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A Post-Apocalyptic Garden of Eden: Marco Ferreri's *Il seme dell'uomo* (1969)

Emiliano Guaraldo

Released in 1969, *Il seme dell'uomo* represents an anomaly in the artistic trajectory of Marco Ferreri, standing out as the only science-fiction feature-length film produced by the prolific Italian filmmaker. In the 1950s, soon after dropping veterinary school, Ferreri took his first steps into the film industry, initially working for advertising and afterwards moving to film production for Alberto Lattuada's *Il cappotto* (1952) and *La spiaggia* (1954), the collective film *L'amore in città* (1953),[1] and Luigi Malerba and Antonio Marchi's *Donne e soldati* (1954). In the late 1950s, he moved to Spain, where he made his directorial debut with the trilogy *El pisito* (1958), *Los chicos* (1959), and *El cochecito* (1960), satirical comedies influenced by neorealism and in which Ferreri started to formulate a cinematic language of his own. Ferreri's Spanish trilogy inaugurated his decades-long troubled relationship with censorship, as these works were immediately targeted by Francisco Franco's regime – *Los chicos*, in particular, faced a ban on its distribution.[2] Back in Italy, Ferreri continued the successful collaboration with screenwriter Rafael Azcona, and together with cinematographer Mario Vulpiani, he delivered some of his most notable works of the 1960s and 1970s, such as the episodic *Marcia nuziale* (1965), *Dillinger è morto* (1969), *L'udienza* (1971), *La*

[1] This neorealist omnibus film included episodes directed and written by Carlo Lizzani, Cesare Zavattini, Michelangelo Antonioni, Federico Fellini, Alberto Lattuada, Francesco Maselli, and Dino Risi.

[2] Loredana Comparone, 'Dando vueltas por Madrid: espacio urbano, descomposición y realismo ideológico en las películas españolas de Marco Ferreri', *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies*, 19 (2015), pp. 9–32 (p. 10). Of Ferreri's Spanish trilogy, especially remarkable is *El cochecito*, in which Ferreri uses the urban spaces of Madrid to comment on wider social and cultural issues affecting Western capitalist societies. See Marvin D'Lugo, 'Landscape in Spanish Cinema', in G. Harper and J. Rayner (eds.), *Cinema and Landscape* (Bristol: Intellect, 2010), pp. 117–30.

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grande bouffe (1973), and *Il seme dell'uomo* (1969). In this chapter, I will contextualize *Il seme dell'uomo* within Marco Ferreri's lifelong cinematic project by pointing out recurring themes and tropes that could help us to extrapolate Ferreri's underlying eco-political message and his choice to experiment with science fiction. Even if in *Il seme dell'uomo* Ferreri is not engaging directly with environmental issues, the film is, ultimately, a remarkably unique vision of planetary catastrophe and it represents the attempt by one of Italy's most visionary filmmakers to reflect on the possibility of human extinction.

Ferreri's Negative Cinema

Because of Ferreri's politics and his constant challenging of film conventions, *Il seme dell'uomo* can be considered an example of the auteurist science-fiction cinema that had gained popularity throughout the 1960s in Europe. Notable examples of this type of production in Italy include, among others, Ugo Gregoretti's *Omicron* (1963), Elio Petri's *La decima vittima* (1965), Luigi Cozzi's *Il tunnel sotto il mondo* (1969), Roberto Faenza's *H2S* (1969), Liliana Cavani's *I cannibali* (1970), Marcello Aliprandi's *La ragazza di latta* (1970), Silvano Agosti's *N.P. Il segreto* (1971), and Emidio Greco's *L'invenzione di Morel* (1974).[3] Film scholar Eliot Chayt identifies this type of cinema as post-neorealist science fiction, a peculiar form of science-fiction cinema influenced by the formal elements and the ideological propositions of neorealism. Post-neorealist science fiction deployed 'radical openness, cognitive estrangement, and critical dystopianism'[4] to reflect, on the one hand, on the global anxieties of the time such as the fear of nuclear war and overpopulation, but, on the other, it addressed specifically 'rapid post-war modernization from a domestic Italian perspective, focusing in particular on the *miracolo economico italiano*, and, later on, on evincing increasingly formally unbounded meditations on the fundamental ideological categories of commodity, family, labor, state, and revolution'.[5] Ferreri was not particularly interested in science fiction, and in his interviews he never really addressed science fiction directly, nor discussed *Il seme dell'uomo* under

[3] For an in-depth exploration of the diverse treatment of environmental themes in Italian science-fiction cinema, see the chapter authored by Robert Rushing in this volume.

