

# Story for an empty theatre

directed by  
Aleksandr Balagura  
and Cesare Bedognè  
with Maria Frepoli  
and Emanuele Ferrari

A film based on the autobiographical novel  
**Beyond the Blue**

by Cesare  
Bedognè

Produced by  
Studio Incantations  
and  
ABao AQu Publishing

*I live in the place where lonely men*

*are afraid to enter, at dusk.*

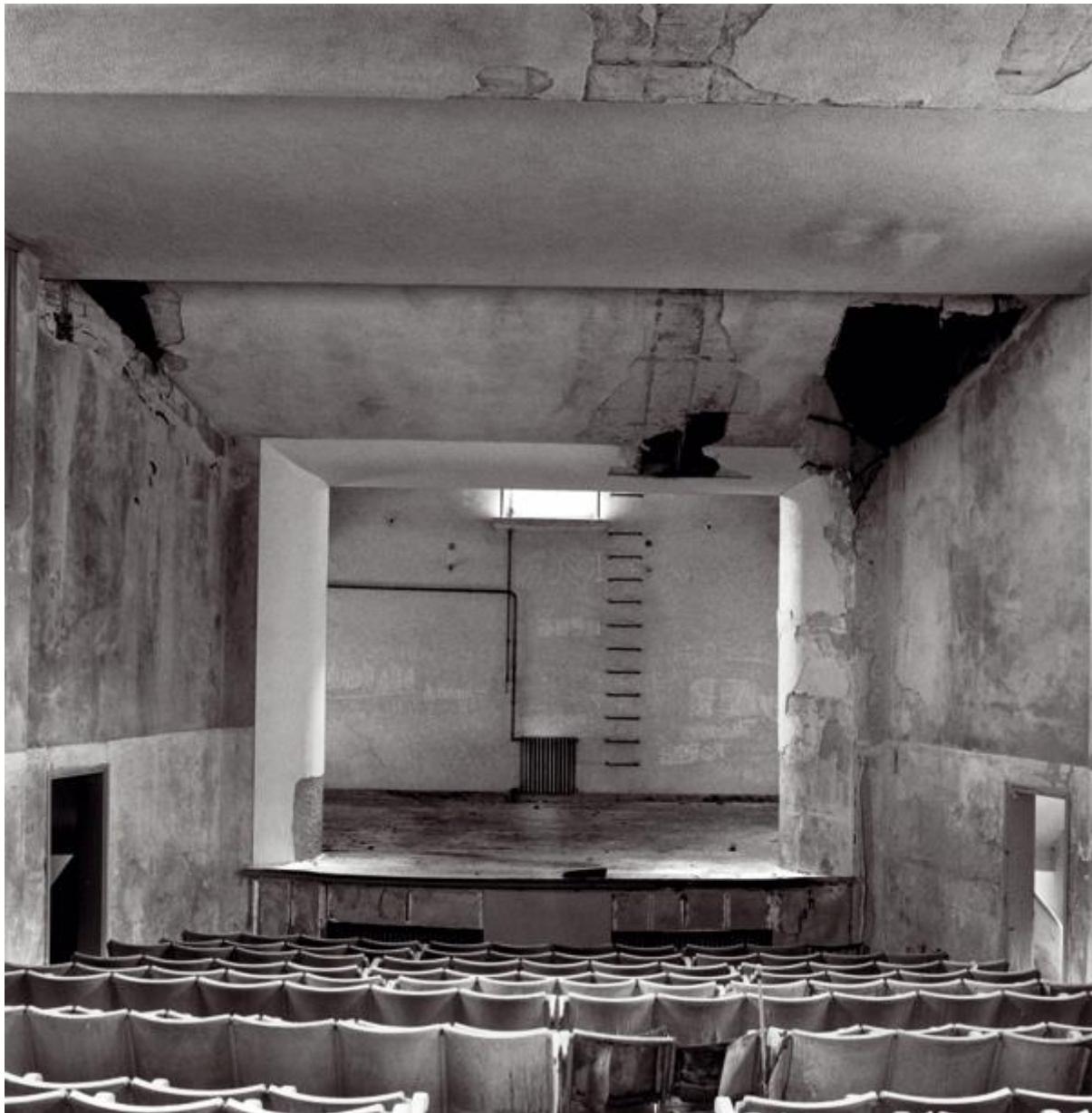
*My room, when the sun is at its height,*

*is the room of God.*

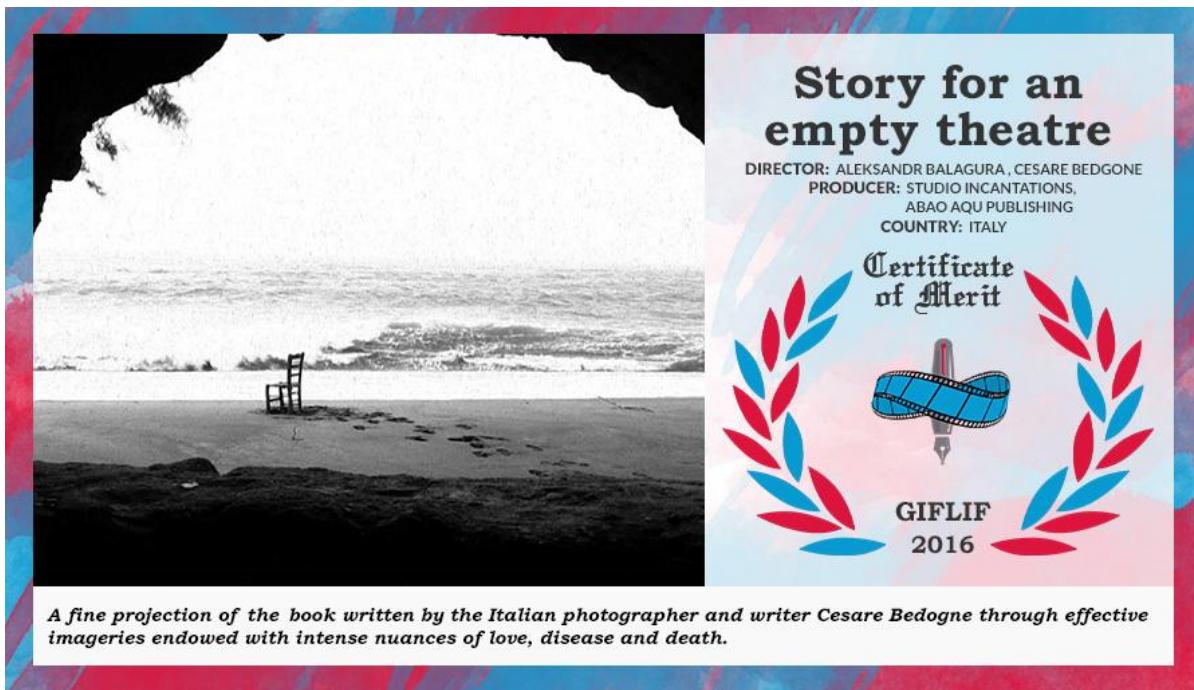


*Photograph by Cesare Bedognè*

This film took inspiration from a diary which became a book,  
from a series of photographs  
and from a theatrical performance.



