental filmmakers in particular. Paying special attention to Birri's published and unpublished writings, this study identifies and traces distinctions between, on the hand, Birri's film and its motivating ideas and, on the other hand, the textual output (films and theories about film and culture) of contemporaneous filmmakers of the sixties. Those filmmakers include Jean-Luc Godard, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, Stan Brakhage, Gregory Markopolous, Paul Sharits, and Alberto Grifi.

**Keywords:** Fernando Birri, art cinema, experimental cinema, montage, spectatorship, film theory.

**TÍTULO:** Una 'suma' de ideas: *ORG* de Fernando Birri entre los nuevos cines

**Resumen:** Este artículo intenta mostrar cómo la película *ORG* de Fernando Birri puede ser interpretada en un diálogo productivo con dos 'nuevos cines' de los años sesenta: el cine de arte posterior a 1967, al que a menudo se hace referencia como modernismo político y la rama del cine experimental comúnmente etiquetada como

*underground*. De particular importancia para el proyecto de Birri es la capacidad del montaje cinematográfico para impactar directamente en la conciencia de los espectadores, un efecto que el cineasta explora en formas que resuenan con el trabajo de algunos cineastas experimentales, en particular los contemporáneos. Prestando especial atención a los escritos publicados e inéditos de Birri, este estudio identifica y traza distinciones entre, por un lado, la película de Birri y sus ideas motivadoras y, por otro, la producción textual (películas y teorías sobre el cine y la cultura) de cineastas contemporáneos de los sesenta como Jean-Luc Godard, Fernando Solanas y Octavio Getino, Stan Brakhage, Gregory Markopolous, Paul Sharits y Alberto Grifi.

**Palabras claves:** Fernando Birri, cine de arte, cine experimental, montaje, espectador, teoría del cine.

the film is a "sum" of ideas  
(the film as a thousand films)  
(as a thousand possible films)  
not one film, but a thousand films\* in one  
the film as a plan for a thousand films

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The thousand and one orgs  
\* to be developed  
Fernando Birri, April 10, 1972<sup>1</sup>

Speaking retrospectively in 1994 about the origins of his film *ORG*, begun around 1967 and premiered in 1979, Fernando Birri notes the importance of some of the major events of the late sixties for his project, including the death of Che Guevara in 1967, the

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1 Fernando Birri, *ORG: un Film de Fermaghorg: "Il Libro di ORG I: Immagineria Visiva"* (typed manuscript): 125. The translation is mine; all translations of texts that are not in English are my own. The version of this transcription of Birri's diary that I cite herein can be found in Box 2, Folder 13-18, Fernando Birri Archive of Multimedia Arts - Escritos 1933-2008 (bulk 1944-2008), Ms.2010.050 John Hay Library University Archives and Manuscripts, Brown University. (This archive is hereafter cited as Fernando Birri Archive of Multimedia Arts - Escritos 1933-2008.) This typed transcription of Birri's diary is also available as a PDF in the following DVD release of the film: *ORG*. Directed by Fernando Birri. Berlin: Filmgalerie 451/Arsenal - Institut für Film und Videokunst, 2017. It should be kept in mind that, since the original, handwritten diary entries are not stored in the Birri Archive at Brown University and have not been made public (if they still exist), currently we cannot know the extent to which the available transcription might also be a revision of the original diary. Also, the Birri Archive includes another, parallel diary, titled "Diario Inútil", composed of small, loose-leaf diary pages that are not included in the typewritten diary.

uprisings of May 1968 in which students were able, in his view, to “radically answer the capitalist system”, and especially the first human moon landing in 1969, which threw into crisis “the ego-cosmocentric conception of man”.<sup>2</sup> Throughout his discussions of *ORG* over a number of years, Birri repeatedly alludes to various all-encompassing assessments of the social, political, and existential problems of humankind, many of which are mentioned in the film in the context of and alongside its loose adaptation of Thomas Mann’s 1940 novella, *The Transposed Heads: An Indian Legend*. In Mann’s revisionist (and highly Occidentalized) version of a tale from the 11th-century Indian story collection *Kathāsaritsāgara*, the German author puts forward his conviction that “the world’s goal is union between spirit and beauty, a bliss no longer divided but whole and consummate”, as Mann puts it in a passage cited by Birri.<sup>3</sup> Omitting what he dismisses as “that ‘psychologizing’ —or subjective— key” in Mann’s version,<sup>4</sup> Birri reduces his characters to symbols (referred to in his diary as the “typical bourgeois of late capitalism”)<sup>5</sup> and focuses his adaptation on “another type of ‘objective’, material, sensory dimension” that he takes to be unique to the cinema, in the hope of guiding his viewers toward a restorative Edenification of our divided world.<sup>6</sup> As Birri sees it, what is referred to in his film as “this scientific, scientifascistic humanity, mechanistic and explosionist”, can be transformed if it applies the overarching corrective developed by Wilhelm Reich, the sexologist who espoused the elimination of all forms of repression through a freeing of the

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2 Fernando Birri, “3a Lección 22/3/94 Polivalencia y Fotografía y Cámara: *ORG*”, “*DOCFIC*” *Cómo se filma un film / Taller de dirección de Fernando Birri / EICTV / Fernando Birri* (Córdoba, España: Fundación del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano; La Habana, Cuba: Fundación del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano, 2007): 102.

3 Thomas Mann, *The Transposed Heads: An Indian Legend* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1941): 137. Birri includes this passage in various promotional materials for *ORG*, including those found in Fernando Birri, *ORG - Dossier inglés I*, Box 1, Folder 31, Fernando Birri Archive of Multimedia Arts - Escritos 1933-2008.