[4] Eliot Chayt, 'Revisiting Italian Post-Neorealist Science-Fiction Cinema (1963–74)', *Science Fiction Studies*, 42.2 (2015), pp. 322–38 (p. 335).

[5] Chayt, 'Revisiting Italian Post-Neorealist Science-Fiction Cinema (1963–74)', p. 324.

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such a premise. But the choice to adopt the language of science fiction for one his works becomes clearer after understanding his trajectory as a filmmaker.

In some interviews throughout his career, Ferreri confessed his frustration about the political sterility of cinema. For Ferreri, filmmakers, and cinema in general, had no real revolutionary potential as they had to constantly operate within a bourgeois system of production and distribution, which was ultimately targeted to a niche of intellectuals. Such a system forced politically conscious authors to negotiate and compromise their work with state censorship and to submit to the logic of the market, transforming truly experimental and revolutionary filmmaking into a 'racist' and exclusionary art. 'Insomma, il cinema è razzista, e basta. Il cinema nostro è un cinema di bianchi per i bianchi, che poi non lo capiscono: è il più grande razzismo possibile. […] Non serve a nessuno'[6] [Cinema is racist, that's it. Our cinema is a cinema made by white people for white people, who will not even understand it: it is the greatest form of racism. […] It is no use to anyone]. This realization, perhaps directly derived from his own experiences in film production, compelled Ferreri to rethink his role as an author and to develop his own 'method' to overcome the domestication and depoliticization of the film medium. Through his career, Ferreri's overarching project was then to create 'negative films'[7] that would provoke institutional power into moving against his films, and, at the very least, challenge the viewers into questioning the system that was producing the film in the first place. 'Forse è sempre meglio fare invece di una cattiva opera rivoluzionaria, un'opera negativa al massimo, un'opera che voglia distruggere'[8] [Perhaps, instead of making a bad revolutionary film, it's always better to create the most possible negative work, an object that has the intent to destroy]. Ferreri's films acquire through such a negative method a destituent function that is autonomous from the author's possibilities and the commercial system that produced and distributed them. In this sense, the negativity of Ferreri's cinema lies not on a bleak or pessimist worldview, but rather on both the recognition of cinema's failure as an instrument for emancipation, and on the explosion of the cinematic language and processes within the film. 'My

[6] Adriano Aprà, 'Intervista a Marco Ferreri', *Cinema & Film*, 7–8 (1969), available at: https://marcoferreri.tumblr.com/post/182452645463/intervista-a-marco-ferreri-di-adriano-apr%C3%A0-1969.

[7] Gino Buscaglia, 'Marco Ferreri: Cinema as the Internal Overthrow of the System', *Framework*, 2 (1975), pp. 22–25 (p. 22).

[8] Aprà, 'Intervista a Marco Ferreri'.

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films never evolve out of a preordained thesis but it is possible that they are an explosion of one. I cannot deny that perhaps a thesis is subconsciously well established within me'.[9] In Ferreri's explosive and unruly intellectual project, mise-en-scene, exposure, colours, camera movements, pacing, genres, montage, and the actors' motions within the film environments acquire new functions. Freed from the restraints of conventional film narrative, the formal elements of Ferreri's cinema can now be re-deployed and reorganized in a manner that still resembles the film-form, but in a slightly off cinematic uncanny valley. Science fiction in Ferreri's hands is stripped down to some recognizable elements (the sense of the unknown, the eeriness of non-human presence, the droning soundscapes, the cyclical nature of cataclysm) that are reorganized and recombined with the purpose of foregrounding the basic mechanisms of capital in the twentieth century. From this point of departure, the film unravels and self-combusts, revealing underneath its own ruins the bare bones of power and the actual, physical skeleton over which it organizes and sustains itself.[10] It is not a case that some of the constant themes of Ferreri's cinema are 'the capillary alienation of the individual; the shattering of the couple in the overburdened structures of marriage; the power labyrinths signposted with falsity and deceit; the self-destruction of the bourgeoisie and finally the all-pervading theme of death as the lowest common denominator of all others'.[11] These preoccupations, that will accompany Ferreri's career until his death, lie beneath the self-reproducing and sprawling architecture of capital not as its source, but rather as its physical and incurable symptoms.