*Photograph by Cesare Bedognè*

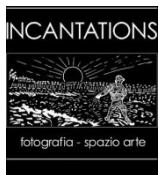








Studio Incantations and ABao AQu Publishing



with the support of



present

## *STORY FOR AN EMPTY THEATRE*

a film by **Aleksandr Balagura** and **Cesare Bedognè**

with **Maria Frepoli** and **Emanuele Ferrari**

based on the novel “Beyond the Blue” by Cesare Bedognè,  
published by ABao AQu Edizioni

## CREDITS

Directed by ALEKSANDR BALAGURA and CESARE BEOGNE'

Storyline by CESARE BEOGNE'

Inspired by the novel "Beyond the Blue", by Cesare Bedognè, published by ABao AQu Edizioni

Theatrical adaptation by EMANUELE FERRARI

Narrator and voice over EMANUELE FERRARI

Choreographies and dance by MARIA FREPOLI

Photography by CESARE BEOGNE', ALEKSANDR BALAGURA, VERONICA PENSERINI

Editing ALEKSANDR BALAGURA

Sound engineer (theatre) FABRIZIO SACCARDI

Produced by STUDIO INCANTATIONS and ABao AQu EDIZIONI, with the support of GENOVA FILM COMMISSION

with MARIA FREPOLI, EMANUELE FERRARI, PIETRO MAREGGINI, NADIA TORREGGIANI,  
FRANCESCO CARRARO

Running time: 57 minutes

Filmed at the Prasomaso deserted Sanatorium (Italy), at Bismantova Theatre of Castelnovo Monti (Italy) and in the island of Lesvos (Greece)

## PRESS OFFICE

ABao AQu Publishing

c/o Emanuele Ferrari

Via Fratelli Meglioli 4  
42034 Casina  
Reggio Emilia

Tel: +39 339 3782964

Email: [melma74@gmail.com](mailto:melma74@gmail.com)

## **SOUNDTRACK BY J.S.BACH**

*Cantata 106*

-*Sonatina* -

*Actus Tragicus Höchster was ich habe Aria*

*Cantata 39*

*Brich dem Hungrigen dein Brot Aria*

*Cantata 182*

*Adagio e Leget euch dem Eiland unter Himmelskönig, sei willkommen*

*Cantata 21*

*Seufzer, Tränen, Kummer, Not*

*Cantata 78*

*Komt Süsser Tod, Corale Jesu, der du meine Seele, Corale Jesu,*

*Nun sei gepreiset BMW 362*

*Cantata 202*

-*Aria*-

The pieces by J.S. Bach were played live at Bismatova Theatre by musicians of Diocesan Institute of Music and Liturgy of Reggio Emilia:

**NADIA TORREGGIANI:** harpsichord

**PIETRO MAREGGINI:** baroque recorders

**FRANCESCO CARRARO:** oboe

# ALEKSANDR BALAGURA



Aleksandr Balagura was born in Luboml (USSR) on January 1st 1961. He graduated in History and Social Sciences at Kiev State University.

Starting from 1989, he directed the Ukrainian Documentary Film Studio. He directed several TV programs and about twenty documentaries and experimental films. His first feature, "To our brothers and sisters" was awarded the Grand- Prize for the best documentary at the prestigious "Festival dei Popoli" in Firenze (Italy).

In 1998 he moved to Italy with his family, settling in Genoa, where he works as independent film-maker.

## FILMOGRAPHY

2016 – **STORY FOR AN EMPTY THEATRE**, 57 min., (a film by Aleksandr Balagura and Cesare Bedognè), Italy.

Certificate of Merit, Great Indian Festival of Film and Literature (GIFLIF 2016, Gurgaon-Bhopal) first joint in the Experimental Film competition)

Best Experimental Film, Calcutta International Cult Film Festival (November 2016 edition, Golden Fox Nominee December 2017).

Best Experimental Film, Eastern NC Film Festival (USA)

Best Experimental Film, Coral Coast Film Festival of Alghero (Italy)

Best Feature Documentary, Maracay International Film Festival 2017 (Venezuela)

Best Experimental Film, SIFF (Switzerland International Film Festival 2017)

Best Italian Documentary , Roma Cinema DOC, (September 2017 edition)

Certificate of Excellence, Best Editing Award, 6<sup>th</sup> Mumbai International Shorts Film Festival (India, 2017)

Best Experimental Film, New Renaissance Film Festival Amsterdam 2018

Kodiak Award, Alaska International Film Festival 2018

Selected also for Blow-up Arthouse IFF Chicago, Chhatrapati Shivaji IFF (Pune, India), Canada's World International Film Festival 2017 (nomination Best Italian film), "Echi delle Alpi" IFF (Italy, July 2017), MedFF Siracusa (Italy, 2017), Lanùs Festival International de Cine 2017 (Argentina), IIMPF 2017 (Ancona, Italy),

Festival Internazionale del cinema documentario "Marcellino De Baggis" (semifinalist), 1<sup>st</sup> FICCSUR, Southern Cone International Film Festival (Valparaiso, Chile), Gulf of Naples Independent Film Festival (Italy, 2017), London Greek Film Festival (UK, 2017), Stockholm Independent Film Festival (Sweden, 2017), for the "Echi delle Alpi" Film Festival (Italy), MAYKOP International Film Festival (RU), Hope Film Awards (USA, Finalist, September 2017), Wirral International Film Festival (UK, 2017), Disappear Here Film Festival (Ireland, September 2017), Madrid Art Film Festival (Spain, September 2017, Semifinalist), Imaginarium Independent Film Festival (USA, October 2017), Sondrio Film Festival (Italy, November 2017, out of competition), AFC Global Fest of Calcutta (India), Miami Independent Film Festival (December 2017 edition), German United Film Festival (Semifinalist), Ficmarc 2018, Russian Film Festival (Moscow 2018, Semifinalist), Roma Cinema DOC (Mothly Winner and Finalist for the upcoming annual competition), South Film and Arts Academy Festival (Rancagua, Chile), New York International Film Festival 2018 (Semifinalist), Voce Spettacolo Film Festival (Matera, Italy, May 2108), Mostra del Cinema di Taranto (Bari, Italy, May 2018), UFF (Underground Film Fest, it will take place in various locations worldwide for about one year starting from May 2018), West Side Mountains Film Festival (Greece, August 2018), Innuendo Film Festival (Milano, Italy, September 2018).