4 Birri, “3a Lección 22/3/94...”, 118.

5 Birri, *ORG: un Film de Fermaghorg...*, 1.

6 Birri, “3a Lección 22/3/94...”, 118. For a critique of Mann’s book as a representation of an Indian legend, see V. Ganeshan, “The Transposed Heads by Thomas Mann: An Indian Legend or a Metaphysical Jest?” in *JSL: The Journal of the School of Languages*, 5-1-2 (Monsoon 1977 & Winter 1978): 1-13.

orgasm and an embrace of its curative energies.<sup>7</sup> These ideas are indicative of the nature and scope of Birri's project, which marries a fairly common diagnosis of our disunited modern society to a very particular thesis about its carnal and spiritual path to rehabilitation.<sup>8</sup>

Birri's self-described *film maldito* explores such concerns through an exceptionally fragmented aesthetic of collage, an audiovisual assemblage that the filmmaker characterizes with chains of words and phrases, as in his 1978 *ORG* manifesto, which calls "for a cosmic cinema delirious and lumpen communism sensual hedonistic erotic thinking viscera: cosmunism".<sup>9</sup> It is not surprising that Birri would be calling for a different kind of cinema in an era of many such artistic imperatives, and this essay considers how Birri can be positioned (and positions himself) in relation to some of the most important 'new cinemas' of the late sixties. Without diminishing the considerable significance of Latin American cinema of the sixties for Birri, this study introduces, through a series of comparative analyses, a selection of cinematic trends and filmmaking projects from Europe and the United States that

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7 Throughout Birri's diary, the concept of polymorphous perversity is referred to in a celebratory, playful manner. But it merits mention that Reich's sexology of liberation views homosexuality as a perversion that will not exist in an ideal society. Reich summarizes his own views thusly: "1. Homosexuality among adults is not a social crime, it does no harm to anybody. 2. Homosexuality can be reduced only by establishing all necessary prerequisites for a natural love life among the masses". Wilhelm Reich, *The Sexual Revolution: Toward a Self-governing Character Structure*, trans. Theodore Wolfe (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969): 211. Given that some have interpreted the transposition of the two male characters' heads in Mann's novella as "a fusion of separate selves [that is] both metaphysical and homoerotic", it can be said that Birri's source material (in which Mann "gave heterosexual rivalry a homosexual spin") not only does not share Reich's limitations, but might even have offered the filmmaker a path beyond some of the sexologist's biases. But the couplings and trajectories of desire represented in *ORG*'s primary narrative are exclusively heterosexual. Anthony Heilbut, *Thomas Mann: Eros and Literature* (New York: Alfred. A. Knopf, 1995): 240, 139.

8 To return to the opening quotation, we can speculate that the apparent thwarting of the global, anti-imperialist plan Guevara had represented, combined with Birri's direct exposure to the sixties countercultures of the European continent, led the filmmaker to deeper existential, more 'cosmic' questions, taking him beyond the limits of the official dimensions of Castro's Cuba (to which he nonetheless remained ideologically committed). This is a speculative suggestion, however. The biographical motives behind Birri's interest in Reich remain a subject for further research and analysis.

9 Fernando Birri, "Manifiesto de *ORG* (Manifiesto del Cosmunismo o Comunismo Cósmico)", in *Fernando Birri: el alquimista democrático: por un nuevo nuevo nuevo cine latinoamericano* (Santa Fe, Argentina: Ediciones Sudamérica Santa Fe, 1999): 233.

bear special relevance for a contextual understanding of *ORG*. The first new cinema discussed here is the post-1967 art cinema that is often referred to as political modernism, and the second is the diverse branch of experimental cinema commonly labeled "underground" during the second half of the decade.<sup>10</sup>

It is apparent from many of Birri's writings and statements that, during his exile in Italy, which began in 1963, he had been able to follow new developments in art cinema quite closely, and he was especially attuned to the increased relevance of politically-engaged cinema, a commitment and interest that has largely been discussed in previous studies of Birri in terms of his ties to Latin American cinema. But at festivals such as the Mostra Internazionale del Nuovo Cinema in Pesaro, for example, Birri was also following a wider cultural shift in modern cinema, a move away from a predominance of existential concerns, toward an exploration of the ideological reconstruction of reality. In addition, as the filmmaker has noted, the era was one of "'underground' fashions, of the 'off, off', of 'extreme cinema', etcetera", and with his editors on *ORG*, he "worked a lot on these innovative codes", incorporating them into what he called "a 'racconto', a longform story" that set Mann's narrative in the service of Reich's worldview.<sup>11</sup> *ORG* demonstrates the importance for Birri of the new 'codes' that had transformed film editing, and as we shall see, this coincides with the high value that key filmmakers, associated with art and experimental cinemas alike, placed on cinematic montage. Montage practices and forms were continually being shaped by an assortment of discursive, ideological, aesthetic, and formal exigencies, and crucially, for Birri, how cinematic montage is understood and explored became inextricable from his view of subjectivity, especially during his search for novel shot-to-shot structures that could solicit or provoke new spectatorial experiences.

As this study connects the film to a number of Birri's core ideas (articulated in interviews and published and unpublished

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10 For an introductory discussion of political modernism in the cinema, see Robert Stam with Richard Porton and Leo Goldsmith, *Keywords in Subversive Film / Media Aesthetics* (Malden, MA; Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015): 107-144.

11 Birri, "3a Lección 22/3/94..." , 118.

writings), it considers which aspects of the filmmaker's project function as aesthetic and ideological positionings, manifesting affiliations and differences between *ORG* and other conceptually, artistically, and even geographically proximate projects associated with the era's new cinemas.<sup>12</sup> Methodologically, this entails identifying and tracing distinctions between, on the hand, Birri's film and its motivating ideas and, on the other hand, the textual output (specific films and theories about film and culture) of contemporaneous filmmakers of the sixties. The multiple contextualizations provided in these pages comprise a differential interpretation of a filmic text and artistic project that has been shaped by more than simply relations of influence: without detracting from its many singular characteristics, *ORG* can be productively situated at the intersection of various period-specific versions of what was being labeled 'modern', 'new', and 'countercultural' in the cinema. Finally, because this essay is primarily focused on conceptual relations and historical parallels between Birri's project and ideas about montage and spectatorial experience that were in circulation in sixties and seventies film cultures, it does not delve into the symbolism of the film's fictional narrative, for example, or its appropriations of documentary. Ideally, this study should function as a complement to future analyses of *ORG* that might attend to other dimensions of its diverse iconography, style, and allegorical structures.<sup>13</sup>

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12 This essay builds upon earlier scholarship that has theorized art cinema in terms of "positionings" that can be carried out through films, various types of written texts, public presentations, institutional rituals, promotional materials, criticism and scholarship, and so on. In this essay, special attention is paid the aesthetic and ideological positioning of filmmakers associated with art and experimental cinemas, and it is presumed that the ideas and practices that inform their films circulate within fields of cultural activity in which self-positioning is highly valued. For an introductory overview of how positioning, as a cluster of meaning-making practices and effects, functions within art cinema, see Geoff King, *Positioning Art Cinema: Film and Cultural Value* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019).