The Seeds of the End

> I think all my films follow the same kind of line, the same kind of ingredients and concerns; in a nutshell, a man living in our society. What changes, naturally, is the context – a context that is never apocalyptic but certainly bewildering.[12]

[9] Buscaglia, 'Marco Ferreri: Cinema as the Internal Overthrow of the System', p. 24.

[10] Together with *Il seme dell'uomo*, Ferreri's most successful experiments in this sense are *Dillinger è morto*, *La donna scimmia*, *Ciao maschio*, and *Non toccate la donna bianca*.

[11] Buscaglia, 'Marco Ferreri: Cinema as the Internal Overthrow of the System', p. 24.

[12] Drake Stutesman, 'Interview: Marco Ferreri', *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, 12 (1980), pp. 35–36 (p. 35).

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The premise of *Il seme dell'uomo* is somewhat typical of science-fiction cinema from an era, the late 1960s, dominated by the anxieties of nuclear war and the technological possibility of human extinction. Films like Stanley Kramer's *On the Beach* (1959), Ubaldo Ragona's *L'ultimo uomo della Terra* (1963), and the natural companion to Ferreri's film, Bruno Gaburro's *Ecce homo – I sopravvissuti* (1969),[13] among many others and along an even richer transnational canon of apocalyptic literature, imagined human societies in the aftermath of planetary disaster. Influenced by the real-life major geopolitical crises of the Cold War, such as the Korean conflict and the Cuban Missile Crisis, these works played a pivotal role in shaping the catastrophic imaginary of the twentieth century, leaving a lasting impact on both the literary world and the broader cultural discourse. The realization that a total eradication of all human civilizations was a real possibility unlocked by technological development represented a 'paradigm shift in our relationship with futurity'[14] that is in part responsible for updating the Western apocalyptic imagination into the planetary eco-disaster imaginary of our times. With particular relevance for the formulation of the Anthropocene thesis, the Cold War represents a fundamental moment, both 'stratigraphically'[15] and 'epistemically'.[16] As pointed out by Joseph Masco, the Anthropocene 'can easily be constituted as a mirror to the Cold War logics of closed systems, of limited systems interacting in positive and negative feedback loops and thus subject to command-and-control reasoning'.[17] The planet-scale scenarios and narratives of

[13] Gaburro's *Ecce homo – I sopravvissuti* was released in the same year of *Il seme dell'uomo* and shares an almost identical premise with Marco Ferreri's film.

[14] Gerry Canavan, 'Introduction: If This Goes On', in G. Canavan and K. Stanley Robinson (eds.), *Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2014), pp. 1–24 (p. 3).

[15] Rens van Munster, 'The Nuclear Origins of the Anthropocene', in D. Chandler, F. Müller, and D. Rothe (eds.), *International Relations in the Anthropocene: New Agendas, New Agencies and New Approaches* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), pp. 59–75; Jan Zalasiewicz et al., 'When Did the Anthropocene Begin? A Mid-Twentieth Century Boundary Level Is Stratigraphically Optimal', *Quaternary International*, 383 (2015), pp. 196–203.

[16] Elizabeth DeLoughrey, 'Satellite Planetarity and the Ends of the Earth', *Public Culture*, 26.2 (2014), pp. 257–80; Eglė Rindzevičiūtė, 'From nuclear winter to the Anthropocene', in E. Rindzevičiūtė (ed.), *The Power of Systems, How Policy Sciences Opened Up the Cold War World* (Cornell University Press, 2016), pp. 150–80.

[17] Joseph Masco, 'The Six Extinctions: Visualizing Planetary Crisis Today', in R. Grusin (ed.), *After Extinction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), pp. 75–76.