.

2013 – **LOLI KALI SHUBA**, doc., 52 min. Odessa IFF, Cottbus IFF, Artdocfest - Moscow, Festival dei Popoli 2013, Delhi IFF 2013

2012 – **LIFE SPAN OF THE OBJECT IN FRAME** - 111 min. FIDMarseille - Mention de jury, DOCLisboa, Artdocfest – Moscow, Bratislava IFF, Docudays- Kiev, FICUNAM – Mexico, Pune IFF- India

2010 – **INTONAZIONE DEL CORRERE** – 10 min.

2009 – **TEXTURA LUCIS**, doc., 20 min

2008 – **ALI DI FARFALLA**- 64min. Jury prize for the best film in Panorama of Ukrainian cinema 2007-2008 -IFF Molodist-2008. Competition: Torino 2008 - Italy IFF, Cinema du reel 2009- Paris - France, FAMAFEST 2009 - Portugal, Filmer l'invisible - France, Le Fantoms du Reel - France

2003 – **PAUSA ITALIANA**, Tagliacozzo FF, experimental films program «Light Cone» - Paris

1998-99 - creative TV program **PHOTOGRAPHER**

1996 –**ANTOLOGION** (ukrainian film)- Neubrandenburg IFF, experimental films program «Light Cone-2006» - Paris, Molodist- Kiev, Tagliacozzo FF.

1995 - **MESSA ECLECTICA** (small), doc. - 26min. Diploma – Stakhanov IFF

1994 – **FROM GREEN THINKS OF ONE FOX** - 18 min.

1993 – **MELODIA** – doc., 30 min.

1992 – **TREE TEMPLS ON THE PALM OF MY HAND**, doc. - 30 min.

1991 – **WIDOWSTREET** – doc., 15 min. Festival dei Popoli -Florence 1991, Filmer a Tout Prix IFF - Bruxelle, Molodist IFF – Kiev

1990 – **TO OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS** -Grand-prize for the Best Documentary - Festival dei Popoli - Florence 1990

## CESARE BODOGNE'



Cesare Bedogné was born in a small town in the Italian Alps in 1968. He later moved to Pavia, where he graduated with honors in Mathematics with a Master's thesis on Minkovski Spacetime, the geometrical theory that forms the basis of Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity. Subsequently, he worked as a researcher in various European universities.

During the course of his studies, he also deepened his interest for the visual arts, with particular attention to cinema, and he eventually devoted himself to photography.

He lived for many years in the Netherlands, in the '90's, and he set up his first darkroom in Groningen, where he started working on his "Innerscapes" series (the photographs are currently included in the "Dutch Years" series), concentrating – in his own words - on "the strange moments when interior and exterior, the eye and the things looked at, seem to dissolve one in another". After the loss of his Dutch girlfriend, Monique, Cesare Bedogné returned to Italy and started working on the "Broken Images" series in a deserted TB Sanatorium in the Italian Alps, where - in his own words, he recognised "his personal landscape of desolation, stilled in a frozen twilight: the mysterious bareness where the soul, alone, returns to itself".

Afterward he travelled extensively in Europe, Nepal and South America working on the "Leaving" series, a body of work dealing with solitude, lightness and nostalgia: with the anxiety and elation of the wanderer. The title, meant in the double sense of "departing" and "abandoning", also alludes to that final departure which is Death.

Starting from the late '90's his works have been exhibited, solo and in group shows, in several galleries and museums in Italy and abroad. Among them, particularly relevant were the solo exhibition at Ch'i Contemporary Fine Art in New York, the "Empty

"Paradise" exhibition at the Museum of Photography in the Hague (the Netherlands), the "Silent Witness" exhibition at Ververs Contemporary in Amsterdam and the three solo exhibitions at Dagmar Schmidla Gallery in Cologne (Germany).

In 2014 his photo-book "Of Ashes and Wind", including 110 black and white photographs, was released by the no-profit Italian publishing house ABao AQu. In the last few years Cesare Bedogné moved to Greece and now devotes himself also to writing. His first, autobiographical novel "Oltre l'Azzurro" ("Beyond the Blue", dedicated to his Dutch years) was published in 2012 by ABao AQu Editions. This novel and the author's photographs were at the basis of a theatrical performance, produced by Bismantova Theater and by the Institute of Music and Liturgy of Reggio Emilia. Afterward Cesare Bedogné, together with the Russian film director Alexandr Balagura, worked on a filmic version of the show, including an editing of his own photographs and documentary shots taken in Greece. This film is entitled "Story for an empty theatre" and was awarded a Certificate of Merit (first equal in the competition for the best experimental film) at the Great Indian Film and Literature Festival (GIFLIF, 2-4 december 2016), which will travel in 2017 in various towns all over India. The film is also the monthly winner (Best Experimental Film, november 2016) in the Calcutta International Cult Film Festival and was awarded as the Best Experimental Film in the Eastern NC Film Festival (USA), the Best Experimental Film in the Coral Film Festival of Alghero (Italy), the Best Experimental Film in the Maracay International film Festival 2017 (Venezuela). Moreover, the film has been selected for the Blow Up Festival in Chicago, for the Lanùs Festival International de Cine 2017 (Argentina), for the Festival Internazionale del cinema documentario "Marcellino De Baggis" (semifinalist), for the 1<sup>st</sup> FICCSUR, Southern Cone International Film Festival (Valparaiso, Chile), for the Gulf of Naples Independent Film Festival (2017), for the London Greek film Festival, for the Disappear Here Film Festival (Ireland, September 2017), for the New Renaissance Film Festival (Best Experimental Film) and others.

In 2016 other three books by Cesare Bedognè were published: "Nessuno" ("Nobody"), "Ombre d'Europa" ("Shadows of Europe") and "L'ultimo viaggio di Albert Camus e altri taccuini" ("The last voyage of Albert Camus and other diaries").

Cesare Bedognè also worked, both as photographer and writer, with various magazines, for instance with "Doppio Zero" and "Il Foglio Clandestino" in Italy and "Visura Magazine" in the US.



