

# Total Cinematic Musiké: the video-poematic experience of Patrizia Vicinelli<sup>1</sup>

Total Cinematic Musiké: a experiência vídeo-poemática de Patrizia Vicinelli

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## Abstract

“Musikè” (also spelled “mousikē” or “mousike” in Greek) refers to the ancient Greek concept of music and the arts. In ancient Greek philosophy and culture, musikè had a broader meaning than the modern understanding of the term “music”. It encompassed not only instrumental and vocal sounds but also poetry, dance, and other forms of artistic expression. The term is derived from the Muses – the nine goddesses in Greek mythology responsible for inspiring and presiding over the arts and sciences. Musikè was considered an essential part of education in ancient Greece and was associated with the cultivation of the mind, spirit, and character. Its artistic and cultural value, also understood as the ethical formation of individuals, was therefore indispensable. In this article, we will explore how a similar experience can be declared through the fusion of cinema, poetry, and performance in the total *opus* of Patrizia Vicinelli, especially through her extensive experimental collaborations. Starting with a poetic-cinematic overview, we will delve into a detailed analysis of her cooperation with the artist Mataro da Vergato and the director and partner Gianni Castagnoli, encompassing set design, screenplay, reading, and recorded performance of *Durante la costa dei millenni* (*Along the Coast of Millennia*).

## Keywords

Musikè · Videopoetry · Patrizia Vicinelli · Italian cinema · Total Poetry

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## Resumo

“Musikè” (também escrito como “mousikē” ou “mousike” em grego) refere-se ao conceito grego antigo da música e das artes. Na filosofia e cultura da Grécia antiga, musikè tinha um significado mais amplo do que o entendimento moderno do termo “música”. Ela abrangia não apenas sons instrumentais e vocais, mas também poesia, dança e outras formas de expressão artística. O termo é derivado das Musas – as nove deusas da mitologia grega responsáveis por inspirar e presidir as artes e ciências. Musikè era considerada uma parte essencial da educação na Grécia antiga e estava associada ao cultivo da mente, do espírito e do caráter. Seu valor artístico e cultural, também entendido como a formação ética dos indivíduos, era, portanto, indispensável. Neste artigo, exploraremos como uma experiência semelhante pode ser declarada através da fusão de cinema, poesia e performance na obra total de Patrizia Vicinelli, especialmente por meio de suas extensas colaborações experimentais. Começando com uma visão geral poético-cinematográfica, aprofundar-nos-emos em uma análise detalhada de sua cooperação com o artista Mataro da Vergato e o diretor e parceiro Gianni Castagnoli, abrangendo o design de cenário, o guião, a leitura e a performance gravada de *Durante la costa dei millenni (Ao Longo da Costa dos Milênios)*.

## Palavras-chave

Musikè · Videopoesia · Patrizia Vicinelli · Cinema italiano · Poesia Total

## The concept of musiké: a brief excursion in a longstanding practice

In ancient Greek culture, the term “musikè” (μουσική) represented a broad and multifaceted concept that extended beyond the modern understanding of “music”. It referred to a composite art form that encompassed music, poetry, dance, and aspects of education and philosophy. Musikè was deeply rooted in the worship of the Muses, the goddesses of the arts and sciences, and played a fundamental role in the intellectual and moral development of Greek society. It involved not only the rhythmic and melodic

structuring of sound, or *melos*, but also maintained a close relationship with spoken word, particularly in the form of lyric poetry and epic recitations.

Far from being a mere source of entertainment, musikè was central to *paideia*, the education system, and contributed significantly to the cultivation of the ideal citizen. A central component of musikè was – as mentioned – *melos*, which referred to the integration of music (melody) and lyric poetry. Unlike modern music, *melos* was inseparable from poetic texts and adhered to strict formal rules regarding rhythm and meter. Aristotle emphasized that *melos* in ancient Greece was composed of three essential elements: the text (*logos*), the melody (*melos*), and the accompanying dance or gesture (*opsis*). This integration of components created a multi-modal form of art, in which music, poetry, and movement were inseparably linked (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1447a). Additionally, Greek thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle believed that music, and by extension musikè, had a profound effect on a listener’s ethos, or moral character. They argued that specific musical modes could influence emotions and behaviors in different ways.<sup>2</sup>

This view positioned musikè as a crucial tool in the moral and ethical education of individuals. Beyond its aesthetic and emotional influence, musikè was essential to education (*paideia*) in ancient Greece, especially for the youth of the aristocracy. It was considered a key element in the formation of character and intellect, instilling virtues and fostering intellectual discipline. In both the *Republic* and *Laws*, Plato underscores the importance of music in shaping the soul, noting its capacity to create harmony between the emotional and rational aspects of an individual’s personality (Plato, *Republic*, 376c-403d). Thus, musikè was deeply intertwined with the development of ethical and rational faculties in the citizenry. Musikè also played a significant role in religious practices and public life. Festivals such as the Pythian Games and Dionysia prominently featured musical competitions and the performance of epic poetry, including Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, which were often accompanied

2 For example, the Dorian mode was associated with dignity and courage, while the Phrygian mode was believed to evoke emotional excess and uncontrolled passions (Plato, *Republic*, Book III; Aristotle, *Politics*, 1340a-1342b).

by music. These performances transcended mere entertainment, serving as important social and religious rituals that reinforced communal bonds and celebrated divine favor. In conclusion, Greek musikè was a holistic art form that integrated music, poetry, and dance while playing an essential role in education, moral philosophy, and religious life. Its study reveals the profound influence it had on ethical development and social cohesion in ancient Greece. Moreover, musikè laid the foundation for many Western aesthetic and educational theories, demonstrating its lasting impact on both individual development and communal culture.

The concept of musikè, with its integration of music, poetry, dance, and philosophy, provides a powerful framework for understanding and engaging with the multimedia forms and poetic experimentalism of the 20th century. As the boundaries between artistic disciplines become increasingly blurred, the holistic nature of ancient Greek musikè offers a model for exploring the idea of total poetry—an artistic form that aspires to unite various art forms into a cohesive aesthetic experience. By examining the principles of musikè, we can draw parallels between ancient artistic practices and the avant-garde movements of the modern era, particularly those that sought to break away from traditional forms of artistic expression and explore interdisciplinary approaches.