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human extinction of the Cold War, then, become fundamental tropes and precursors of the extinction narratives inherently constitutive of the Anthropocene paradigm, which is 'mobilized via apocalyptic visions of the future, drawing on tropes developed most directly by nuclear crisis as a tool of political mobilization'.[18]

Il seme dell'uomo stands out among Cold-War-era apocalyptic cinema for its demanding and enigmatic nature. The film follows Cino and Dora, a young couple driving on a highway in Italy who inadvertently survive a sudden, massive catastrophic event. The film's soundscape is permeated with droning noise evocative of radioactivity and wartime technology, including laser-beam sounds and sonar beeps. Despite these audio cues pointing towards a global conflict as the source of the apocalypse, the actual cause of the world's demise remains ambiguous and left to the viewer's interpretation. The film only hints at the existence of a planetary plague, presumably unleashed as a form of biological warfare, without further geopolitical description. The first sequences of the film are set in an *autogrill*, a road-side rest stop. Inside the autogrill, a video warns and instructs the visitors about the eventuality of a plague: 'Se vedete segnali di questo colore significa che la zona è infetta. Giallo uguale peste. Ma siamo sicuri che questi segnali non li vedremo mai' [If you see signs of this colour, it means the area is infected. Yellow equals plague. But we are sure that we will never see these signs]. A sequence of real historical footage from the bombings of Dresden and Vietnam ensues, accompanied by a voice-over announcing the beginning of a large-scale conflict: 'Il rapporto dedica soltanto tre pagine ai precedenti storici, ma subito dopo assume il tono scientifico e burocratico che potrebbe avere l'inventario di un museo degli orrori. Le conclusioni sono sconfortanti, infatti soltanto i reparti armati potrebbero essere in grado di difendersi con equipaggiamenti speciali e con adeguati sistemi di rilevamento e d'allarme. La popolazione civile invece non ha difese. Ma com'è che la tregua di cinquant'anni è stata rotta?' [The report dedicates only three pages to historical precedents, but soon after acquires the scientific and bureaucratic tone that the inventory of a museum of horrors might have. The conclusions are discouraging; in fact, only the armed forces might be able to defend themselves with special equipment and adequate detection and warning systems. The civilian population, on the other hand, has no defenses. But how is it that the 50-year truce has been broken?].[19] As

[18] Masco, 'The Six Extinctions', p. 76.

[19] It is important to point out the fact that the indication of the 50-years truce establishes a bizarre temporality for the whole film, opening three different scenarios. The film may be set: in 1969, the present time of Ferreri, with

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soon as the news segment is over, normal programming resumes and a song by Gabriella Ferri ('La collanina') is introduced. The pre-apocalyptic portion of the film, which amounts to its first eight minutes, is entirely shot in the autogrill and on the highway. All we know about this civilization that is about to be destroyed is contained in this non-place of petromodernity, where men and women are shown as consumers, and brands, logos, and advertisements are scattered everywhere, with every object displayed as a product.[20]

The apocalyptic event takes place while Cino and Dora are driving through a tunnel, and after seeing a bus filled with the corpses of several children, they are halted by government authorities who briefly inform them that 'quello che doveva succedere, è successo' [whatever had to happen, happened] and that they are now to be relocated in an abandoned villa by the beach. After being given some pills, they are set free and are ordered to survive and burn the dead: 'Ricordatevi che le pestilenze che uccisero un terzo degli europei nella seconda metà del Trecento diventano, a confronto delle esperienze che stiamo vivendo oggi, un episodio insignificante' [Remember that the plagues that killed a third of Europeans in the second half of the fourteenth century become, in comparison with what we are experiencing today, an insignificant episode]. One last ritual act of consumption formalizes the beginning of the new world. Facing a pyre where corpses of children are set ablaze by the state authorities, a chewing-gum vending machine sticks out: 'se volete un consiglio, spendetevi gli spiccioli. Non vi serviranno più. Brooklyn la gomma del ponte. Che gusto vuoi? Le gialle' [If you want my advice, spend your change. You won't need it anymore. *Brooklyn the gum of the bridge*.[21] What flavour do you want? The yellow ones].[22] At the

the truce referring to the end of the First World War and configuring the films as a uchronia; in 1995, a future point in time in relation to Ferreri, with the truce referring to the end of the Second World War; or in a time or place completely outside of historical accounts, with the film depicting the end of a world out of many possible worlds.

[20] Even a military helicopter is described in detail by Cino as a product: 'Guarda Dora, questo è un Sikorsky 61, vecchio modello. Ha dodici posti, adesso non lo fabbricano più. Nei nuovi modelli la linea è tutta cambiata' [Look Dora, this is a Sikorsky 61, old model. It has twelve seats, they don't make it anymore. In the new models the design has all changed]. The framing accompanying this description emphasizes the logo of ESSO behind the helicopter before reversing the shot and creating a similar effect with the Pavesi logo and the ESSO *Uniflo* oil cans.