## MARIA FREPOLI



*film still*

She was born in Sondrio (Italy) on January 2nd 1970. In 1992 she moved to Venice for her studies, graduating at the Academy of Fine Arts with a thesis on "The theatrical body between performance, circus and cinema". She took part as actress in several productions of the "Theatrical University Centre" of Venice, and afterwards she followed the courses of the "Teatro Continuo School" of Padua, under the direction of Nin Scolari. Her work was then developed following both the teachings of the "Third Theatre" and the street-theatre and *clownerie* tradition. She studied mime with Helfrid Foron, *clownerie* with Bano Ferrari, Butoh dancing with Imre Thormann. Moreover, she approached Indian dance-theatre staging with Marise Noiseaux (Kathakali), with the Milon Mela Group of Abani Biswas (Baul musicians from Bengali, Kalaripayattu masters and Chhau dancers) and with Tapa Sudana (Balinese theatre). She also followed paratheatrical courses with Rena Mirecka from Grotowsky's Laboratory Theatre.

Maria uses her visual artist's background to build masks, glove and Bunraku puppets which often take part in her performances. Her shows in puppetry and *clownerie* were represented in various Festivals both in Italy and abroad; for instance at "The Fairs of Theatre" in Sarmede (Italy), at "Festeatro" in Poschiavo (Switzerland), at the Covent Garden Festival in Londra and at the Streatham Festival (UK).

As a puppeteer, she collaborated with the "Il pianeta di Tifiret" company from di Asti, as a stilt-walker with the "Teatro dell'Aleph" from Bellusco, as an actress with the Bismantova Theatre of Castelnuovo nei Monti.

In 2012 she took part to the International Stilt Council organized in Holstebro(DK) by the Odin Teatret.

She currently lives and works on the island of Lesvos, in Greece.

## Interview on the work of the actor

curated by Giacomo Montevaldi

*This film is based on a book and on a series of photographs. First of all, this material was at the basis of a theatrical performance. Why did you approach this subject through the Japanese Butoh tradition?*

It was the mystery of death. Kazuo Ohno said that each of us brings along his or her own death, the women in their milk and the men in their chest. In Butoh dance, life and death are intertwined as the roots of a tree around a heap of bleached bones. One crosses continuously this border, in both directions, and the history narrated in the book and in the film dances in the same way.

*Photographers, in the old times, used to blend the ashes of the dead with gelatin silver. How did you identify yourself in relation with the absent protagonist of this book/film?*

The mediator was the angel of Andersen's fairy tale: he takes dead children to the heavens, but before he lets them fly above all the places where they played on earth. Only at the end of the story one discovers that the angel himself had been one of those children. Through his eyes I listened to and relived Monique's story.

*One of the most interesting ideas of the film, in my opinion, is the dilation of the scenic space, the opening of theatre to the real world, to the waves of the sea, to the shriek of a seagull... What did it mean to you working in this way, and before a movie camera?*

First of all a great freedom, as if it were natural for my theatrical character to move and breathe amidst the elements, letting himself to be transformed by them. And this is no matter how an internal process intrinsic to my work as dancer-performer. Behind the camera I always perceived an intense spiritual communion about what we were doing, and this way of working not only felt natural, but was also a stimulus to create.



*film still*

## EMANUELE FERRARI



*Maria Frepoli and Emanuele Ferrari, film still*

Emanuele Ferrari lives in a small Italian mountain village, near Reggio Emilia. In the late '90's he starts working as editor and journalist. He published short-stories on various magazines and anthologies, often co-operating with painters and photographers, curating art exhibitions and literary festivals. In 2005, together with Davide Bregola, he establishes the writing school "Alla ricerca dell'ombra". Starting from 2004, working with different actors and composers, he writes and stages a number of monologues and theatrical adaptations. In 2008 he publishes for Abao Aqu Editions "Un posto dove guardare", a theatrical narration inspired by topics referring to imprisonment and the Italian resistance movement during the Second World War. Starting from 2012 he creates and directs two new book series for Abao Aqu: "Le Tasche" and "I Burattini". Since then he curated over 20 books ranging from narrative to poetry and art books. He took part, both as a guest and conductor, to the "Festival of Literature" in Mantova, to the "Festa del Racconto" in Carpi, to the "Festival dell'Autobiografia" in Anghiari. It is now about 10 years that Emanuele Ferrari travels around Italy, reading from his own narratives and short-stories, accompanied by musicians such as Giovanni Mareggini, Lorenzo Munari, Davide Castellari, Armando Saielli, Nadia Torreggiani, Pietro Mareggini, Francesco Carraro. His most recent publications are "Quando tutto era ancora possibile" (with James Bragazzi), "292 Poltroni" (with Giovanni Mareggini), "40" (with Luca Tondelli), "L'uomo principale è una donna" (with Simona Sentieri), "North by northwest" (with Carla Bedini), "Pensieri perduti paesaggi ritrovati" (with Corrado Tagliati).

## BEYOND THE BLUE, the theatrical performance



The theatrical performance, which intertwines dance, storytelling and baroque music, took inspiration from the book of the same name (ABao AQu, 2012): an autobiographical novel, written like a diary, alternating rhythmical prose and poetry. The book tells us about long travels between the North and the South of Europe, about an encounter with a Dutch girl and an illness making its way inexorably, about a return home, later on, with the fragments of one's past to be put in order, not chronologically, but rather in search of that "eternity of the instant" which is sculpted inside each of us. In this performance the words from the book merge with the physical scores of a white-dressed creature who silently transforms, re-living her own reminiscences, crossing thresholds, until she suddenly finds herself (as in one of the book's last fragments) "on the other side of the mirror": a mysterious space, reverberating the absolute and timeless music of Bach, bright and doleful, in which she is looking for a way to narrate once more, or perhaps for a pause, a barenness opening to grief, the first and last sense of our inhabiting the void. In essence, the actress worked on the possibilities of the body/soul to transform into other creatures and other conditions of being: her character could be a dead creature, or one not yet born, suspended in a no place where one dreams, remembers, questions oneself. Death is thus represented as an experience of life and transition, enveloped not only by anxiety, but also by beauty and mystery. In this sense, the performance intends to restore theatre to its tragic background and its original cathartic function.