The interdisciplinary nature of musikè directly parallels the multi-sensory, hybridized forms that emerged in 20th-century art, such as dadaism, surrealism, futurism, and concrete poetry. These movements sought to reject the boundaries of purely literary or visual modes of expression, often incorporating sound, visual elements, and performative aspects into their work. This shift resonates with the ancient Greek understanding that no single form of expression—whether poetry, music, or dance—could be fully realized in isolation. Instead, the arts were understood as interconnected, capable of influencing one another and contributing to the ethical and emotional development of individuals and society as a whole.

For example, futurist poetry, with its innovative use of typography, rhythm, and sound to create a multi-sensory experience, reflects the ancient Greek concept of melos, where the fusion of word, music,

and movement was essential to artistic expression. The avant-garde experiments of figures such as Filippo Marinetti<sup>3</sup> and Hugo Ball<sup>4</sup> can thus be seen as efforts to rediscover or reinvent a form of total art, akin to the integration of *logos* (speech), *melos* (melody), and *opsis* (gesture) that was central to Greek aesthetics, albeit in the context of modern technological advancements.

Furthermore, the concept of ethos, which was central to Greek musikè, is crucial for understanding the political and philosophical motivations of 20th-century artistic movements. Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle emphasized that music and poetry had the power to shape an individual's moral character, and similarly, many 20th-century poets sought to challenge societal norms and provoke new ways of thinking through their work.

Poetic experimentalism in this period became a means not only for aesthetic exploration but also for social critique and the transformation of consciousness. In the work of artists like Antonin Artaud<sup>5</sup>,

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3 Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1944) was an Italian poet, playwright, and founder of the Futurist movement, known for his radical break with tradition and celebration of modernity. Born in Alexandria, Egypt, and educated in France and Italy, Marinetti gained prominence with the publication of the *Futurist Manifesto* in 1909, which called for the rejection of the past and the embrace of speed, technology, and industrial progress. His work, marked by free verse, experimental typography, and a focus on the dynamic energy of the modern world, influenced multiple disciplines, including literature, art, music, and architecture. Marinetti was also politically active, aligning with Italian Fascism, though he frequently clashed with the regime over its cultural policies. Despite the controversies surrounding his political involvement, Marinetti remains a seminal figure in the history of modernism and avant-garde art.

4 Hugo Ball (1886–1927) was a German author, poet, and co-founder of the Dada movement at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich (1916). Known for pioneering sound poetry, exemplified by his poem *Karawane*, Ball's work rejected traditional aesthetics, embracing absurdity and anti-art. After leaving Dada in 1917, he pursued a more spiritual path, documented in his diary, *Flight Out of Time* (1927), a key text on Dadaism.

5 Antonin Artaud (1896–1948) was a French dramatist, poet, and theorist, best known for his development of the Theatre of Cruelty. Artaud's radical ideas sought to shock audiences into confronting deeper truths through visceral, non-verbal, and sensory experiences. His works, including *The Theatre and Its Double* (1938), challenged traditional Western theatre's focus on dialogue and narrative, advocating instead for a more physical and immersive approach

poetry becomes an act of ritualistic transformation, designed to shock the audience out of complacency and reawaken their spiritual and sensory awareness. This vision of art as a medium for both personal and collective catharsis mirrors the ancient Greek belief in the ethical impact of musikè. The avant-garde's embrace of total poetry, which incorporates visual, sonic, and performative elements, can be viewed as a modern reinvention of musikè's capacity to influence both the moral and emotional dimensions of its audience. In this context, the aspiration for total poetry in 20th-century experimentalism reflects a desire to reunite the fragmented senses and restore a holistic experience of art. This aim closely resembles the original role of musikè, where artistic creation was not confined to a single medium but engaged the entire body and mind in an integrated experience. Poets such as Henri Chopin<sup>6</sup> and Jackson Mac Low<sup>7</sup>, in their exploration of sound poetry and visual poetry, sought to engage multiple senses simultaneously, creating a total poetic experience that blurs the boundaries between listening, seeing, and reading.

The use of technology in the 20th century, particularly recording devices, film, and video, further enabled new forms of multi-media poetry that recall the synesthetic qualities of ancient musikè. In these works, which combine sound, text, and visual elements, contemporary poets create immersive envi-

to performance. Artaud's influence extends widely across avant-garde theatre, film, and performance art.

6 Henri Chopin (1922–2008) was a French poet, sound artist, and key figure in the avant-garde and concrete poetry movements. Known for his innovative use of sound poetry, Chopin experimented with magnetic tape and recording technology to explore the sonic possibilities of the human voice. His work sought to break down the boundaries between language, sound, and music, and he is often credited with pushing the limits of poetry beyond the written word. Chopin was also the editor of the influential magazine *OU*, which published experimental texts and sound works by leading avant-garde artists.

7 Jackson Mac Low (1922–2004) was an American poet, composer, and performance artist, central to the Fluxus movement and experimental poetry. Known for his use of chance operations and non-intentional methods, Mac Low incorporated randomness, collaboration, and interdisciplinary approaches into his work. His innovations in text-sound compositions and performance art significantly influenced postmodern poetry and avant-garde art. Notable works include *Stanzas for Iris Lezak* (1971) and his involvement in the early Happenings with other avant-garde figures.

ronments that expand beyond the confines of the printed page, evoking a return to the ancient Greek emphasis on rhythm, melody, and gesture as a unified art form. The rise of intermedia art in the 20th century, where disciplines such as visual art, poetry, and performance intersect and collide, can be seen as an effort to revive the ancient model of musikè. Just as in ancient Greece, where artistic expression was intimately tied to education and the cultivation of the individual, 20th-century artists sought to create works that transcended conventional boundaries and spoke to the human condition in a holistic way. Figures such as John Cage<sup>8</sup>, Merce Cunningham<sup>9</sup>, and Laurie Anderson<sup>10</sup> worked in collaborative forms where the interaction between music, text, movement, and technology reflected an updated vision of musikè, one that was adapted to modern sensibilities and cultural contexts. Their work represents an attempt to recover art's transformative power by integrating different forms of expression into a single, immersive experience, much like the multi-modal integration of

8 John Cage (1912–1992) was an American composer, philosopher, and visual artist, renowned for his innovations in avant-garde music and experimental sound art. A leading figure in the Fluxus movement, Cage is best known for his use of chance operations, indeterminacy, and the incorporation of silence in works such as *4'33* (1952), which challenged traditional notions of music and performance. His exploration of prepared piano and interest in Eastern philosophies deeply influenced 20th-century music, art, and thought.