[21] Brooklyn is a popular Italian chewing-gum brand, historically represented by its advertising slogan 'Brooklyn la gomma del ponte'.

[22] The yellow colour evokes the warning video of the opening scene.

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mansion by the beach they are welcomed by the corpse of Marco Ferreri himself, still sitting and decomposing on the terrace.[23] The house is soon transformed by Cino into a sort of museum of human civilization and filled with artefacts of the near past. On TV, the news shows images of war and destruction (again the bombing of Dresden from the Second World War) and a brief interview with an agonizing pope amidst the ruins of St. Peter's square. 'Rivolgiamo a tutti un appello alla calma e alla fiducia. Oggi le scelte e l'ultima parola spettano ai cervelli elettronici che non hanno i dubbi e le esitazioni di un uomo. L'evidenza delle immagini non ha bisogno di commento. Tutta una civiltà distrutta. Bisognerà ricominciare da capo' [We hereby appeal to all for composure and confidence. Today the choices and the final say are up to electronic brains that do not have the doubts and hesitations of a man. The clarity of the images requires no comment. A whole civilization is destroyed. We will have to start over again]. Days go by, as Cino reads books from the villa's library and curates his museum. Eventually, the couple is visited by a group of armed horsemen, who identify themselves as the administrative service of the recently formed post-disaster national government. Cino and Dora are interrogated and reminded that 'Il mondo ha bisogno di nuovi cittadini, le donne devono essere fecondate tutte. È un ordine' [The world needs new citizens, women must all be impregnated. It is an order]. Cino enthusiastically shows his collection to the government authorities: pictures of space flights – 'si ricorda i voli, comandante?' [do you remember flights, commander?] – a Piaget watch, a perfume, a parmesan cheese wheel, a record player, a fridge, a portable television set, a car, and a *View-Master* stereoscope loaded with photos of New York City (including a picture from the anti-Vietnam War protests). A blood sample from both Cino and Dora is collected and logged into a big registry book of the survivors and, after being gifted a painting and a typewriter ('Guardi che meraviglia. È una Praxis dell'Olivetti, chissà quando le rifaremo' [Have a look how wonderful this is. It's a Praxis by Olivetti, who knows when we will make them again]), Cino is officially appointed director of the human civilization museum.

The appearance of a dead whale on the beach elicits contrasting emotions in the couple, as Cino enthusiastically welcomes it as a gift from the heavens: 'È la balena bianca. È Moby Dick. È la balena di

[23] This is only the first of a series of metacinematic references, as Cino soon after moving into the villa decides to grow and style a beard to look like Marco Ferreri himself, and, later on, the gun of Glauco from *Dillinger è morto* (recognizable by the red paint with white polka dots) makes its appearance in Cino's museum of human civilization.

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Pinocchio. Una balena tutta nostra' [It's the white whale. It's Moby Dick. It's Pinocchio's whale. It is our own whale], but Dora interprets its appearance as a sign of upcoming tragedy. Soon after, a woman walks into Cino and Dora's post-apocalyptic garden of Eden and seduces Cino by reinforcing his desire to reproduce. A physical altercation between the new woman and Dora ensues. Dora kills her, quarters the corpse, cooks it, and serves it to an unknowing Cino. Ultimately, the stench of putrefaction emanating from the dead whale makes it impossible for them to continue living in the villa and they decide to spend some time at the Saturnia thermal baths. Cino discovers a warehouse where dozens of life-size plastic puppets are stored. Once back in the villa, only the skeleton of the whale remains. Next to it, Cino has buried the puppets underneath a transparent plastic sheet, to Dora's puzzlement: 'Eccoli. Ci terranno compagnia. E perché vuoi la compagnia di un cimitero di pupazzi?' [Here they are. They will keep us company. And why do you want the company of a puppet graveyard?]. At night, Cino drugs Dora and rapes her in her sleep. Eventually, they find out she is pregnant, and as Cino rejoices 'Il seme dell'uomo ha germogliato. Ho seminato ho seminato, il seme dell'uomo ha germogliato. Diecimila milioni di figli, i figli dei figli' [The seed of man has germinated. I have sown, I have sown, the seed of man has germinated. Ten thousand million children, the children of children], Dora cries desperately 'Perchè l'hai fatto? Non ne avevamo il diritto' [Why did you do that? We didn't have the right]. The scene and the film end with a sudden explosion and the evaporation of both of their bodies on the beach next to the skeleton of the whale.