## The roads of the angel – Traces of an actor.

*A fairy tale says that an angel goes to take children when they die, but before bringing them to the heavens, he allows them to fly over all the places where they had played. As the angel silently picks up little disremembered objects, the kid slowly opens his eyes: when they will come to the sky, those tiny assembled objects might have a voice and maybe they will sing. The angel entered noiselessly into the actor's work, who followed his tracks in the dark alleys of dream and memory, gathering small traces, almost undecipherable signs, to bring them in a place where they might bloom.*

As in the book reality is revealed as a multifaceted crystal, in the same way, on the stage voices, images and sounds alternate in a temporality belonging to dream and memory. A white figure, arrived after a long journey, outlines in the wind her own soul's faces and spaces, and in her haversack she carries light shapes: her own days. Leafing through them, she discovers the memories of a tree, of a butterfly, a shaft of sunlight. Slowly, the invisible threads binding her own experience of the world disentangle. The spectator may track her path inside this room, which has shut doors, open-wide windows, secret passages, dark corners. Everyone reflects oneself into other beings, into the world: it may seem one is getting lost in a play of mirrors, but it is only a journey to meet one's own secret.



*Cesare Bedognè*  
**Oltre l'Azzurro**

22.11 - 06.12 2014 *Vernissage mostra fotografica sabato 22.11 ore 18.00*  
FOTOGALLERIA INCANTATIONS Vico San Giorgio n. 9/11r Genova

*Finissage: Racconto per voce, corpo, musiche barocche sabato 06.12 ore 17.00*  
MONASTERO DI S. MARIA DI CASTELLO Via di S. Maria di Castello n. 27



Comune di Genova

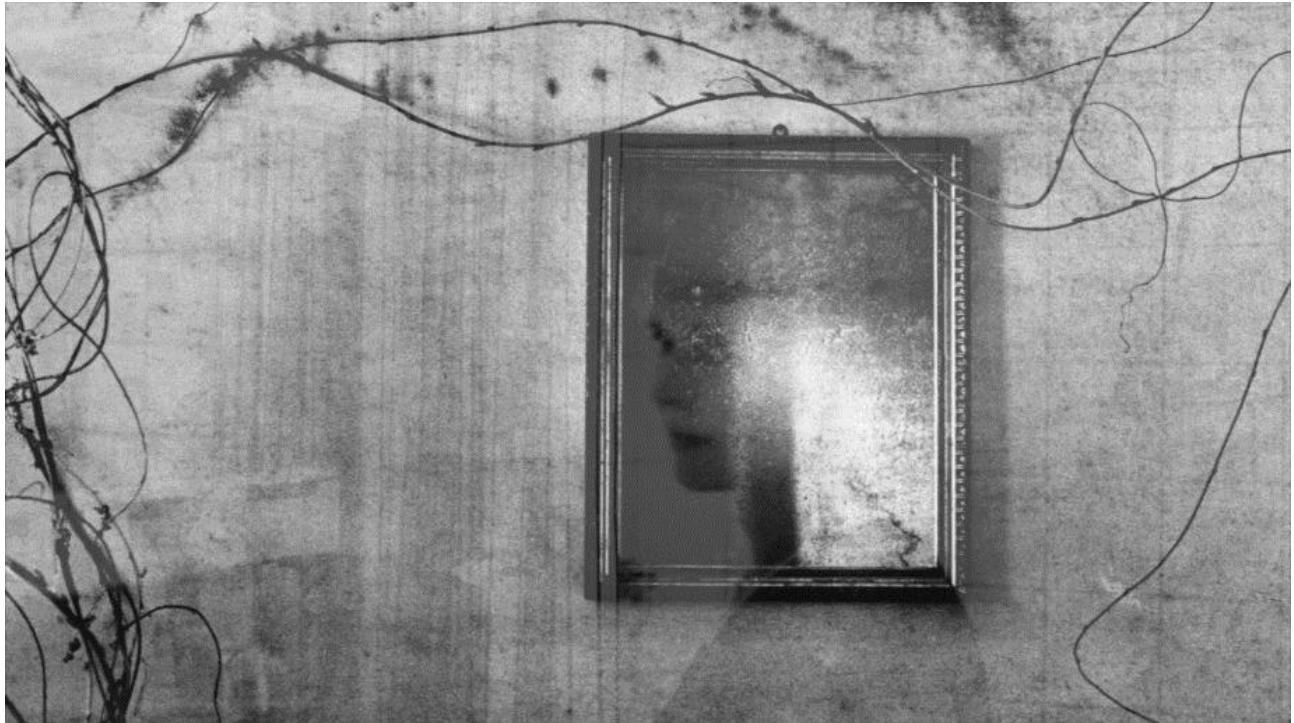


Municipio I  
Genova Centro Est



info: [www.incantations.it](http://www.incantations.it)

## STORY FOR AN EMPTY THEATRE, the film



*film still*

*"I finished just now to see the film, actually I have seen it two times in a row, because I simply could not stop looking, captivated as I was by those images, by that music, by the voice-over delivering words which are by now inscribed in my memory, but which acquired afresh the emotional strength of the very first reading. I would even say that, in an atmosphere where narration, images and sound perfectly meld together, empowering one another, the words, the sense they enclose, dilates. Such an extraordinary result is hard to achieve. In the transition from literary to filmic language, you know it, usually the original work suffers a loss, even when the film is in itself well made. You were truly lucky in meeting such a talented director who appreciated both the density of the text and the expressive and symbolical potential of the imagery, approaching them with remarkable light-handedness. Undoubtedly, he realized he had come across works endowed with such "beauty" and perfection that there was nothing to add to them, and he masterly let himself be led by those images that speak by themselves, by those words which arouse deep resonances and do not ask for anything else than silence and meditation. And it came out a masterpiece outside the box".*