13 For a general introduction to *ORG*, see Hermann Herlinghaus, "Exilio-Resistencia-Vanguardia. La película 'ORG' de Fernando Birri", in: *Europäische Avantgarde im latein-amerikanischen Kontext*, ed. Harald Wentzlaff-Eggebert (Berlin: Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut, 1991): 571-590. For a discussion of *ORG* in relation Birri's film career, see Pablo Klappenbach, "ORG: ni alienígena ni meteorito. Continuidad y ruptura en la película maldita de Fernando Birri", *Cine Documental* 19 (2019). Available: <http://revista.cinedocumental.com.ar/org-ni-alienigena-ni-meteorito-continuidad-y-ruptura-en-la-pelicula-maldita-de-fernando-birri/>

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Birri's films and ideas are often discussed in relation to the New Latin American Cinema of the sixties that his early films predate, and it is evident that, throughout his career, he spoke and wrote about that movement more than any other. In a text published in 1968, for example, Birri lamented the reductive response to Latin American cinema of those European critics and programmers who expected films from the region to be politically-engaged in predictable ways. He also noted that the 'underdevelopment' affecting Latin American cinema was "socioeconomic but not necessarily [...] intellectual", insisting on the cosmopolitan and eclectic nature of cultural consumption and reception across the region, a point he supported by naming European and American writers and films (Joyce, Whitman and Lautréamont, for example, as well as *Citizen Kane*, *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* and *Entr'acte*) that were culturally significant within Latin America.<sup>14</sup> Birri's own internationalist perspective had already been made clear the previous year, in "Soggettiva Libera Indiretta, Liberissima, Addirittura Libertina", a text of his that made reference to Jonas Mekas, Glauber Rocha, Jean-Luc Godard, and Pier Paolo Pasolini, among others, assembling them under the appellation of 'new cinema' and emphasizing their 'freedom' as filmmakers.<sup>15</sup>

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Of signal importance for the new cinema of the late sixties was the shift, most pronounced after 1967, toward a cinema of political modernism, and in film scholar András Bálint Kovács's study of 'European modern cinema' and its major trends, we can identify which characteristics of this cinema seem most pertinent to *ORG*. As Kovács notes, the films of political modernism share a foundational belief in reality as a context that must be "reconstructed" critically within each film "with a clear manifestation of the auteur's political and ideological bias".<sup>16</sup> This view builds upon earlier versions of art cinema, such as the prevalent use of allegory in the 1950s to grapple with spiritual,

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14 Fernando Birri, "Revolución en la revolución del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano", *Fernando Birri: el alquimista democrático...*, 152, 154.

15 Fernando Birri, "Soggettiva Libera Indiretta, Liberissima, Addirittura Libertina", *Fernando Birri: el alquimista democrático...*, 80-82.

16 András Bálint Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema 1950-1980* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007): 357.

existential, or humanist questions, but the new cinema responds to a new auteurial imperative, evident by late 1968, according to which the filmmaker should present in his or her film a "totalizing vision about the world", a "comprehensive ideological framework to describe reality".<sup>17</sup> Disregarding the traditional subject matter and aesthetic conventions of realism, such a vision or framework offers instead "the essential rules, laws, functions, and forms organizing empirical reality [...] creating imaginary emblems of this arrangement". This type of assemblage can be found in the montage structures of Godard's films, for instance, whose organization appears to allude to, parody, emulate, or hyperbolize the logic of a culture saturated and interpellated by modern media.

28 Bound up with notions of immediacy and interventionism are three additional trends from the post-1967 period that Kovács discusses: the conviction that 'cinematic narration', a term that encompasses a broad range of possible styles, is "a form of direct auteurial and conceptual discourse"; the complementary belief that cinema can function as "a means of direct political action"; and the mandate that it "should exercise a direct impact on social, political, or ideological debates".<sup>18</sup> Art cinema becomes more overtly dominated by language during this period of heightened politicization, as in Kovács's example of *Partner* (1968), Bernardo Bertolucci's dialogue-heavy response to the events of May '68, in which a character calls for "direct communication" with audiences and implores viewers to pick up film cameras for themselves: "Do long panning shots of life, in Techniscope and color if you have broad ideas. Do static shots of death, in black and white if you like early Godard". For some of the most influential filmmakers of the period, including Third Cinema directors such as Rocha and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, the social, political, and cultural transformations of the decade had necessitated a linguistic turn, taking the cinema deeper in the direction of the verbalization of ideological propositions, of explicitly-asserted theories, questions, and slogans about art, politics, and society (relying increasingly upon a rhetoric of forceful impact that the Europeans come to share with the New Latin American filmmakers, a link Kovács does not address in depth).

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<sup>17</sup> Kovács, *Screening Modernism...*, 379.

<sup>18</sup> Kovács, *Screening Modernism...*, 356.

Central to all of these trends is the relation between audiovisual montage and language, a longstanding concern within 'new' and 'modern' cinemas. Prior to the rise of political modernism, one model for linguistically-direct, montage-intensive cinema was exemplified by the first part of the film *La Rabbia* (1963), an essay directed by Pasolini that addresses the European colonization and Marxist liberation of Africa. But Birri distanced himself from that approach when he wrote in a diary entry, dated July 18, 1970, that he was attempting to make a "film-poem" and not another version of "a cinema 'of poetry' (alla Pasolini, so to speak)", in an allusion to the Italian director's 1965 essay "Il cinema di poesia".<sup>19</sup> Birri does not explain further, but given the formal and structural complexities of *ORG*, we can speculate that he was in agreement with Godard, who discussed, decades later, "a brief vogue for what were called 'poetic films'" and disparaged the obviousness of "showing a photo of Marilyn Monroe when you're talking about her", as Pasolini does in *La Rabbia*.<sup>20</sup> Godard goes on to describe an alternative structure in which the viewer is presented with "a photo of something else to introduce another idea...", one that is not standing in for the idea or referent being heard in the film's spoken text. When montage is used to create a contrast between what is seen and what is heard, "there's no longer this simple relationship of illustration, and that makes it possible to exercise your capacity to think and reflect and imagine, to create [...] to discover at a stroke things you've never thought of before".<sup>21</sup> Like Godard, Birri ascribes a special value to montage structures that produce relationships of difference between language and image, as exemplified by any number of sequences in *ORG* with complex sound-image contrasts. In another diary entry, dated July 8, 1970, Birri writes that *ORG* will, ideally, convert filmmaker and viewer alike into co-creators, "both owners of 'their' (belonging to the two of them, to all of them)

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19 Birri, *ORG: un Film de Fermaghorg...*, 12.