From a technical and formal point of view, *Il seme dell'uomo* does not represent a significant break from Ferreri's and Vulpiani's filmmaking. Certain visual tropes of Ferreri's films are still present here such as the use of real footage and long take shots. In particular, historical real footage has an important function in Marco Ferreri's interpretation of science fiction. Through its intentional displacement and mislabelling, Ferreri uses real footage to screen horrific, apocalyptic scenes that are already part of Western history rather than products of speculative imagination. In *Il seme dell'uomo*, the destruction of the planet is shown through images of the bombings of Vietnam and Dresden, man-caused catastrophes with real, historical, and geopolitical causes. Historical real footage, then, becomes an element within the film that destitutes its authority from within and warns the viewer about the fragile foundation upon which such a project lies. The long takes sequences, most of which focus on the beach, instead, transform the local setting into a planetary stage. Through these sequences, the liminal space of the beach becomes a space of encounter with the unknown reality of the post-apocalypse.

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Shipwrecks and survivors appear at the beach in front of the villa: a dead whale, the government officials, a new woman, a giant floating Coca-Cola bottle balloon. The beach, a recurring location in Ferreri's films, connects the enclosed space of the villa with the presumably dead planet outside and with an eerie, non-human, primordial temporality.

Il seme dell'uomo gives Ferreri the possibility to expand the scope of his cinema and to test its political potential to an unprecedented planetary dimension. Through the language of science fiction, subjects such as gendered violence, the struggle for reproductive power, and the commodification of life and nature are transposed from the historical setting of the Italian post-war economic growth to the time and the geography of the human species. Many of Ferreri's films seem to operate within a pre-apocalyptic setting, as he is interested in exposing the seeds of capitalist self-annihilation in the everyday life of Western societies and within consumerist culture. As Daniele Rugo has pointed out,

> For Ferreri, the persistence of the world is what is always at stake; he is the film-maker who more than any other pushes the world towards its end. However, there is nothing millenarian or cataclysmic about this project. Ferreri does not announce to us that the world will necessarily end, such metaphysical propositions stand in stark opposition to his work. Ferreri does not locate extinction at the historic conclusion of the world. The extinction of sense does not inhabit an 'other' side of the world; it is to be found in the midst of the world itself. Extinction is of the world; it happens at each moment, and is part of the very constitution of a world.[24]

In his films, this general sense of diffused, dispersed, rhizomatic apocalypse is conveyed through a cinematic and self-aware use of the built environment, with a predilection for decaying, but vital, suburban spaces, decomposing bourgeois architecture and alienating industrial infrastructure. In Ferreri's cinema, these settings become the stage for screening the critical failure of those forms of organization and knowledge (such as the archive, the institution, the church, the university, historiography, and, naturally, the museum) that are the tools for the dominion and power of the Western man. These types of organization of knowledge become complicit with the forces accelerating the end of the world, and enable narratives of persistence and naturalization

[24] Daniele Rugo, 'Marco Ferreri: The Task of Cinema and the End of the World', *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies*, 1.2 (2013), pp. 129–41 (p. 134).

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of inherently destructive and violent forces such as the market and the state. For Ferreri, the end of times is not only already present and unavoidable, but also inextricably tied with circular narratives of the persistence of these forms of power. What is unsettling for Ferreri is the realization that death or the end of the world does not bring a halt to the propagation of violence, injustice, and consumption; instead, albeit speculated, they become a catalyst for more abject (and real) forms of oppression and commodification. This critique highlights the insidious nature of power and its ability to persist and reproduce itself even, if not more, in the face of catastrophe. Before *Il seme dell'uomo*, Ferreri had previously shown this preoccupation in a very different film, *La donna scimmia* (1964), where the body of Maria (the titular 'ape woman') was, in life, simultaneously the centre of the perverse attention of science, a grotesque spectacle, and an object of consumption. After death, by continuing to be exploited as sites of value extraction, the bodies and Maria and her child become symbols of a commodification of life that is totalizing, cynical, and inhuman, and that is able to transcend the timescale of biological life itself. *Il seme dell'uomo* allows Ferreri to imagine a transposition of this realization to a planetary dimension, in a setting in which the end is the literal beginning. According to Rugo, Ferreri 'announces extinction in the midst of the world by showing that everything has already exhausted its force. […] In Ferreri's films the end has already happened and now the world finds itself in the suspension and inauguration this end has produced'.[25] In *Il seme dell'uomo*, the end of the world is revealed as a device that forces a mutation of the forms of oppression currently existing in the real world and that enables a further naturalization of the man's subjugation of the biophysical dimension of women and the planet alike.