*(from a message of Anna Bordoni Di Trapani to Cesare Bedognè)*

## STORY FOR AN EMPTY THEATRE, an introduction by Venanzio del Mare



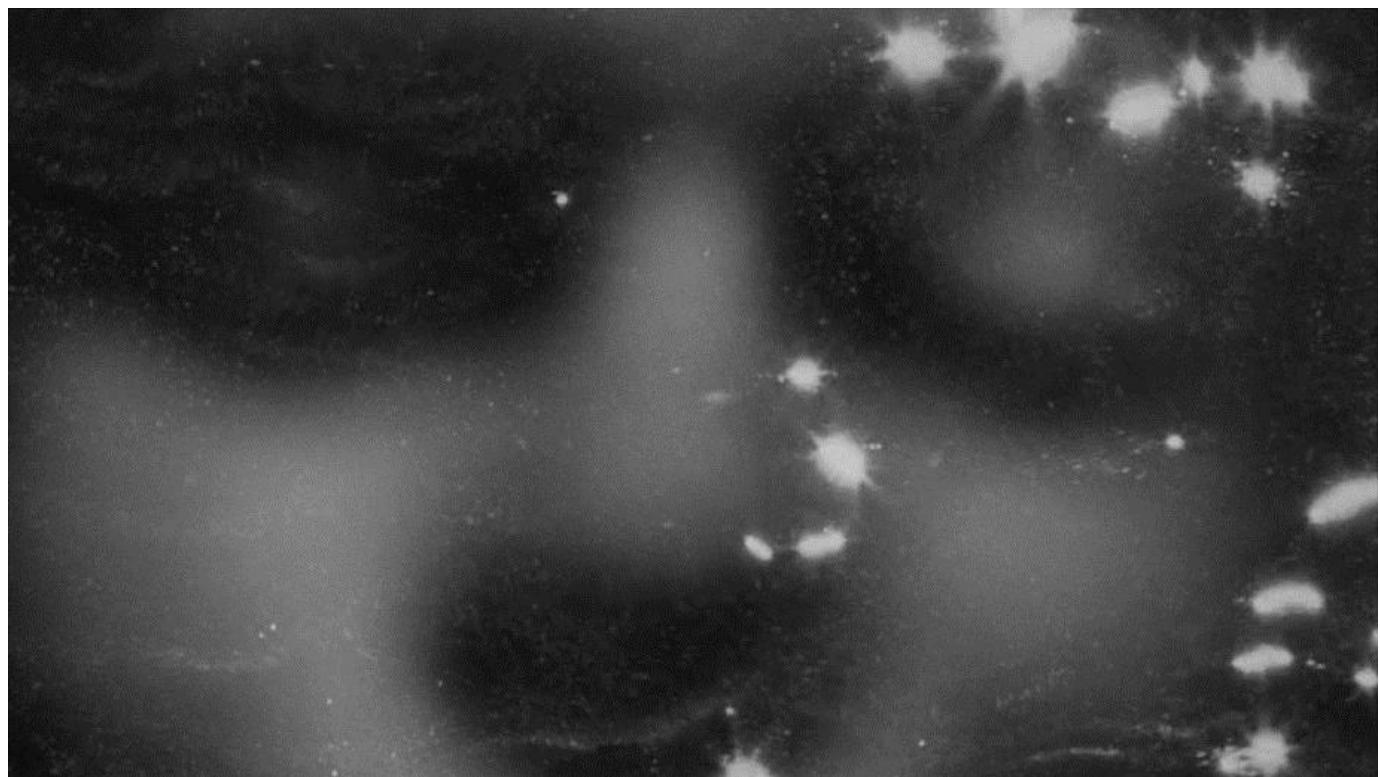
*film still*

This film narrates an intense story of love, disease and death, inspired by the autobiographical novel "Beyond the Blue", by the Italian photographer and writer Cesare Bedognè. The novel is at the basis of the theatrical performance of the same name which, together with the writer's photographs, was the first material on which this film was created. In this work still photographs, classical music, theatrical choreographies belonging to the Japanese Butoh's tradition, lyrical prose, diary fragments and poems merge cinematographically, through the editing by the Russian director Aleksandr Balagura, with shots taken both in a deserted Sanatorium of the Italian Alps, the place of the writer's past, and in the Greek island of Lesvos, the place of his present. As the book on which it is based, the film seems to wander freely in time, attempting to be more faithful to the intrinsically poetic and diachronic flow of memory rather than to the artificial linearity of conventional narration. The space of this film is thus the space of consciousness, a continuum which dilates, in one of the very last shots, into a dreamlike meditation on death, when the theatre's stage slowly dissolves into the interior of the Sanatorium's ruined church, and the white female character weaving together in a pattern of Japanese theatre the various shots of the film, seems to leave behind her own body and

leaves the scene. Before the crumbling altar only a drifting plastic bag remains, stirred by the wind.

This is a film constructed on words where images (both still and moving) do not play a merely descriptive role, but rather open a parallel poetical path. It is thus accomplished, through a polysemic correlation between word and image, what Belá Balázs believed to be one of the most intriguing possibilities of poetical expression pertaining to cinematic language.

Through this filmic journey we are also led to the inner depths of the photographic image, the very stuff cinema is made of. Gelatin silver pictures merge in this film with cinematic shots, abandoning their seemingly static form: they dissolve or slowly take shape, as if still under the action of a developer in the darkroom, gradually revealing different layers of reality. The same pictures return rhythmically, in the film, and as the story unfolds they produce always diverse suggestions and meaning, in the continuously changeable and renewed flow of memory. In quite a similar manner, the actress seems to react to both the words from the book and Bach's music, wandering freely inside and outside the stage, in a silent dialogue with the impalpable beings that from time to time seem to inhabit her, on the Greek shores, in a deserted church or in the old Sanatorium's haunting rooms - a landscape of Absence - emptiness submerged by a sense of waiting, that counterpoints and at the same time reverberates the everlasting voice of the sea.



*film still*



*film still*

## STORY FOR AN EMPTY THEATER

*"I believe that photography is an adaptation of vision to a spiritual necessity – the eye forms an image which in its turn, through its inmost resonances, refocuses and transforms the gaze itself." – Cesare Bedognè*

**Review by EJ Wickes (published on CULT CRITIC, the film magazine)**

*A film by Aleksandr Balagura and Cesare Bedognè. Produced by ABao AQu and Studio Incantations, 2015*

Experimental art films are rarely self explanatory. The artist, writer, director comes at it with nuances or fragments of dreamlike images. The established perimeters of pacing, structure and development don't always fit the armature of the visual film experiment. *Story for an Empty Theater* flows like a diary, or a book of prose written by one who is deeply in love.

Fashioned from the writings and photography by the Italian artist Cesare Bedognè, the work is an amalgamation of a diary, tintype styled photographs and performance art suggestive of contemporary Japanese Butoh and Grimaldi Pantomime. Filmed in locations from the artist's past; an abandoned sanatorium in the Italian Alps and his present, the

island of Lesvos in Greece, Story for an Empty Theater is tied skillfully together by Russian director Aleksandr Balagura.

A lonely chair at the edge of the surf; an abandoned sanatorium, the lush monochromatic texture of the film and it's melancholy narrative, serve the artists well in their visual monument to love despair, death and abandonment. "Story" moves like living pages from a photo album sifted from memories captured through the lens of the artist's mind's eye. To say anything more about this film would almost be a disservice to the viewer. Like paintings and other fine art, we tend to over intellectualize in our search for a clear schematic to their design, rather than just enjoying the sensation of being part of a very well-constructed a daydream.



*film still*



**EJ Wickes** is a visual artist and the Managing Editor of *Cult Critic Magazine*. His aesthetics lie somewhere in the vortex between painting and filmmaking. Eric has worked as an Art Director, Lead Scenic and Leadman on many film productions from Wes Craven's *The People Under the Stairs*, to his most recent involvement with the Verizon Go90 Channel's airing of the comedy series *Embeds* about young reporters following a political campaign across Iowa.