9 Merce Cunningham (1919–2009) was an American dancer and choreographer, celebrated for revolutionizing modern dance through his collaborations with avant-garde artists, particularly composer John Cage. Cunningham pioneered the use of chance operations and indeterminacy in choreography, challenging traditional narrative and musical synchronization in dance. His works, such as *Summerspace* (1958) and *Rainforest* (1968), explored new spatial relationships and often featured multimedia elements, significantly influencing contemporary dance and performance art.

10 Laurie Anderson (b. 1947) is an American experimental performance artist, composer, and musician, known for her pioneering work in electronic music and multimedia art. Combining spoken word, music, and technology, Anderson's work explores themes of language, politics, and storytelling. Her breakthrough piece *O Superman* (1981) gained widespread acclaim, blending avant-garde performance with pop culture. A leading figure in intermedia art, Anderson's innovative use of technology, including voice modulation and synthesizers, has significantly influenced contemporary music and performance.

musikè in ancient Greece. In conclusion, the concept of musikè provides a valuable lens through which to understand the interdisciplinary ambitions of 20th-century experimentalism, especially the desire for total poetry.

By recognizing the holistic, ethically engaged, and sensorially integrated nature of ancient musikè, contemporary artists and scholars can better appreciate how the merging of disciplines in modern art seeks to evoke deeper emotional, intellectual, and ethical responses. Just as the ancient Greeks viewed musikè as essential to the cultivation of the self and the community, modern experimentalists envision their total art as a means of re-engaging with the world, reconnecting the senses, and challenging artistic and social conventions. This reflection on musikè and its enduring relevance not only sheds light on the continuities between ancient and modern artistic practices but also invites a reconsideration of how we understand the role of art in shaping our ethical and emotional landscapes. The interdisciplinary practices of the avant-garde are, in this sense, a contemporary embodiment of the ancient Greek aspiration for a unified and transformative art, where the arts combine to address the whole human being, engaging both mind and body, ethics and aesthetics, in a comprehensive, total experience.

### Patrizia Vicinelli (1943-1991)

Although faced with the difficulties of constructing a comprehensive bio-bibliography for Patrizia Vicinelli, owing to the scarcity of documentation she left behind and the historical lack of attention bestowed upon her memory until more recent times, the most recent installment in Le Lettere's Fuoriformato series presents a valuable avenue for delving into the expansive oeuvre of this enigmatic author, often deliberately elusive in her approach. Born in the vibrant city of Bologna in the year 1943, Patrizia's formative years and adolescence unfolded within the confines of the stately dwelling situated on Via Siepe Lunga. The trajectory of her life led her to seek solace in the familiar surroundings of her mother's bourgeois abode before ultimately succumbing to the complications arising from AIDS in 1991.

The narrative spanning from her transition into adulthood to her return to the familial homestead

is marked by a series of geographical relocations, meticulously chronicled through a rich tapestry of private correspondences, testimonials from intimate friends and colleagues, and the poignant expressions found in her public and poetic writings.

Within the expansive realm of her verbivoco-visual poetry, such as the evocative *à, a, A* (1967) – *Apotheosis of a schizoid woman* (1979), and linear (in-printing) works like *Non sempre ricordano* (1985) – *I fondamenti dell'essere* (1994), her adventures are fervently brought to life. This artistic exploration extends beyond the confines of poetry into prose, as exemplified by works like *Messmer* (1994), and the realm of theater, where *Cenerentola* (1997), stands as a testament to her multifaceted creative prowess.

From a tender age, she forged connections with influential figures in the realm of experimentalism, particularly within the Emilian region. Emilio Villa, affectionately referred to as “amico re” (king-friend) in her private correspondences and poetic compositions, and Adriano Spatola played pivotal roles in shaping and guiding her literary journey. A mere nineteen years old, she embarked on her poetic odyssey by contributing her inaugural work, *E capita* (1962), to the esteemed magazine *Bab Ilu*, under the nurturing guidance of Adriano Spatola.

The poetic debut in book form with the Lerici publishing house already presents, in its title, the tension between the poles of neo-avant-garde experimentalism. The book, published in 1967 and printed under the supervision of the *Marcatré* magazine, is titled – as mentioned – *à, a, A*: the repetition of the vowel in distinct symbols with unique characteristics indicates a continuity of variable meaning in its expression through pronunciation. The graphic arrangement of the symbols and their unique oral interpretation immediately signal a deviation from traditional Italian linear lyricism, while also indicating an inheritance from the Futurist experience that doesn't render it alien to tradition.

The graphic-sonic relationship is a participatory function in the text that will always characterize Vicinelli's work: movable characters reproduced in superimposition on each other, as well as the multidirectional arrangement of the text, make active reader participation and a renewed focus and interaction with the text by the author during vocal performance necessary. Indeed, just the previous year, Vicinelli

had participated in the '63 Group conference held in La Spezia, and on that occasion, she had recited her own verses, attracting the interest of everyone present, thanks to her expressive vocal energy (D'Amico, 2023).

Her exploration in the realm of visual poetry earns her national and international acclaim, showcasing her graphic experiments in exhibitions across Rome, Milan, New York, Tokyo, San Francisco, and the Venice Biennale.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, she delves deeply into the field of sound poetry, with phonetic-syllabic experiments featured in records like *à, a, A* (Marcatrè, 1967), *Futura poesia sonora* (Cramps Records, 1978, curated by the esteemed voice master Arrigo Lora Totino), and in the 11th issue of the *Baobab* magazine (1981).<sup>12</sup>

The necessity for corporeal expressiveness during live performances is an essential aspect of Vicinelli's poetic approach and her poetry itself. She frequently accompanies her public readings – whether of more narrative or experimental texts – with an executorial style that is both conceptual and infused with a vigorous, animalistic energy. In the context of video recordings of live performances, Vicinelli skillfully engages both the audience's gaze to honor the unfolding poetry and the camera's lens capturing its legacy for future generations. This performative capacity allows her to exist in the present and future simultaneously, revealing herself fully and almost brutally, even through the filter of the pursuing camera.