The relationship between industrial civilization and the environment or the natural world is never at the centre of any of Ferreri's movies. Ferreri is not by any means showing explicit environmental awareness or direct engagement with environmental issues, even if in some interviews he stated that he considered 'the natural environment' as a crucial element, if not the most crucial, for the well-being of human societies.[26] Ferreri's cinema acknowledges that the physical state of the planet and

[25] Daniele Rugo, 'The End Goes On… The Desert, the Jam and the Last Days of Italy', in R. Cavallini (ed.), *Requiem for a Nation: Religion and Politics in Post War Italian Cinema* (Milan: Mimesis, 2016), pp. 135–50 (p. 145).

[26] This reference to the natural environment can be found in one of the interviews in the documentary *Marco Ferreri: il regista che venne dal futuro* (2007) directed by Marco Canale.

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the ecological functions of nature, akin to the reproductive power of women, are subject to extensive and pervasive forms of exploitation, depletion, marketization, and dispossession. In this sense, even if the critique of consumerism seems to be so central in a film like *Il seme dell'uomo*, Ferreri highlights that the continuation of the human species remains subordinated to the logic of power and gendered state violence. Rather than cautioning us about a potential future demise and its origins or causes, Ferreri's aim is to reveal what persists in a world that has already perished: the violence of power, the arrogance of Western man, and the failure of his knowledge systems. In doing so, his cinema lays bare the decomposing whale's bones, exposing the very foundations of its putrefaction. Consumerism, capitalism, state violence are in this vision different offspring of the seed of man, and as such bound to cyclically return in many of the possible future worlds where man still exists.[27] He reaches such a realization with the same negative method of his cinema: stripped down to its most basic fundamentals, those are only expressions of a totalizing drive to possess, extract, and categorize. Underneath it all, the planetary machine of capitalist accumulation and injustice can only perpetuate itself with the consumption of the physical and the biological domains of the planet. In this sense, Ferreri's cinema becomes an eco-political project of denunciation of capital's urge to mutate, reproduce, and, if needed, reconstruct itself, but also of those forms of knowledge that reinforce and naturalize such tendencies. Now it becomes more clear why, in an angry response to journalists asking him about the meaning behind his most celebrated film, Ferreri once said 'Voi dite che sono contro il consumismo? E io dico che *La grande abbuffata* parla di ecologia' [You say I am against consumerism? And I say that *La Grande Bouffe* is about ecology].[28]

Museum of Arrogance

Ferreri organizes *Il seme dell'uomo* around the destitution of two 'museums'. The first is the autogrill, the second is Cino's museum of human civilization. The autogrill, the museum of a soon-to-disappear consumerist civilization, serves as the starting point for Ferreri's de-creation or counter-genesis of the world. Here Cino and Dora are exposed to the images of destruction of Dresden and Vietnam while

[27] 'Man' not as a species, but rather as the *homo oeconomicus*.

[28] This quote by Ferreri can be found in the documentary *La lucida follia di Marco Ferreri* (2017) directed by Anselma dell'Olio.

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surrounded by colourful products and acts of enthusiastic consumption. This space is also a space of materialization, as the helicopters shown in the Vietnam footage become real (the Sikorsky 61, see footnote 20) in the external space of the autogrill. Vulpiani's cinematography is at work here using framing in a way that emphasizes brands and logos, replicating techniques drawn from advertisements. This is how Ferreri is depicting the world we live in, so much permeated and shaped by consumerism and its visual culture, to the point of becoming the main way of experiencing the world. The audience is made aware of the presence of this consumerist subconscious by confronting Ferreri and Vulpiani's alienating bits of advertisement. Ferreri needs to screen a reality where the material culture of consumerism is transformed into ruins and debris and stripped of any meaning in order to test his thesis: that deep beneath the ruins of this world, there is something else, something sinister and inescapable that organizes itself to perpetually reproduce, over and over again, the same structures of power and forms of oppression.