20 Youssef Ishaghpour and Jean-Luc Godard, *Cinema: The Archaeology of Film and the Memory of a Century*. Trans. John Howe (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005): 10-11. See also Pier Paolo Pasolini, "The Cinema of Poetry", in *Heretical Empiricism*, eds. Ben Lawton and Louise Barnett (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988): 167-186. For an analysis of Pasolini's essay, see John David Rhodes, "Pasolini's Exquisite Flowers: The 'Cinema of Poetry' as a Theory of Art Cinema" in *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, eds. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010): 142-163.

21 Ishaghpour and Godard, *Cinema...*, 11.

images (no longer an author-master and spectator-slave of the images): a creative, free, vital, participating, collective, community act".<sup>22</sup>

By 1968, Birri had already encountered a remarkable synthesis and transformation of many of the fundamental features of the new cinema — not in European cinema, but rather in the earliest version of Fernando Solanas' and Octavio Getino's *La hora de los hornos* (1968).<sup>23</sup> Ideologically comprehensive and politically explicit, the cinema of urgent political action developed by Solanas and Getino assumes that audiences have the capacity to recognize, interpret, and reflect upon the version of reality that the film offers them through its various channels of information. The filmmakers do not renounce the illustrative image-text relationship that Godard disparages, but all the same, the sheer quantity and heterogeneity of their shots opens up the possibility of variable and subjective spectatorial responses. This would still amount to a secondary effect within *La hora de los hornos*, however, because its visual diversity is not designed to lead the viewer to a state of individual distraction; through its multiple strategies of linguistic exposition and rhetoric, the film asks viewers to follow (and debate) a coherent political polemic that is structured around various forms of intellectual and emotional entreaty. With its pronounced reliance on compact slogans (such as Julio García Espinosa's "'perfect' cinema = reactionary cinema") and a rapid accumulation of images and sounds, *ORG* can be seen as an extension and continuation of the features of *La hora de los hornos* that demand a highly-engaged spectator. But if Solanas and Getino base their film in an ambitious conception of the purposes and effects of montage, ample enough to encompass reasoned discourse and sensational agitprop, Birri's film makes manifest another tendency within the utopian cinemas of the moment: through editing strategies designed for direct psychophysiological impact, the filmmaker strives to produce a viewer who might discover "at a stroke", as Godard put it, not only ideas "never thought of before", but also effects felt on a level beyond that of conscious awareness. The

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<sup>22</sup> Birri, *ORG: un Film de Fermaghorg...*, 12.

<sup>23</sup> For an account of Birri's early, appreciative responses to Solanas's and Getino's film, see Laura E. Ruberto and Kristi M. Wilson, "The Hour of the Furnaces, May 68, and the Pesaro International Film Festival", in *A Trail of Fire for Political Cinema: The Hour of the Furnaces Fifty Years Later*, eds. Javier Campo and Humberto Pérez-Blanco (Bristol: Intellect, 2019): 124, 128-129.

search for more open and unconscious forms of spectatorial receptivity leads Birri in the direction of some of the most critical ideas, practices, and effects of experimental cinema of the sixties.

As it combines fictional, narrative scenes with essayistic monologues and documentary sequences, Birri's film continually interrupts itself, destabilizing its modes of address and disrupting its sequences through shots of very brief duration and an extensive use of discontinuity-editing techniques such as jump cuts and flash frames. In the previously cited diary entry from July 8, 1970, the filmmaker expounds the effects of such techniques:

[...] free association: spontaneous association, uncontrollable "uncontrolled" reply (cheers for speed!) which keeps the eye answering "without thinking twice", without thinking even once: a link, reaction, not only between two thoughts, ideas, opinions, but between two imperatives: between a million imperatives, a billion imperatives, pure metaphor, eye metaphor, *METAPHOR IN THE EYE*. (eye!: anti-symbolic function of this cinema, sensorial, sensual, material, biological metaphor and poetics of this cinema).<sup>24</sup>

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In the same entry, Birri also writes that this "process of *free metaphorization*" must be triggered by sequences dominated by many short shots: "only a rapidly cut film, a film which shows the eye an image before the eye —not the brain or the cerebral cortex— has time to forget what it no longer sees, can create this *eye association* (free or full of significance)".<sup>25</sup> Presumably, the spectator's mental associations would begin to link together liberated sexuality and revolutionary political thought in previously unforeseen and inconceivable ways, once freed from the resistances and repressive tendencies of both the conscious mind and Western social structures. This diary entry is one of Birri's earliest and most impassioned accounts of the type of spectatorial experience he was pursuing through *ORG*, and some of its language echoes that of Stan Brakhage's landmark statement *Metaphors on Vision*, which had been published in April of that same year in translation in Italy. The translation also included *A Moving Picture Giving and*

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<sup>24</sup> Birri, *ORG: un Film de Fermaghorg...*, 9-10.

<sup>25</sup> Birri, *ORG: un Film de Fermaghorg...*, 8.

*Taking Book*, the American experimental filmmaker's unique version of an instructional text about filmmaking, wherein Brakhage makes brief mention of his interest in Wilhelm Reich's "orgone" energies as visual phenomena.<sup>26</sup>

In *ORG*, Birri acknowledges his debt to Brakhage by including an excerpt from *Song 16* (1966), a film from Brakhage's *Songs* series (1964-1969) that is thematically concerned with sexuality, biology, and nature. As Guy Davenport noted, in his short film "Brakhage takes the fact that flowers are sexual organs and includes the human among them", but *Song 16* is more than a lyrical celebration of "fore-play, love, orgasm" because it also includes natural imagery — of undersea phenomena, for example— that evokes the biological state of pregnancy.<sup>27</sup> Davenport also claims that "Brakhage's moral concepts are whole", a comment which intimates that an ecologically-minded ethics informs the film's threading together of different forms and stages of life. Viewers can participate in the moral, organicist vision of the world that Brakhage puts forward in *Song 16* if they accept the challenges posed by his larger restorative project, which aims to overcome or ameliorate our modern condition of alienation and estrangement from the diversity of nature, largely through a repurposing and rethinking of the cinema as a visual experience. Interpreted in this manner, as Brakhage often was, the experimental filmmaker can be placed on common ground with the art cinema auteur, insofar as both figures are committed to a visionary reconstruction of the world as they see it.