11 Tool, Milano (1972), Finch College Museum, New York (1972), Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Torino (1973), Bologna (1974), Artivisive, Roma (1974), Istituto Italiano di Cultura, Tokyo (1976), Expo Arte Bari (1977), Biennale di Venezia (1978), Italian Poetry 1960/1980, San Francisco (1982), Spazio Suono, Viareggio (1984).

12 In addition to featuring the work *Sette poemi* on the fifth CD for Cramps (Milan), Arrigo Lora Totino curated the radio broadcast *Il colpo di glottide: la poesia sonora come riscoperta dell'oralità* (1980), consisting of thirteen episodes that concluded with *La poesia sonora in Italia*. This episode included a review of experiments by Patrizia Vicinelli, Eugenio Miccini, Sergio Cena, Adriano Spatola, and Giulia Niccolai. Adriano Spatola, the creator of Italy's first audio magazine for sound poetry, *Baobab*, produced in collaboration with the publisher Ivano Burani, would include recorded poetry on cassette, presented as *Senza titolo* by Vicinelli (featuring a section from *Non sempre ricordano*).

## Cinematic experiences

Patrizia Vicinelli's prompt proficiency in this live and multimedia performative space arises from a persistent collaboration with experimental theater (with Aldo Braibanti<sup>13</sup> and Emilio Villa<sup>14</sup>), which will also extend to avant-garde cinema (with Alberto Grifi<sup>15</sup> and Gianni Castagnoli<sup>16</sup>).

Consider *Transfert per camera verso Virulentia* (1967), a short film crafted by Grifi based on Braibanti's theater and in collaboration with him. Grifi, who was then a partner of Vicinelli, employed the poet and Braibanti as prominent voices (interacting and overlapping with other actors and unsettling sounds) to depict the fragmentary nature of the "marvelous perceptual disorder". This was visually portrayed by

13 Aldo Braibanti (Fiorenzuola d'Arda, September 17, 1922 – Castell'Arquato, April 6, 2014) was an Italian writer, screenwriter, and playwright. An intellectual, anti-fascist partisan, and poet, throughout his life, he was involved in art, cinema, politics, theater, and literature.

14 Italian poet (Cinisello-Balsamo 1915 – Rome 2003). Having developed in the hermetic atmosphere, he quickly turned to operations of programmatic transgression of literary language, until the decision, matured in the 1960s, to abandon the Italian language in favor of the French linguistic area. <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/emilio-villa/>

15 Director and cinematographer, born in Rome on May 29, 1938. Among the most significant personalities in Italian militant cinema, he represented the perfect synthesis between the intellectual and artisan figures. His work, characterized by a refined formal research and constant political commitment, has been incessantly subjected by Grifi himself to continuous revisions, making its dating sometimes difficult and even removing it from usual forms of distribution. [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/alberto-grifi\\_%28Enciclopedia-del-Cinema%29/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/alberto-grifi_%28Enciclopedia-del-Cinema%29/)

16 Gianni Castagnoli, Italian visual artist and filmmaker (Bologna 1946-2007), in his art used poor materials (paper, cardboard, wood and putty, which he uses in his paintings to represent objects). From 1969 he exhibited paintings and installations in collective and solo exhibitions. From 1972 he obtains important acknowledgments as a cinematographic author and participates with his films (including one of the most interesting results of the Italian experimental cinema, *La Nott'e 'l Giorno*, 1976) at international festivals. In 1979 he published 80's monographic volume, in which he collected xerochromes (a term he coined) made with color Xerox machines. Between 1982 and 1987 he collaborated, for fashion photography, with the magazine *Uomo Vogue*. Among the works of the 90' the series of the *Smokers* and of the *Horses*, the large panels in relief (Dora Maar, the triptych *Van Gogh*) and still lifes. [https://www.xing.it/person/742/gianni\\_castagnoli](https://www.xing.it/person/742/gianni_castagnoli)

using prisms (“I constructed lenses and mirrors to place in front of the lenses”) that distorted the image captured by the lens, presenting on video the visions “bestowed upon us by psychotropic substances”.<sup>17</sup>

In the field of cinema, Patrizia Vicinelli was the protagonist, again under the direction of Grifi, in *In viaggio con Patrizia* (of which the filming dates back to 1964-65, but the first version is from 1985).

On the other hand, it is certainly a testament to the “time of a wonderful love,” as noted by Dall’Asta (2015, 243), the film *In viaggio con Patrizia*: among the footage shot between 1964 and 1965, not only typographic fragments emerge but also Vicinelli’s handwritten notes. In the graphic gesture, there surfaces an almost chemical elaboration of words, where the disassembled letters come together like molecular elements, undoubtedly retracing that primitive exploration of sound, sign, and gesture that both are experimenting with in the workshops of Braibanti during that period. Vicinelli reinterprets this primarily through the sound recordings of a poetic expression that she herself describes, once again, in the introduction to *à, a. A* (1967b). (Simi, 2020).

Later, she worked with Tonino De Bernardi in *A Patrizia*, where the theme revolves around a journey to Morocco (1969-70). Silent film shot in Turin and Morocco between 1968 and 1970.

We left and went far away because Patrizia had called us. The film bears witness to what we saw there and what we found on our return home, the two ideally united. In addition there is my inventory of love and visions, as well as the search for love, between reality and unreality on the ideal thread and the obsession of the mind. (De Bernardi, 1972).

In the 1980s, she also took part in the neo-realist documentary film by Claudio Caligari, playing a secondary but memorable character in *Amore tossico* (1983). In the script, Vicinelli takes on the role of Patrizia, a painter grappling with a heroin dependency. In a particularly tragic yet visually expres-

sive scene that encapsulates Vicinelli’s own poetic sensibility, Patrizia – having administered a dose to herself – uses the same syringe to create splatters on the wall behind her, then encourages her friend to do the same. Cesare, the protagonist, asserts that the resulting artwork, shaped by their shared experiences, becomes a manifestation of life and death intertwined. All the actors, much like Patrizia, were either heroin addicts during filming or had a history marked by substance abuse.