For this reason, the autogrill has a post-apocalyptic counterpart: Cino's museum of human civilization. Here the objects are separated from their pre-apocalyptic functions and transmuted into devitalized fossils. According to Rugo, 'the domestic display assembled by Cino does not just enclose specific objects, it becomes a monument itself. The very ideas sustaining the museum are made part of a history'.[29] In this sense, the museum is Ferreri's unique prefiguration of the Anthropocene. Cino's museum aspires to be a material witness of humans' transitory presence on the planet, to be interrogated and interpreted by archaeologists of a deep future, and to be of inspiration for the men of the post-apocalypse.[30] But it is also an imperfect, impossible collection of the undifferentiated slag produced by Western civilization, and, in its universalizing *hybris*, a testament to its colonial political project. For Rugo, 'the museum's claim for completeness – redeployment of appearance according to an organizing principle – incorporates the very disorder it claims to overcome. This aporia reveals a series of problems that could lead the museum to the very point of exhaustion. To put it in other words what is at stake is the impossibility for the museum not

[29] Rugo, 'The End Goes On…', p. 143.

[30] Besides the typewriter scene ('chissà quando la rifaremo…'), in another moment, Cino is reading some physics books and comments: 'Con questi mi potrei costruire la bomba atomica' [With these I could build myself an atomic bomb].

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to depend on the very interruption it exercises'.[31] It is in this obvious failure-by-design that Ferreri is exposing the possibility of breaking the cycle of oppression and violence, as the totalizing form of knowledge embodied by the museum aims at producing the same results over and over again. For Chayt, 'Cino's compulsion to repeat the past is a madness but one which is not essential, and which may be negated'.[32] This type of space abounds in Ferreri's cinema: the museum of Roman civilization in *Ciao maschio* (1978), the professor's house in *La donna scimmia* (1964), Glauco's house in *Dillinger è morto* (1969), the mansion and the garden in *La Grande Bouffe* (1973), among others. These spaces enclose the failed forms of knowledge of the Western man, but also various fossilized and manufactured simulacra of life. They are spaces that Ferreri uses to make the audiences aware of their daily cohabitation with the seeds of man, and their destructive potential.

In this context, Cino embodies the *homo oeconomicus* of the Anthropocene, not exclusively because of his active and enthusiastic role in producing such geological era, but also because of the archaeo-museological gaze deployed on the past of Western civilization in order to conserve a history of violence and injustice that through the subjugation of women's reproductive power could be restaged *in aeternum*. He embodies the anthropocenic hybris and the desire for stewardship, management, and cybernetic control of the planet. His attitude towards the apocalypse as an opportunity for reaffirmation and his uncritical acceptance of the new statal subject and the imposed continuation of the species are justified by the desire for the domination over nature and its productive functions. This tension between the destructive (war, violence) and the productive (industrial, technological) power of men and the reproductive capabilities of women and nature is never resolved in Ferreri's cinema, and represents one of the key themes of his oeuvre.

In an interview following the release of *Ciao maschio*, Ferreri stated: 'The society sacrifices man in order to preserve the ideal it has of itself which is that of a regimented, almost inhuman Swiss-like monumental fetish. But every day we realise that we are being sacrificed for something that does not exist at all–, what does exist is oppression, blackmail, destruction and the violence of an exasperated, cruel system'.[33] It is a new, monstrous form of this 'cruel system' that re-emerges from the post-apocalyptic ruins of *Il seme dell'uomo*, a system that is made possible

[31] Rugo, 'Marco Ferreri', p. 135.
[32] Chayt, 'Revisiting Italian Post-Neorealist Science-Fiction Cinema (1963–74)', p. 333.
[33] Stutesman, 'Interview', p. 35.

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by the musealization and the naturalization of the *homo oeconomicus* as the fundamental agent of this self-portrayal of Western civilization. Using science fiction (for his first and last time) and extending the reach of his cinema to the planetary scale, Ferreri screened 'the most negative' of his films, one that forces the viewer to face the eventuality of an infinite and self-replicating 'cruel system', that same 'system' that today we recognize as the Anthropocene.