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Despite Birri's use of phrases that resemble the language of Brakhage's writings, including "eye metaphor, metaphor in the eye", and notwithstanding each filmmaker's mobilization of montage to help viewers leave behind their preconditioned perceptions and ideas, they diverge in their views regarding whether such a liberation could be accomplished using the cinema's physiological triggers or through the intentional efforts of willful spectators. In *Metaphors on Vision*, Brakhage describes his self-conscious visual experiences as individual, voluntary exercises in seeing differently, through which he

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26 Stan Brakhage, *Metafore della visione e manuale per riprendere e ridare i film*, trans. Massimo Bacigalupo (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1970): 202.

27 Guy Davenport, "Two Essays on Brakhage and his Songs", *Film Culture*, 40 (Spring 1966): 12.

is able to generate "illuminations possible for any viewer capable of understanding his very vision as a metaphoric creation", as a subjective construction that can be expanded or restricted, "either directly inspired by nature or watered down by the cliché sights of others".<sup>28</sup> Rapid montage sequences are certainly a significant feature of many of Brakhage's films, but generally speaking, the filmmaker does not place any special emphasis on the type of visual effect to which Birri refers when he writes about presenting "an image before the eye [...] has time to forget what it no longer sees". Birri is referring to the optical afterimage that is caused by the delayed perception of a very fleeting image: because the viewer cannot see the image in the precise moment of its appearance before the eye, this inability can create a commingling in the perceptual system, a mental joining of two images, with the earlier one being perceived slightly late and possibly in conjunction with the next image (roughly similar to when a spot of bright light lingers as an imprint in the field of vision). Brakhage and Birri understand the potential of montage to lead the viewer to make semantic associations, to discover or invent meanings suggested by the representational content of different shots and scenes; but in contrast to Brakhage, in Birri's writings the visual device of the afterimage is made to occupy a privileged position as a catalyst, producing "spontaneous [...] uncontrollable" chains of ideas and even unclassifiable affective responses.

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This combination of filmic imagery and the afterimages that are generated by "the eye - not the brain or the cerebral cortex" holds the promise, for Birri, of founding a collaboratively intersubjective cinema, one whose qualities as a visual experience cannot be fully understood by merely looking at the frames on the filmstrip or the moving images that appear on the theater screen. Birri speculates that the authorship of *ORG* could be shared by filmmaker and viewer, "both owners of 'their' [...] images", perhaps in a manner analogous to modern musical compositions that explore the psychoacoustic effects of auditory illusions. Thinking along such lines, Birri wrote of his editing as a search for a "microtonality of film images", formulating a type of analogy between film editing and musical composition that can be

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<sup>28</sup> Stan Brakhage, "My Eye" in *Metaphors on Vision, Film Culture*, 30 (Fall 1963): n.p. For the Italian translation of the passage, see Stan Brakhage, *Metafore della visione...*, 67.

found throughout the history of experimental film discourse.<sup>29</sup> In an article published in the Italian film magazine *Filmcritica* in 1966, for example, Gregory Markopolous champions the importance of the single film frame, and in the area of montage, he advocates for a play of repetition and variation ("a complex of differing frames being repeated") within "short film phrases which evoke thought-images" and "are similar to the harmonic units found in musical composition".<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Markopolous invokes his own version of the rhetoric of co-participation when he claims that "any discontinuity introduced in the structure of the motion picture" might provoke "the arrest of the spectator's attention, as the filmmaker gradually convinces the spectator not only to see and hear, but to participate in what is being created on the screen, on both the narrative and introspective levels".<sup>31</sup> Notwithstanding these overlapping formal pursuits and theoretical claims, however, Birri would likely have differentiated his own palimpsest of projected and perceived images from Markopolous's work (or what he might have seen of it, possibly at screenings of the New American Cinema in Italy in the sixties). In Markopolous's

**34** *Twice a Man* (1963), for instance, one of the film's predominant formal features is its extensive use of onscreen superimposition, a technique that the Argentine filmmaker regarded as less direct and forceful than a montage method of optical afterimages that can be directed at the spectator's neurophysiology.<sup>32</sup>

Birri does not mention Markopolous in his writings or public statements, and the only New American Cinema filmmakers whose

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29 See the entry dated May 29, 1973 in Birri, *ORG: un Film de Fermaghorg...*, 170.

30 Gregory Markopolous, "Verso una nuova forma narrativa del film", *Filmcritica*, 169-170 (agosto-settembre 1966): 415. I am citing the original English-language text reprinted in Gregory Markopolous, "Towards a New Narrative Film Form", *Film as Film: The Collected Writings of Gregory Markopolous*, ed. Mark Webber (London: The Visible Press, 2014): 207.

31 Markopolous, "Towards a New Narrative Film Form...", 416. For an analysis of Markopolous's theories of montage, see François Bovier, "Collage, montage et assemblage: l'instantanéité des photogrammes dans le cinéma de Gregory J. Markopolous", *Retour d'y voir*, 6-8 (2013): 198-239.