### **Cinema & poetry: *Non sempre ricordano***

To be able to hold the reins of Vicinelli and his companion’s wild artistic exuberance, it is necessary here to resort to a philological methodology, looking closely first of all at the typographical and publishing history of the text *Non sempre ricordano*, probably Vicinelli’s best-known poetic work.

Initially conceived as a hand-written work, it was later transcribed into typesetting, for more usable reading and difficult publishing problems. [It is the position of] a man who traverses the world within manifestations of darkness or light that interests me: let us say his attitudes define him more and more. These are underpinned by an underlying tension that is epic. (Bello Minciacchi, 2009, XLII).

The writer personally characterizes the poematic journey of *Non sempre ricordano* as an epic poem, a designation that becomes evident when the work is published in 1985 as part of the title by Ælia Læia following its third revision. This prolonged epic composition undergoes three revisions, precisely dated by Cecilia Bello Minciacchi in 1977, 1979, and finally in 1985, closely preceding its publication.

It comprised magnificent color tazebahs, now regrettably lost, and another handwritten version sprawled across lengthy notebooks. The variable nature of the poem’s notebooks (or sections), with each chapter embodying a new adventure, was inherent to Patrizia Vicinelli’s ‘epic’. (Bello Minciacchi, 2009, XLI).

The decision to forego further para-textual experiments undoubtedly posed a challenge for a poet as experimental and avant-garde as Vicinelli. However, the significance of this work within her poetic expres-

17 The quotations are sourced from A. Grifi, ‘From Grif-fith to Grifi,’ *Alias* (a weekly supplement of *il Manifesto*), January 19, 2008, p. 3. Where not otherwise indicated, all translations into English are mine.

sion and the philosophical impact she attributed to the text prompted her to relinquish these experiments. Consequently, she presented the work as potentially complete, in its purely linear form on paper: a perfect mixture of epos and ordinary life, represented in hybrid stylistic form.

Greater attention is thus warranted for the meticulous handling of layout and the thoughtful typographical choices concerning elements that make up the edited text. It is crucial to assign them the appropriate conceptual and, simultaneously, communicative significance. In addition to being able and necessary to be interpreted as a score for vocal performance, in fact, the choice of concatenation of words and the use of capital letters in contrast to large segments of white space seem to precisely present an alternation between light and darkness, a fundamental theme of the poematic-cinematic research we are analysing.

As analysed and interpreted in detail by Simi, Patrizia Vicinelli's filmic and poetic experience are constantly intertwined in both their ethical and artistic scores, progressively developing according to a fragmentary view of the constituted self. Nevertheless, it is difficult to find the accolades due to her. This is certainly the case with the film work *La notte'l giorno*:

Although the work is signed by Castagnoli and Vicinelli only appears as a 'camera assistant' and as a performer – 'with Patrizia Vicinelli' we read in the opening credits – her contribution, in terms of theoretical and poetic reflection, is certainly of broader scope. In fact, the film seems to be the visual counterpoint to *Non sempre ricordano*, as the words written by Vicinelli in 1984 to accompany the release of a video-performance of the poem, made together with Castagnoli, testify. (Simi, 2020).

*Night'n'Day*, a masterpiece of '70s independent cinema, emerges from a meticulous and rhythmic editing process that weaves together Super8 mm shots captured between 1973 and 1976 in diverse settings, cities, and under varying light conditions; transcending the boundaries between day and night. The film encapsulates the life and intimate experiences of the filmmaker and his partner, the poet Patrizia Vicinelli, who serves as the central focus. Alongside them, the film features the artists and friends encountered during their extensive journey,

which unfolds across different continents, spanning from Europe to America and eventually to Africa, following their departure from their hometown of Bologna.

Importantly, the cinematic gaze is effectively employed in Vicinelli's writing, manifesting as a kind of imaginative form of ekphrasis. This allows her to navigate through various genres of writing that she engages in, ranging from poetry to prose, to theatrical and cinematic screenplay.

TITOLO: in sovrapposizione: "RICOMPARSI,  
ALL'ALBA"  
RISORGENDO  
DAI CAMPI  
INVASI DA SMITRAGLIATE DI LUCE

TITLE: overlapping: "REAPPEARED,  
AT DAWN"  
EMERGING FROM FIELDS  
INUNDATED WITH BURSTS OF LIGHT

In a form almost stripped down to its essence, resembling ekphrasis, the intense fragmentation of meaning within the verses vividly presents an image to the reader. The presence of light necessitates an imaginative engagement centered on the sense of sight, and the battlefield, initially entrenched in the ancient past, undergoes a transformation through assimilation. The term "smitragliate" is used to describe the origin of light on the field, despite its association with light, introducing an imaginative connection to modern weaponry. Just as the myth had previously, as declared explicitly in verses, permeated everywhere, including the contemporary narrative of ongoing human affairs, the modern world now infiltrates the realm of myth. This blending of the tangible and intangible extends to the merging of past and present, underscoring the fundamental coexistence of these diverse realms in an even more pronounced manner.

The same dissonant interweaving of epic and the ordinariness of life occurs in Castagnoli's film, where the fragmentation of the image blends details of everyday and familial life in a typical home movie style reminiscent of the teachings of Jonas Mekas — a window open with billowing curtains, the tousled bed in the morning, a



view of a sunset sky — to gestures that evoke fragments of Hollywood narrative cinema — whiskey glasses in cigarette smoke, ships setting sail, money pocketed in the darkness of the night, embraces in front of the fireplace, police cars. The traversed spaces are the same as those found in Vicinelli's poem, where Rome, New York, and Tangier are recognizable. (Simi, 2020).

Similarly to what has been observed for the correspondence between poetic-cinematographic text and cinematic realization of poetic inspiration, there is another document that we will evaluate here according to the video poem genre. It is not simply a recording of a performative reading, but a true cinematic-poetic staging.