## Beyond the Blue, the book

A presentation by Anna Bordoni-Di Trapani



The narrative nucleus behind *Beyond the blue* is an intense story of love, illness and death set in the Netherlands. The story-teller, or rather the person who evokes this tale, is the protagonist himself. The work presents itself thus as a book of private memories, the modern version of an autobiography. The approach to the subject-matter and the work's structure are not related to the autobiographical genre of a classical kind, whereby recovered memoirs are usually arranged in an orderly scansion of logically connected chronological events, so that the speech flows regularly from a "before" to an "after", until the conclusion of the story. Our writer decisively refuses the deforming conventions of ordinary plot-narrative, ignoring the elusive complexity of reality. He opts instead for a-temporality. This does not mean however that the novel is devoid of internal coherence but only that it must be sought elsewhere, on other structural levels.

As a matter of fact, the camera is aiming its lens here not on the narrated ego, the story's protagonist, but on the narrating ego, on his present, extraordinary, memorial experience. What is focused, in close-up, is the narrator caught in the act of reliving fragments from his past, outside time, immersed in an "eternal present", the present of memory. This is a subjective time, all internal, the time of the soul, where the past is not annihilated but endures, overflowing with its lights and shadows in a "continuous infinite" where ports crazed with sunlight and dreary soulless towns, bewildered dawns and shattered suns, slivers of eternity and splinters of grief, the Chamber of Nostalgia and the Room of the Shattered Windows, resurface to consciousness, and return circulating in the stream of existence. The protagonist lives in this a-temporal dimension, switching from one state of mind to another, occasionally yielding to the spontaneous and intermittent re-appearance of ghosts from the submerged *rooms of memory*, resurfacing to inhabit his consciousness. Boundless spaces burst open to the narrator, where an uninterrupted monologue and interior dialogue flow: reminiscences, nostalgia, free associations, evocations, meditations; and he faithfully records all this in his writing, obeying an imperious inner need.

This is why the speech proceeds through fragments, extremely short at times, emphasised also typographically by the white space separating them. A flight of dazzling images, with a strongly visual impact, rushing before the protagonist's eyes: snap-shots linked to one another almost cinematographically. As a result, the autobiographical matter is subjected to a process of fragmentation that clearly de-structures the tale. Only rarely does the speech expatiate, allowing some room for straight-forward narration.

The diary pages themselves, dating back to the times in which the story took place, are scattered here and there by the author as tangible signs of continuity. They are however kept detached from the new parts, and in italics, and do not accomplish so much the function of a "memorial recovery", as cinematographic flash-backs, but rather enter the present-day experience as new possible evocative starting-points of a story which is, above all, the story of a soul.

It is for the reader, interested in the "fabula", to re-construct it piece by piece in his mind on the basis of the information he recovers whilst perusing the text. This is a form of collaboration that modernly experimental narrative often requires of the reader and it is doubtlessly pre-supposed also in *Beyond the Blue*, where the thematic structure is decisively preeminent to the narrative one. It is certainly not by chance that the chapters' montage does not follow any chronological order, obeying rather the inner necessity of alternating rhythms, tonalities and colours, thus resulting in that polyphony which is one of the major virtues of this book. This is essentially a lyrical novel, as it emerges from the density of language, from the high metaphorical dimension of the images, from the creative use of adjectives, extremely rich semantically, from the frequent passage to nominal structures and style.

And moreover, it is not by chance that the author introduces each chapter with a very short poetical composition, standing alone on the blank page with its naked essentiality, which immediately translates into a metaphysical experience, both for the narrator and the reader. According to the author, this is evidently the only possible structure for this work - the only one that does not betray the a-temporal complexity of memory and the essential indecipherability of experience.



*film still*

*"After the first week of isolation, in a strange moment of giddiness, we fled the hospital and went to have an ice cream, slipping out -just like that- past doctors and distracted nurses*

*Monique was wearing a tight green T-shirt revealing a hint of her turgid nipples; a number of little tubes and catheters dangled from her bluish arms. Her hair had become dull and colourless; big clumps of it had begun to fall away.*

*That evening, she asked me to shave her head.*

*Then she wanted to be photographed, in the cold glow of the artificial light: a woman at the mirror, contemplating for the first time the image of her own death.*

*Photograph not yet creased, in the groping of memory: a bathroom, the blinding light, her shorn head.*

*She looks at herself sideways, as though hesitating - maybe even more beautiful, her eyes unusually darkened, and strange - her face frozen in a timeless instant.*

*The glitter of a bracelet – her hair on the floor, almost invisible, tiles... – everything the image does not encompass: she raising her hand to her mouth, after the shutter click.*

*The pale mirror reflects nothing: the wind blows through my empty rooms".*



*Medisch Spectrum Twente, 1997  
Photograph by Cesare Bedognè*

*"The grief, the absence, the remorse.*

*All is a chasm.*

*They're sharpened, with time, the blades of memory".*



Groningen 1996  
Photograph by Cesare Bedognè

*"In a corner of this boundless room of mine, there is another lamp – taller than a man – on which the orange hawser we found one foggy night at Noorderhaven, winds like a creeper. Then the reflections of a glass vase – its snow-like lightness, - of birch-trees rustling in the wind – and a sea chest once used to carry the clothes of sailors embarking for the East Indies.*

*Now it contains letters, diaries, photographs: in short, the soul - more or less useless - of a man, and so its voyage continues.*

*I was forgetting a shriveled red apple and a few cinema stubs - blue and yellow - if one sniffs them, they still smell of stale beer and out-of-tune pianos.*

*Even the door of this room is red: red like clotted blood, like grief, like red moist lips.*

*The carpet is a worn, dusty green, like autumnal moss in the mountains: where one can comfortably stretch out, at nightfall, and lose oneself in the woods.*

*These the colours of the Nostalgia Room on a rainy day: here, all the whistles of departed trains, splintered suns in silence, and cries.*

*Here the stars fall one by one, and everything plummets with the hissing wind.*

*Here lie all the shipwrecked vessels and the run-away ships, beyond the wallpaper's scratches, in the Land of Dusk".*