32 According to editor Settimio Presutto, "We wanted to achieve the superimposition of images in the eye, and not on the screen...". Settimio Presutto, "The rediscovery of *ORG*", in *Berlinale Forum Programme* (Berlin: Berlin International Film Festival, 2017): 93. Available: [https://www.berlinale.de/external/programme/archive/pdf/201703093\\_en.pdf](https://www.berlinale.de/external/programme/archive/pdf/201703093_en.pdf)

footage appears in *ORG* are Brakhage and Jonas Mekas.<sup>33</sup> The issue of Birri's knowledge of experimental cinema becomes particularly relevant when considering his sustained interest in the afterimage throughout his long period of editing *ORG* in the seventies. One of his editors, Settimio Presutto, has made the credible claim that it was through a trial-and-error process that Birri discovered how different numbers of frames could produce different afterimage effects, but he has also asserted, incorrectly, that the experimental use of the afterimage was Birri's invention.<sup>34</sup> What remains an open question is whether Birri was at all aware of the flicker film, one of the most prominent types of experimental films of the second half of the sixties and the best-known vehicle for afterimage experimentation, or whether he had seen flicker or stroboscopic effects in film sequences, expanded cinema performances, or light shows. Despite the lack of any references to flicker-associated filmmakers such as Peter Kubelka, Tony Conrad, or Paul Sharits, even a cursory comparison of Birri's and Sharits's discussions of the afterimage reveals that they share some important ideas and at least one critical influence. Also, the points of connection with Sharits throw into relief the centrality, for *ORG*, of a particular conception of the spectator as a conditioned subject.

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Both Birri and Sharits mention the importance for their work of the cut-up method devised by William S. Burroughs, which, as the writer explained in 1963, "brings to writers the collage which has been used by painters for fifty years. And used by the moving and still camera".<sup>35</sup> But one crucial difference between those earlier modernist and popular-industrial versions of collage techniques and Burroughs's literary cut-up can be located in the broader context of ideas that the

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33 Birri does refer to Andy Warhol's filmmaking in a few entries from the diary that was not transcribed. Most tellingly, he declares in a July 8, 1971 entry that "the erotic cinema of Warhol is not a cinema for sexual liberation but instead for social sexual oppression", ironically claiming to "prefer a Danish porno film to the entire Warhol filmography". Birri does not elaborate his criticism, but he might have been objecting to the sadistic psychosexual dynamics of films such as *Chelsea Girls* (1966) and *Mario Banana #1* and *#2* (1964). Fernando Birri, *Diario inútil 4-VII-71-VIII-71*, unpaginated, Box 58, Folder 24, Fernando Birri Archive of Multimedia Arts - Escritos 1933-2008.

34 Settimio Presutto, *Recording of the Q&A with Settimio Presutto* (June 29, 2013), in *ORG*. DVD. Directed by Fernando Birri. Berlin: Filmgalerie 451/Arsenal - Institut für Film und Videokunst, 2017.

35 William Burroughs, "The Cut-Up Method", in *The Moderns: An Anthology of New Writing in America*, ed. Leroi Jones (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1965): 345.

36 writer offers about language and the body, specifically in his theory that language is a virus that infects the human body. First developed in the early to mid-1960s, Burroughs's ideas about the alterity of language and our susceptibility to its viral effects offer a deterministic vision of social control and a utopian promise of corporeal and mental release. As Birri noted in a letter from 1977, the goal of Burroughs's method, whether in literature or other media such as magnetic audio-tape, was "to achieve the cutting of the associations of conventional thinking", and it is through these linguistic and conceptual "association lines," as Burroughs describes them, that viral habits of thought and parasitic ideologies take hold within the subject's mind and body.<sup>36</sup> In keeping with Burroughs's belief that deprogramming was possible through certain neurophysiological effects in art, media, and technology, Birri deployed the cinema to bypass the conscious mind and disrupt the viewer's nervous system, an objective also expressed by Sharits. In a statement about his short *Ray Gun Virus* (1966), Sharits writes of the intended impact of flickering sequences of monochromatic color frames: "the projector is an audio-visual pistol; the screen looks at the audience; the retina screen is a target. Goal: the temporary assassination of the viewers' normative consciousness".<sup>37</sup> In another text, which refers explicitly to Burroughs's cut-up method, the filmmaker expresses his desire "to have total nonunderstanding and its consequence - involvement", a "mental orgasm" for the spectator that "is over when you are finally able to (mis) understand it".<sup>38</sup> Birri also sexualizes this mental-somatic response in his writings, and like Sharits, he pursues a Burroughs-inspired cinema of "eye association (free or full of significance)", capable of not just constructively, imaginatively disorienting and confusing his audience, but possibly dissolving each viewer's sense of a stable identity as well.

In his scholarship on Sharits and, more extensively, his fellow flicker filmmaker Tony Conrad, the art historian Branden Joseph submits that films such as the former's *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G* (1968) and the latter's *The Flicker* (1966) endeavored to fundamentally alter spectatorial

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36 Fernando Birri, "Carta al pintor escenógrafo portugués Henrique Ruivo, en Lisboa, 1977", in *Birri: el alquimista democrático...*, 108.

37 Paul Sharits, "Notes on Films/1966-68", *Film Culture*, 47 (Summer 1969): 14.

38 Paul Sharits, "Movie Cookbook", *Film Culture*, 47 (Summer 1969): 111.

experience.<sup>39</sup> Through *The Flicker*, for example, Conrad attempted "to induce an experience that was not only antinormative, but characterized by multiplicity and differentiation", offering "a transgressive, heterotopic encounter with the outside, an instance of positive feedback that induces wild perceptual oscillations".<sup>40</sup> Situating certain flicker films in a lineage of art from the sixties that includes Brian Gysin's *Dream Machine* and the performances of The Theatre of Eternal Music, Joseph argues that such projects are directed against more than just customary ways of thinking or perceiving —they resist and dissipate the perceived limits and borders of the body and the supposed autonomy and sovereignty of the human subject. Through his own encounters with and knowledge of the counterculture, Birri seems to have arrived at a roughly similar set of ideas and objectives, albeit without forswearing his exploration of alternative narrative forms. As he declares in the 1977 letter:

In order to get the most from this *EXPERIENCE*, the spectator should be brought back to a *zero point* in film experience, to a demolition of the old, the acquired and the partial within him, to an ideal *tabula rasa* receptive state: which is the same as wishing his palingenesis.<sup>41</sup>

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Such a spectator is far removed from the discerning subject being addressed by *La hora de los hornos*, for example, a film of considered arguments, emotional appeals, and historical narratives.<sup>42</sup> By contrast, *ORG* works to strip its spectators down, in a sense, and their rebirth and reconstruction is predicated less upon any one, correct interpretation of the film's pseudo-Reichian parable (its "ideological fable for perverse and polymorphic adults", in Birri's words) than on their receptiveness to corporeal and psychological liberation.<sup>43</sup> In his dia-

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39 See Branden Joseph, "A Crystal Web Image of Horror: Paul Sharits's Early Structural and Substructural Cinema," in *Paul Sharits*, ed. Susanne Pfeffer (London: Koenig, 2015): 204-221; Branden Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts after Cage*. New York: Zone Books, 2008.