In this video poem dated 1987, lasting less than four minutes, dedicated to the direct and close-up shot of Patrizia Vicinelli's worn face as she reads a portion from *Non sempre ricordano*, the play of lights and shadows that has been analyzed so far solidifies. The artist and the camera's oscillation also replicate the intrinsic elusiveness of the subject perpetuated artistically by the Vicinelli text.

Despite its brevity, this video poem already intensely captures the premises of a perfect synthesis of the Vicinelli-Castagnoli collaboration, which, instead of a dialogue between the arts, aims for a true blending of expressive possibilities.

It is Vicinelli and Castagnoli themselves who clarifies their intent in an interview release in May 1979 for a major Italian newspaper.

We do not want to theorize a relationship between film and poetry, nor do we want to present them as distinct technical figures. Film is fiction and so is the reading of a poem: the real thing happens within the words and images. And the real thing is the shared life experience from which the film and the text were born. The relationship between the two is the person of Patrizia who is inside and outside the film, the object of the images and the subject of the reading. (La Repubblica, 8 May 1979).

### Durante la costa dei Millenni

This brief film captures the initial three segments of *I fondamenti dell'Essere* (comprising a total of 4 acts) featuring Patrizia Vicinelli, alongside scenic interven-

tions and direction by Gianni Castagnoli.<sup>18</sup> Recorded in 1987 at the Teatro Dell'Arte in Milan during the *Ća+Ća – Two days of sound poetry* event, the performance is a significant live production involving Patrizia and Mataro da Vergato<sup>19</sup>, who collaborated with her in various events and performances from 1986 to 1990. The event drew the participation of prominent Italian and European poets.

*I fondamenti dell'essere* appears in magazine previews but also in a mix-media elaboration in collaboration with Gianni Castagnoli and Fiorella Petronici, further confirming the need for a look at the polyvalence of the verb that does not express itself completely in a univocal form but rather, since its conception, has been pawing for a planned extra-literary reaffirmation. extra-literary. In fact, there are numerous collaborations with musicians, directors, dancers throughout Vicinelli's life and artistic career.

This work, titled “The Foundations of Being”, is structured in four parts, connected by the same process of linguistic research. The main connotation, which is ethical, reflects different moments of perception – times of the spirit – and develops different ways of manifesting real time in activity and event, privileged places of every metamorphosis. The two relationships converge in the representation of a dialectical process whose terms transcend the sense of experience into the speculation of thought. Each of these four parts is accompanied by a sound and/or phonetic reflection-refraction. The second part,

18 *Durante la costa dei millenni* Tratto da ‘I fondamenti dell'essere’ poema di Patrizia Vicinelli. Voce: Patrizia Vicinelli, Regia: Gianni Castagnoli, Figure canti suoni strumentali: Stefano Armati, con Patrizia Vicinelli, Riprese: Giuseppe Baresi, Scenografia: Gianni Castagnoli, Suoni: Gianni Fini, Montaggio: Antonella Gazzola, Luci studio: Roberto Tomasin, Audio Rvm: Andrea Piscitelli, Una produzione PPV – Studio Platone 1987”: <https://vimeo.com/143293995>

19 Mataro da Vergato stage name that comes: from his paternal grandfather and the village where he was born.

He graduated at the Art Institute and the Academy of Fine Arts in Bologna. After various artistic experiences in Italy and abroad as a performer, in the early '90s, and after a period of living in New York, the key meeting with the computer. Thus began a personal quest for the relationship between photography, already cultivated by years of study, and the computer, using just appeared on the world stage. [...] <http://www.matarodavergato.com/biography.html>

“The Time of Saturn”, also includes a visual component that “reveals” the mode of analysis within the linguistic structure. (Pedio, 1994).

Inspired by Ariosto, the poem boasts a modern form of *entrelacement*. In a similar vein, Vicinelli distorts the chronological flow of narrative time by removing it from the empirical context and duplicating it. This creates a blurred distinction between the timing of external events and that of internal experiences for the subject (and subjects). The mythical, dreamlike, and empirical planes coexist within the world’s experience, and the narrative incorporates these varied perspectives. The integration of diverse moments and seemingly impossible forms, challenging to experience simultaneously, and lacking immediate connection without Vicinelli’s word-body (serving as inspiration for the reader-public), is achievable only through embracing fragmentation as the most genuine portrayal of perceived time. Indeed, the body contains and generates from a specific space-time point that encompasses the history of both personal and collective memory, including the mythical past, as well as the imagination and aspiration towards future stories.

The confluence of movement, singing, and music in *Il sonnambulo meraviglioso* (1986) marks a profound exploration into the realms of musikè, representing a distinctive and noteworthy experiment within the artistic landscape. This collaborative venture attains its zenith in the symbiotic relationship between Mataro da Vergato and the deeply and directly inspired poet, Patrizia Vicinelli. The multifaceted and eclectic artistic approach adopted by the participants in the production of *Durante la costa dei millenni* adds layers of complexity and richness to this unique creative endeavor.

In dissecting the elements that contribute to the extraordinary synergy within the performance, one cannot overlook the role of movement. Mataro da Vergato, known for his prowess as a dancer, infuses the stage with dynamic and expressive movements that serve as a visual counterpart to the unfolding narrative. His movements become a choreography of emotions, intertwining seamlessly with the thematic fabric of the production. Singing assumes a pivotal role in this exploration, transcending mere vocalization to become a narrative device. The sung poetry, facilitated by the musical elements meticu-

lously crafted by Mataro, amplifies the emotional resonance of the performance.

The collaboration with Patrizia Vicinelli, a poet of profound inspiration, adds a layer of linguistic richness, as her words find a melodic cadence that becomes an integral part of the auditory landscape. The musical dimension, particularly exemplified by the construction of Orpheus’s lyre, signifies a manual and artistic endeavor by Mataro. The lyre, beyond its functional role, becomes a symbol of craftsmanship and creative genesis. This manual skill, coupled with Mataro’s roles as a dancer and actor, underscores the depth of his artistic versatility. The fascination with this lyre serves as a catalyst for the production, initiating a collaborative spark that propels the performance into a realm where the tangible and the symbolic converge. The participants’ eclectic and multifaceted artistic approach within *Durante la costa dei millenni* further contributes to the richness of the overall endeavor. This diversity of artistic expressions creates a tapestry of experiences, inviting the audience to navigate through layers of meaning and interpretation. The experimental nature of musikè, as manifested in this collaborative venture, becomes a testament to the boundless possibilities that emerge when different artistic disciplines converge, creating an immersive and transformative experience for both the creators and the audience.