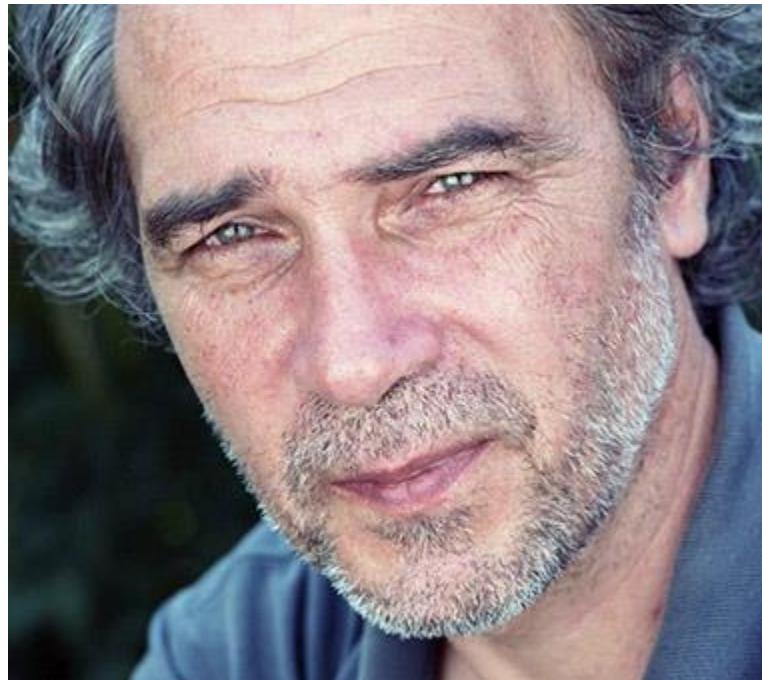
*Den Haag, 1997*

*Photograph by Cesare Bedognè*

# The man from Kiev

by Riccardo Ferrari e Paolo Marocco.

A meeting with Aleksandr Balagura, the Ukrainian film director living in Genoa's historical town center.



## **ALEXANDR BALAGURA (KIEV, 1961) IS A UKRAINIAN DIRECTOR CURRENTLY LIVING IN GENOA.**

*Author of To our brothers and sisters (Best Documentary at the "Festival dei Popoli" 1990), Widow street (1991), Ali di Farfalla (IFF Molodist Award, 2008), Life span of the object in frame (Mention de jury at FIDMarseille 2013), Loli Kali Shuba (2013).*

### **What brought you from Kiev to Genoa?**

It is now fifteen years that I live in Italy, but why I settled in Genoa is a query that might be answered in many different ways... where one lives is actually a question it takes a whole lifetime to reply. When I lived in Kiev, I was working in a film studio, and I came to Italy for the first time specifically to present two films at the "Festival dei Popoli", in 1990 and in 1991. Before the collapse of USSR, cinema was financed by the government, but in the following years the state funding ended, substituted only by the occasional support provided by private televisions. In 1995-96, we were already working without a salary. The situation was getting harder and harder, I did not live well the transition from socialism to capitalism, and I watched

with dismay the transformations taking place in all the people around me. Therefore, at a certain point, I decided to leave. In 1998 I came to Genoa for the first time and one just senses such things, I felt myself at ease here, I never felt an immigrant. Genoa does not offer very much from the point of view of cinematography, but psychologically, well, it is difficult to explain... I've always felt a bit of a traveler, but here I surprised myself in not willing to go anywhere else anymore.

**Genoa was for you also a source of artistic inspiration. What did you shoot in our town?**

In Genoa I shot *Life span of the object in frame* in the church of Santa Maria di Castello, at the Ancient Harbour and other locations.

**You are not a commercial director, and you seem to privilege documentary cinema, a very "artistic" approach. We are very curious to know what is cinema for you...**

I believe cinema is first of all a language, as literature, painting and music. Even if it is still young, it is a language which developed very quickly and I think it has now reached a point where it is able to reflect on itself. The films I love the most are precisely those revealing this self-awareness: *8 ½* by Fellini, or some works by Tarkovsky, Bergman, Godard and all the French Nouvelle Vague, but also Straub, Ervant Gianikian, Stan Brakhage... Even though I do not quite like the word "experimental", I believe these directors are generally considered experimental.

**You work with different formats. Which is the most congenial to you?**

I started shooting in 35 mm, and I continued for a long time, this is the format I prefer. It is not a sort of snobbery or a fetishistic bond with film, but only the fact that one needs to be aware of the material he or she is using. To me cinematography is all about the light, it is the direct and natural contact with the object portrayed, which in a sense touched the film, leaving on it (and on ourselves) a living trace of its existence. Digital images are signals, codes, something radically different from film... something between marble and plastic, so to speak... Even though my last works were made with digital cameras (a Red One and a Canon) because of the usual budget problems.

**In *To our brothers and sisters, your first work, it is portrayed an event looking like the disinterment of a common grave*. What was it and where was it filmed?**

The film was shot in 1989 in the Demianov Laz valley in Ukraine, and was commissioned by the Ministry of Culture. It is about the discovery of a common grave in the late 80's, when the USSR was collapsing, and all the slaughters from the times of Stalin (and not only Stalin) came to the surface. I was interested in filming this event not only for its historical importance, but also because of the proximity between all the living and the dead that were put together by the same event. I wanted to answer visually to a question: what can a living person do when he is facing another who is dead and buried in the ground. One can pray, cry, feel sorrow... but in reality what can one do for the dead? This film is about the possibility of framing together, in the same shot, the living and the dead, and at the same time about the impossibility of an interaction between them.

**In *Wings of a Butterfly* you make use of heterogeneous materials: an old unfinished film of yours, amateurish shots, archive footage, sequences taken from Muybridge. In this film, it shows what you were saying about cinema reflecting on itself, in an autobiographical way, starting in Kiev and ending here in Genoa. It seems that for you the act of vision should be accompanied by an archeology of vision and of memory.**

The film starts with a movie camera in 16 mm which my mother gave me, and thanks to that I started shooting together with my friends in the '80's, when each of us decided to make a film. Then we followed different paths in life, but the films are still there. By the way, I always loved Muybridge very much, and I consider him of one the greatest artists of all times. Muybridge developed the first symbolic characters of a world which would later become populated by cinematic images, and which keeps on been crowded by them every day. Something akin to what Adam and Eve are in the Christian world's tradition.

**Can you make a comparison between Italy and Ukraine with respect to cinematographic distribution, to the small movie theatres and the cine-clubs?**

I belong to a generation grown in the cine-clubs, which were numerous in Kiev in the '80's. Nowadays young people probably watch films on-line, but I don't really know what they are interested in. In my opinion, many people feel the need to return to movie theatres, to places where author and audience can actually meet. I am talking about the projections of low budget works, of independent film Festivals. In France particularly, but also here in Genoa, when there is some happening or a festival, people are happy to go there.



*film still (Story for an empty theatre)*