40 Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate...*, 313, 340.

41 Birri, "Carta al pintor escenógrafo portugués...", 109.

42 The multiple formal and rhetorical strategies of *La hora de los hornos* are reviewed in Javier Campo, "To Invent Our Revolution: An Aesthetic-Political Analysis of *The Hour of the Furnaces*", in *A Trail of Fire for Political Cinema...*, 23-46.

43 See the entry dated October 18, 1971 in Birri, *ORG: un Film de Fermaghorg...*, 108.

ry Birri considers whether "sensory experience (sensory response) is much more universal —common— than intellectual response",<sup>44</sup> and proposes that in his film the "critical spectator [has been] changed for [the] sensorial spectator",<sup>45</sup> ideas he explores when, for example, the soundtrack to *ORG* distorts the words spoken by other filmmakers in their interviews and offers instead an indecipherable audio collage. But even though Birri's film frequently courts incoherence, it also undertakes to direct or guide the spectator's process of "free metaphorization" toward the filmmaker's Reichian concerns through its thematically-consistent emphasis on metaphysical, political, and sexual freedom. In this way, through its discursive explicitness, the film retains its ties to the modern cinemas of Europe and Latin America, even as it makes manifest various other affinities with the recent artistic paradigm of transgressive self-dissolution.

38 The topic of Birri's commitment to Reich's most widely-discussed theories brings us, briefly, to a final historical comparison, one that reflects Reich's prominence within countercultural spheres — and reveals either an unacknowledged influence or a curious historical parallel. Reich's ideas play a central role in another film made in Italy in the late 1960s: shot by the Italian experimental filmmaker Alberto Grifi in 1968 and edited in 1971, *Argonauti, Evviva!* is an 18-minute short that uses a science-fiction premise mostly as a pretext for promoting Reichian theses through its spoken narration (in keeping with the late-sixties turn toward intensified verbalization that Kovács observes). The film's space-traveling characters are said to be "distant descendants of certain dangerous subversives, minorities and partisans and shirkers", and they pilot a spaceship whose "fuel is love", as manifested in the energy of the orgasm. In their orgasms, they are "freed smilingly from the anguish of history", and the lovers declare that in "exploring the universe we have traveled back in time towards the primordial eye [...] exploring the biological unconscious of vision", thereby introducing one of Brakhage's most recognizable tropes and recasting it within an absurd pulp-genre narrative.

As in *ORG*, the deliverance from corporeal-sexual-ideological preconditioning is linked to vision, with seeing serving as a thematic

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44 See the entry dated July 8, 1970 in Birri, *ORG: un Film de Fermaghorg...*, 10.

45 See the entry dated January 3, 1973 in Birri, *ORG: un Film de Fermaghorg...*, 169.

element referenced in spoken text, as the film's imagery seeks to activate or intensify the visual experience of the spectator. In *Argonauti, Evviva!*, during a sequence in which one of the lovers, with electrodes attached to his temples, is subjected to colored, stroboscopic lights, it is explained in a voice-over that,

[...] with low frequency luminous pulses, the traumatic breakdown of light provokes, in the eye of the spectators, abnormal vision. Hallucinatory phenomena. Photogenic epilepsy can cause discomfort. Brief suspension of conscious vigilance. Survey of the unconscious. Brief hypnosis. Unity of feelings and emotions.

Grifi's images also contain what he refers to as "chromatic aberration prisms and specular image deformations", produced by the lighting devices he devised in order "to reproduce all that series of illusory and hallucinatory phenomena in which several systems simultaneously perceive two or more contradictory realities".<sup>46</sup> In a formulation analogous to Birri's discussion of his search for a visually-triggered "link, reaction, not only between two thoughts, ideas, opinions, but between two imperatives", Grifi states that his images —mostly medium shots and close-ups of his actors, set against a black backdrop, their bodies covered by intermittently-flickering colors and frequently distorted as if reflected in a funhouse mirror— are designed to break down or suspend for the spectator the "binomial" of "introjection and projection".<sup>47</sup> Grifi further explains this assumed binary opposition when he asserts that his film situates "the viewer in the astronaut's conditions in front of a new dimension (the future external environment), and at the same time a very old dimension (his internal biological environment)", "conditions" that resonate with Birri's mention of the first moon landing and more generally

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<sup>46</sup> Annamaria Licciardello, *Il cinema laboratorio di Alberto Grifi* (Alessandria: Edizioni Fal-sopiano, 2017): 55. Grifi also claims that his shots were distorted by an "artificial eye, oriented by an electronic libido", a self-invented, "complex structure of servomechanisms that 'points' a camera, adjusting itself to the emotional state of the actors. In essence, the direction is conducted by the unconscious pulsations of the person being filmed". Alberto Grifi, "ORGONAUTI, EVVIVA! (1968-70)", in *Cinema underground oggi*, ed. Sirio Luginbühl (Padova: Mastrogiacomo Editore-Images 70, 1974): 38.

<sup>47</sup> Licciardello, *Il cinema laboratorio...*, 53.

with sixties-era techno-utopianism.<sup>48</sup> Not mentioned in any of the existing literature on *ORG* or *Argonauti*, *Evviva!*, these correspondences and similarities between Grifi's and Birri's projects are profound enough to hint at the possible existence of an Italian "school" of Reichian-inspired experimentalism in the cinema —but perhaps one that is entirely comprised of those two films.<sup>49</sup>

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40 We can begin to conclude this survey by reviewing the larger arc of ideas about the cinema that have brought Birri and *ORG* into dialogue with the ideas and practices of various new-cinema filmmakers of the sixties. The point of departure for our discussion was the current of late-sixties art cinema in which European and Latin American filmmakers explore purportedly-novel forms of montage. Their search for new editing structures is motivated by a shared belief in the cinema's capacity to reorder or uncover fundamental, perhaps hidden aspects of reality, in accordance with specific ideologies and beliefs, including those of the cinematic auteur. In keeping with the cultural premium placed on discursive, political, and disputative directness, the new montage of ideologically-committed representation includes a strong reliance on language and verbalization within the film itself. For filmmakers who reject the notion that, in the relation between language and image, the icon should be reduced to the role of illustrating the word, a more productive and challenging set of image-language (or image-sound) relationships can be generated through contrast and dissimilarity. Imbricated in their valorization (and idealization) of desynchronized images and sounds is a view of the spectator as a subject whose necessary participation in the process of making meaning and responding imaginatively can be seen as a collaboration with the filmmaker.