The artistic skills of Mataro da Vergato, with his training as a dancer, singer, and musician, blend with the power of performative poetic writing and poetic reading by Patrizia Vicinelli. Finally, the ability to capture the experience beyond the present moment through Gianni Castagnoli’s cinematography completes this unique experiential amalgam essential for the success of the staging.

Each participant, however, brings past training experiences in related fields, contributing to creating a complex experiential fabric necessary for the realization of the work. While Mataro da Vergato focuses on the success of this experience in Greek tradition, Vicinelli experiments with concrete poetry practices, with a particular emphasis on “Poesia Totale” theorized by Adriano Spatola. This poetic form seeks to break free from the page to vibrate in the air through vocal and oral sound, along with the materialization of language.

The significance of manual skill emerges as a pivotal aspect in the artistic collaboration, with Mataro da Vergato showcasing his multifaceted talents. Central to the stage presentation is the lyre, the key instrument associated with Orpheus, intricately crafted by Mataro himself. Drawing inspiration from archaeological vases, this musical instrument becomes not only a performative prop but a tangible manifestation of Mataro's craftsmanship. Beyond his prowess as a dancer and actor, Mataro's ability to manually construct the elements required for integrating sound and song serves as a testament to his artistic versatility. This hands-on involvement creates a unique synergy, positioning Mataro's creative contributions as an extension of his physical body.

The lyre, in this context, transcends its role as a mere accessory; it becomes a symbol of artistic genesis, sparking the initiation of production and collaboration. The fascination with the lyre, a product of Mataro's manual dexterity, establishes a profound connection that permeates the collaborative process. It serves as the catalyst that sets the wheels in motion, leading to a dynamic interplay between the visual and auditory elements within the performance. As the musical embodiment of Orpheus, the lyre assumes a central role in heralding the commencement of sung poetry, marking a crucial juncture in the narrative. This material representation of the Orpheus archetype not only enhances the aesthetic dimension of the performance but also assumes significance in the analytical framework. Mataro's lyre, as a tangible and symbolic entity, becomes a focal point for scrutiny, offering a lens through which the collaborative work can be deconstructed and understood. In this intricate interplay, Mataro's performance evolves into a rich textual tapestry from which Patrizia Vicinelli can draw inspiration for her subsequent poetic experiments, creating a seamless continuity between the tangible craftsmanship on stage and the poetic realms waiting to be explored.

In the course of an intellectual exchange, Vicinelli sends Mataro tapes containing obsessive recordings of her own voice – parts of which will be replicated and implemented in the final recorded performance. These recordings, prolonged repetitions of words, become a way to mark the vocal and oral temporality, serving as inspiration for Mataro's subsequent movements. Creative flexibility is a crucial element,

allowing constant adaptation to the dynamics of shared experience and maintaining a common creative horizon. Gianni Castagnoli enters the scene by directing and conceiving these videos, in which the two artists visually alternate on stage. With his artistic gaze, Castagnoli manages to elegantly integrate two forms of expression, traditional and modern, creating a synthesis that the camera transports into the new millennium.

To emphasize the importance of Castagnoli's artistic intervention in the staging, Mataro da Vergato, in a private video interview accorded to me in 2022, highlights the power of the scenography integrated into poetic practice: the three ghostly doors that appear in the video footage, in fact, are a solution derived from Castagnoli's specific artistic practice and produced with a Xerox photocopier.

The directorial decisions within the recording exhibit a deliberate and nuanced approach in differentiating between the visual representation of Mataro da Vergato's gestures and Patrizia Vicinelli's readings. This intentional divergence in cinematographic techniques underscores the unique nature of each artist's contribution to the overall performance. In capturing Mataro's expressive movements, a preference for wide-angle shots becomes apparent. This choice allows for an explicit and expansive interaction with the surrounding elements, emphasizing the dynamic and immersive nature of Mataro's engagement. The wide-angle shots not only showcase the physicality of Mataro's gestures but also provide a broader context, inviting the viewer to witness the artist's interaction with the environment, possibly echoing the thematic elements inherent in the Greek tradition of bodywork. Conversely, when turning the lens towards Patrizia Vicinelli's readings, there is a deliberate shift in approach. The close and tight close-up framing chosen for Patrizia's performances serves to intensify the focus on her spoken words, creating an intimate and immersive experience for the audience. This juxtaposition of visual styles enhances the overall narrative texture, presenting a dichotomy that mirrors the distinct artistic expressions of Mataro and Patrizia. Moreover, Mataro's deliberate emphasis on the grandiosity of Gianni Castagnoli's ideas adds another layer to the directorial choices. This emphasis, occasionally bordering on the unrealizable, not only captures the magnitude

of Castagnoli's conceptual contributions but also introduces an intriguing tension between the ideal and the tangible. By navigating this boundary, the visual storytelling becomes a dynamic exploration of artistic vision, pushing the boundaries of what is conceivable within the realm of performance and cinematic representation.

True to his textual interpretive skills, Castagnoli decides, for example, to have Mataro da Vergato appear on a white horse,<sup>20</sup> leaving him motionless on stage during the poem reading dedicated to the Knight, a central magical figure. This animal presence emphasizes an epic imaginary crucial for the textual transposition of Patrizia's epic writing principle.

The recorded instances of Patrizia's readings exhibit a distinctive visual approach, often featuring a close-up perspective from below. This cinematographic choice not only captures the essence of her spoken words but also introduces a fascinating element of elevation. This elevation, achieved through the vertical framing, imparts a sense of transcendence, seemingly transporting the viewer to a realm distinct from the immediate, tangible, and material surroundings.

