

Sebastian KÖTHE

Silent Cinema as Ambiguous Heritage at the *Giornate del Cinema Muto*

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Visiting the *Giornate del Cinema Muto* feels like waking up from a vaguely lucid dream. I remember meeting people, going places to have coffee, things one does when one is awake - but everything is flooded by a vibrant phantasmagorical rush of cinematic images. Images that are not contained in the prisons of their narratives, of their closed nature of single artworks or of cinema. Not only did the festival guests from all over the world mingle, so too did the films, their images, tropes and characters mingle among them and in my perception.

Thus it seems that Kean (*Kean*, 1924) and Nana (*Nana*, 1926) would be visiting the same bars, dancing together and fighting the same social barriers; that the Russian villains of US films must be part of the same gigantic scheme (*The Woman Disputed*, 1928; *Tempest*, 1928; *The Cossack Whip*, 1916; *The Mysterious Lady*, 1928); that the Polish marine of *Zew morza* (1927) should protect himself from the German U-boats of *Behind the Door* (1919) and that the elephant with the in-

heritance hidden behind his big ear (*His Friend the Elephant*, 1916) must have escaped from *The White Desert* (1925).

This stream of images gets even more confusing as it is intimately connected with world history. But it's unclear in which way: As a trace of world history? Its mimetic image? A variation, parody, distortion or a grotesque double? It seems this cinematic twin of world history preserves it: silent cinema is the eternal repetition of the struggles at the American Frontier, Austrian pre-war chic, the atrocities of First World War... World history and film history seem to

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