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<sup>48</sup> Licciardello, *Il cinema laboratorio...*, 54.

<sup>49</sup> A more global discussion of Reich's impact on experimental cinema would have to consider Carolee Schneemann's film *Fuses* (1964-67). She discusses her interest in Reich in various texts, including Carolee Schneemann, "Notes from First Viewing of a Film by Dusan Makavejev: W.R. *Mysteries of the Organism*" (1971), *Imaging Her Erotics: Essays, Interviews, Projects* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002): 98-103.

Another aspect of the challenges offered by such new cinemas is the expectation that the spectator will develop the capacity to respond to various modes of address, often simultaneously, as the increased density of montage structures opens up multiple channels of communication and transmission within a given film. Here we arrive at Birri's most significant point of divergence from this model of montage practice, and it relates directly to the spectator's intellectual capacities and critical-interpretative reactions. Within experimental cinema, filmmakers can certainly continue to explore and expand the aforementioned version of montage as a cognitive instrument, but it is also possible to use editing to move cinematic spectatorship deeper into the realm of unconscious, even biological response. Montage structures directed at the spectator's nervous system can be directed against the norms and habits of associative thinking, thereby realizing another method by which ideology can be undone, overridden, or short-circuited through the cinema. This model of montage is also expected to facilitate a collaborative, non-hierarchical filmmaker-spectator relationship, one in which the spectator has the liberty to see more than the filmmaker intended to show in a given film. But this particular conception of spectatorship is crucially different in that it focuses on an embodied subject whose corporeal reactions — to optical afterimages, especially — cannot be contained within predetermined intellectual parameters. At its most utopian or extreme, the experimental montage of neurophysiological response responds to the ideological conditioning of the modern subject by seeking, even if only fleetingly, to dissolve the self altogether.

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My conceptual summary is intended suggest at least one critical and unresolved paradox in the ideas that motivate *ORG*, and it can be posed as a series of questions: How can a montage method whose impact is primarily sensorial and highly open-ended be utilized in a film with a premise as essential as Birri's reading of Reich? Put another way, is the political modernist's imperative to verbalize, to communicate ideas linguistically, at odds with the experimental filmmaker's cinema of corporeal intensity and physiological infection? If the former assumes an autonomous subject while the latter works to dismantle the myth of an atomized self, how can *ORG* coherently incorporate both of their

approaches? For Birri's part, he indicates in a diary entry from 1971 that if *ORG* is to constitute "myself in my most radical experience", if it can function at all "as a meaningful / operative [...] conceptual / practical synthesis - in this moment", then it must do so "(without forcing, models, parameters) imposed / mandatory / authoritative-repressive".<sup>50</sup> If the resistance to "forcing" concepts onto the subject whom Birri terms, later that year, the "sperimentatore-spettatore" (experimental spectator) results in a radically indeterminate film, he seems willing to accept this possibility —and, indeed, throughout his diary he names the composer generally associated with indeterminacy, John Cage, as an influence who is as important as Burroughs.<sup>51</sup>

42 We can consider, briefly and in conclusion, a more tentative periodization. The paradox described above is very much a problem of its era, just as Birri's film is a countercultural artifact of "the long sixties" (arriving fairly "late", ideologically speaking, to its premiere in 1979). In a diary entry from 1969, Birri wrote, "everything that I imagined two years ago has become trendy and a mode of consumption: *via!*", and years later, in his typed version he added, "(this, written in 1969, would authorize me today, 1977, as I transcribe these lines, to throw away the entire film)".<sup>52</sup> But it seems likely that Birri recognized that part of what was keeping his film vital and relevant was its open-endedness. Reiterated throughout Birri's diary are thoughts about what has commonly been called "the open work", a term that acquired increasing importance throughout the sixties and whose intellectual popularizers included Umberto Eco. In a foreword to a 1992 study of the neo-baroque, Eco returns to a canonical text he had written thirty years earlier about the open work, and he proposes that, in the early sixties, "openness was a phenomenon found in the avant-garde, but extraneous to messages circulating in the universe of the mass media".<sup>53</sup> Because "the distance between these two spheres has been greatly reduced" in the ensuing decades, it may be easily forgotten that the reader of the past was typically "confront-

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50 See the entry dated January 31, 1971 in Birri, *ORG: un Film de Fermaghorg...*, 50.

51 See the entry dated July 9, 1971 in Birri, *ORG: un Film de Fermaghorg...*, 113.

52 See the entry dated June 22, 1970 in Birri, *ORG: un Film de Fermaghorg...*, 1-2.

53 Umberto Eco, "Foreword", in Omar Calabrese, *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times*, trans. Charles Lambert (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1992): ix.

ed by an author who proposed a message, and then had to make his own decisions" as an interpreter of that message. Accompanying the rise of the neo-baroque work has been the more widespread exercise of the reader's freedom to become a creator "by taking excerpts from the infinite messages that assail him from every direction".<sup>54</sup> *ORG* has been productively labeled a neo-baroque film since its initial screening, but perhaps its hybrid of different models of cinematic montage reflects a more intermediary, transitional position in cultural history: Birri's project was initiated during the waning dominance of the discrete encounter with a decipherable message and completed during the broader consolidation of our contemporary condition of continual receptiveness, invention, and appropriation.<sup>55</sup> Irrespective of the persuasiveness of this final, speculative periodization, however, I hope to have demonstrated in this essay the extent to which this film of "a thousand films" exhibits, engages with, and contributes to some of the most important conceptual concerns of its particular moment in film and media history.

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<sup>54</sup> Eco, "Foreword" ..., x.

<sup>55</sup> On *ORG* as a neo-baroque film, see Paul A. Schroeder Rodríguez, *Latin American Cinema: A Comparative History* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016): 231-234.

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