Notably, when compared to the live performances that were often captured with Vicinelli engaging directly with the camera, this particular recording takes a different approach. In this instance, the gaze intentionally avoids the camera lens, choosing instead to fixate on a more distant alterity. The experiential richness derived from the fragmented nature of the performance is intricately woven into the scenic presence of Mataro da Vergato and the scenographic contributions of Gianni Castagnoli. This unique collaboration allows for the unfolding of a distinct performative trajectory. Unlike previous instances where the performance may have directly and immediately drawn attention to itself, here, there is a deliberate

choice to let the performance unfold more subtly. Castagnoli, in turn, assumes the role of directing this nuanced articulation towards a multiplicity that transcends the temporal and spatial dimensions of the performance. This multiplicity, embedded in the materiality of the world, serves as a vessel capable of embracing this work as a direct capture of the fictional action, resonating beyond the immediate confines of the performance space and time.

The convergence of the poet's, performer's, and director's perspectives culminates in a unified gaze, which subsequently undergoes a transformative refraction within the comprehensive performance documented on film. This deliberate amalgamation of diverse artistic practices and disciplines, each methodically weighed and integrated, begets an innovative manifestation of poetic involvement facilitated through the lens of the camera.

In this intricate fusion, the poet's discerning vision, the performer's emotive expression, and the director's strategic framing coalesce into a harmonious whole. This deliberate synthesis, meticulously orchestrated, serves as the cornerstone for a novel mode of poetic engagement that finds its expression through the medium of the camera. The resulting visual narrative encapsulates not only the individual nuances of each perspective but also transcends them, giving birth to a collective artistic statement that resonates profoundly within the realm of cinematographic representation.

## Total Cinematic Musiké

As expounded and put into practice by Adriano Spatola, the visionary author of the literary cornerstone *Towards Total Poetry*, the poetry emerging from the experimentalism of the late twentieth century undergoes a departure from conventional mediatic genre classifications. Instead, it accentuates its inherent ability not only to exist independently but also to coexist harmoniously within the diverse realms of various arts and disciplines.

Towards Total Poetry aims, above all, to be a formula capable of establishing the necessity of seeing the field of experimental poetry not so much as a confused and fragmented area of dispersion, but as the coexistence of various directions interconnected by a dense network of relationships and exchanges... (Spatola, 1969).

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20 The idea dates back to a live performance at 'Pratolino in the park of the Villa, with the great sculpture of the Apennines', Mataro da Vergato recalls in the interview. He also emphasises that on that occasion Gianni Castagnoli attempted to choreograph the entrance of Mataro da Vergato himself and Patrizia Vicinelli on horses, but that for logistical and security reasons this idea had to succumb to the obvious impossibility. It remains true that on that occasion Gianni Castagnoli's cinematographic gaze anticipated the later rendering on film.

Spatola's groundbreaking ideas, articulated in *Towards Total Poetry*, challenge the traditional boundaries that confine poetry to a specific medium or genre. This poetic approach of the late twentieth century, marked by its experimental spirit, seeks to liberate itself from rigid categorizations. It asserts a fluidity that allows poetry to transcend traditional constraints, finding expression not only on the printed page but also in the multifaceted landscapes of visual arts, music, and other interdisciplinary domains.

The essence of Spatola's perspective lies in recognizing poetry as a dynamic force capable of permeating and intertwining with diverse artistic expressions. The very core of this approach emphasizes poetry's adaptability and its innate inclination to collaborate and coexist with various forms of artistic manifestation. In essence, *Towards Total Poetry* becomes a manifesto for the liberation of poetry from constraining definitions, encouraging its unfettered exploration across the expansive spectrum of creative disciplines.

Contingently, Patrizia Vicinelli's inclination toward poetic participation across various art forms naturally aligns with the tradition embraced by Mataro da Vergato, who is deeply involved in the terminological reworking of musikè practices. Exploring the convergence of these two artistic perspectives reveals a synergy that transcends individual disciplines.

Vicinelli's commitment to integrating poetry with other art forms harmoniously intertwines with Mataro's approach to music and performance. Poetic participation thus becomes a guiding thread that connects diverse artistic expressions within this collaboration. In the context of musikè reworking, Mataro da Vergato experiments with pushing beyond pre-existing terminological boundaries, creating spaces for exploration and innovation.

This conceptual reinvention aligns with Vicinelli's predisposition to surpass the traditional limits of poetry, fostering a fertile ground for a deep and nuanced creative dialogue. Within this context of mutual influence and experimentation, the artist emerges as a catalyst for new expressive possibilities.

The fusion of Vicinelli and Mataro's traditions gives rise to an artistic approach that not only embraces the diversity of involved disciplines but also challenges pre-existing definitions of what is possible through the synergy of the arts. Vicinelli's poetic participation, woven through various arts, becomes a

creative lever that, combined with Mataro's reworked approach to musikè, offers a unique perspective on the power and versatility of artistic expression.

This collaboration not only attests to the richness of interdisciplinary interaction but also to the ability of these artists to push beyond conventions, shaping an artistic path that challenges and enriches traditional perceptions.

However, the genuine innovation is rooted in the extensive and expansive foray into the cinematic realm, a testament to the dedicated and meticulous collaboration with Gianni Castagnoli. The strategic decision to enlist an adept filmmaker for a pivotal collaborative variation, exemplified by the cinematic rendition of *I fondamenti dell'essere*, stands as a true testament to the seamless transition of classical arts into the modern milieu. This deliberate choice serves as tangible, empirical evidence that the poetic potential inherent in musikè thrives in its continual adaptation to the ever-evolving currents of contemporary times. Simultaneously, this approach articulates not only a distinct poetic validity of experimentation, viewing it as an inheritance from a broader tradition, but also underscores its intrinsic capacity to evolve and engage with the pressing demands of the present moment.

The deliberate inclusion of an experienced film director such as Gianni Castagnoli not only underscores the eagerness to explore novel artistic languages but also signals an acute awareness of the imperative to reinterpret classical art forms in an innovative manner. This reinterpretation is crucial for ensuring their sustained relevance and vibrant resonance in the dynamic tapestry of the contemporary artistic landscape. This intersection of classical and modern elements, through the lens of cinematography and collaborative endeavors, is emblematic of a conscious effort to bridge the gap between tradition and innovation, propelling the arts into new dimensions of expression and interpretation.

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