**Abstract from phd thesis *In Search of Cinema Lost in the Net: Webcinema*.**

In this work we will examine a context that no longer exists. Today, we are used to considering the Internet as an audiovisual and dynamic network, rich with Flash animations and embedded videos. But, if we do a brief search with the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine on the mid-nineties sites, we could achieve a web with mainly textual content, still pictures, animated gifs, midi sounds, some rare video content. Our aim is to suggest an archaeology of online moving images. To deal with this topic means to struggle against an Internet antinomy: the Net aspires to become the human knowledge archive and, at the same time, almost genetically, forgets itself. According with Bauman, we can say one of the features of the Internet is the instantaneity: time becomes a large container and, simultaneously, it dissolves and denigrates its duration.

Speaking about the relationship between moving images and the Internet means to discuss an object hostile to a clear identification. Although scientific literature on this subject is rather spare, we can find a lot of labels: cinema online, webcinema, e-cinema, cybercinema. All these terms refer to a hybrid, heterogeneous media, made up trailers, live short movies, 2D, 3D, Flash animated short movies, websoaps, collaborative projects, net art works. The period we analyse covers the time frame since 1997 to 2001. This is a threshold that marks a first experimental phase until streaming video sites achieved cultural visibility. 1997 is the beginning of the first audiovisual streaming content trials and 2001 is the year the dot.com bubble burst, indicating the breakdown of the most pioneering streaming content web sites.

This work is divided into two sections: *Theory* and *Archaeology*. The first represents the research's theoretical lintel, the second concentrates on the relationship between cinema and the Internet.

In the theoretical section we question on technology and how in social sciences and in particular in Science and Technology Studies, it consults the ideas of innovation, cause, effect and social processes. An analysis of media and information technologies suggests a model focusing on the mixture between the social shaping of technologies and the social effects with attention to the links and the interdependences among technologies, practices and social arrangements. Nevertheless, it doesn't refer only to a mutual shaping process that, according to social constructivism, plans the social practices that determine the technological development. In fact, even if the user's agency is primal, it is fundamental to consider also the social effects and the influence technologies have on societies since the pervasive technologies can obligate or restrict the choices.

In the second section we analyse the object of our research adopting the *Actor-Network Theory*'s method. We have decided to use this method for a number of reasons. First, ANT offers the possibility to follow a series of human and non-human actors in a network, without prescribing for a stable theory or submitting a Grand Theory. Second, ANT concentrates on materiality. Often media and cultural studies focus on the political dimension of society, ruling out the material reality. At the same time, the post-Structuralist theory uses the identity's category as primary analysis unit and neglects the characteristics of non human identities. In ANT, instead, the absence of a human and social centred approach allows you to discuss non-human actors besides the social use of technology. This change allows the inclusion of some material factors without recurring to either social constructivism or technological determinism. Starting with the assumption that digital media are material and their materiality is more visible, active and influential than technological artefacts, ANT is very suitable for our aims: digital media encourage a relation in which agency alternates between technology and individuals and passes through networks in which both actors are incorporated. Finally, ANT is an instrument able to incorporate variation. Digital media are distinguished by fast transformation and

consequently by their constant unsteadiness. The competition factors into network involve economical, political, technological and geographical actors, and each of them have to continuously enlist co-actors and create alliances to drag on their own stability and, in this way, keep their own power. ANT supplies the instruments able to investigate the rapid changes.

We focus on the relation between cinema and the Internet underlying three types of interdependent actors: technology, aesthetics and use. Technology, that is hardware and software actors, has a cardinal role in content production and transmission. The webfilmmakers have to confront themselves with the technological actors throughout a careful calibration. Webfilm production demands a right relation among the hardware components. If a video capture card is not compatible with the digital video software, the footage could not be imported on the computer. Hardware components, such as processor's speed, hard-disk size and RAM capacity, influence directly production since a deficiency in this elements narrows and damages seriously the filmmaker's creativity. Moreover, the webfilmmakers have to evaluate the audience's technological actors to ensure their works could be seen. In this period the most common movie formats are .wmv (Windows Media), .mov (Movie), .rm (RealVideo), while the media players are respectively Windows Media Player, QuickTime e RealPlayer. Since not all the formats are supported by all the players, the encoding format, chosen by the filmmakers, is fundamental and usually is made in at least two formats.

Second, how do these films look? Even if webmovies are very different, it is possible to detect some common features to define what, according to Latour, could be called an *aesthetics of battle*. This expression points out how webfilm aesthetics comes to terms and moulds itself continuously with the technological barriers, bringing outformal strategies that, on one hand, provide for the technological restrictions and, on the other hand, mark this cinema with peculiar traits. The average length of the movies is rather short, between 30'' seconds and 5 minutes. The frame size is relatively small with 160x120 pixels the average, while the frame rate is from 6 fps to 15 fps. The movies shortness bears on the narrative developing, mainly, a very thin story. From the stylistic point of view, the use of close-ups is encouraged (with some medium long shots and the absence of long shots), a type of shot to minimise the compression's problems. The high presence of close-ups involves a static shot where the camera movements are minimal. On sound level, the audio is most often spoken words (voice over or character narration) with little or no background sound, and tends to be a monologue. To sum up, the aesthetic and formal features of webfilms are deeply marked by the technological actors: the image is a miniature-image, grainy, jerky, flat, out of focus, constrained within the media player's narrow confines. Simultaneously, these same technological barriers are folded in a creative way. The webfilmmakers use black and white images mixed with bright coloured ones, the shots are often décadrages, joined together by a fast editing with frequent changes of rhythm that shows off the pixels and the flickering of a blurred and elusive vision. The webfilms refuse and somehow mock the traditional, realistic filmmaking's conventions through a frame miniaturized that echoes vaguely the cinema screen. The little size and the precarious image remember the first photographs or even Edison's Kinetoscope movies.

Finally, how is webfilms consumption? The users are a niche audience, some early adopters with clear skills, both hardware and software, and therefore able to calibrate the fruition to a fragile and unstable experience of viewing. It is often required that they adapt their computers in order to watch the movies, for example, to install the right player, to struggle against the slow 56k connections.

Moreover, the spectatorship experience is generally household, the user is solitary, sitting in a chair, bent over his own computer screen, fixed to observe a media player's small box that encloses a poorly defined image in a frame.

This work tries to question on the roots of the contemporary media experience, labelled as immersive, dynamic, dislocated and relocated constantly throughout the mobile devices. A first set of observations concerns the materiality of technology. It is becoming less and less visible and intrusive, wireless, portable, and simultaneously able to dematerialise the concreteness of objects. Miniaturisation, however, does not erase the fact that technology has a material aspect and has to be considered in relation to a network of infrastructures, that is in a context of already existing material objects. Second, our object of inquiry allows a critical analysis of the relationship between development and social practices of using technologies. Social studies on technology underline emphatically a mutual shaping process between these two spheres. If that is indeed correct, it is also necessary to recognize the social effects and impacts technologies have on society. If, in fact, people have the opportunity to choose the use of technology is equally true that technology can constrain and limit the number of choices.

An archaeology of this auroral period could stimulate some doubts about a development and use process of digital technologies, sometimes characterised by an almost deterministic linearity. On one hand, it should investigate the "weight" of user-friendly technologies in content creation and consumption: what conditions require, what skills, what relations established with already existing technology. On the other hand, it would study the features of the fruition’s experience characterised by a user’s high commitment who must build his own vision setting, coping with the barriers imposed by technology and negotiating with them. An archaeology of stamp-images in which the viewer’s eye, bent over a barrier-screen, discovers the fatigue of viewing.