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***Archives of Pathos. Image and Survival in Ernesto De Martino's interdisciplinary ethnography<sup>1</sup>***

**Abstract**

*By focusing on part of the iconographic production of Italian anthropologist Ernesto De Martino in the 1950s, this article proposes to sketch his objects of study through an insistence on their historiographical value. Within this context, the crises of possession triggered by the Arachnida bites function as so-called "folkloric-religious relics" of Tarantism, and thus come to be considered by the anthropologist as "surviving documents" of a tension between memory and oblivion. Not only does this open the door to a discussion on the relation between the archive and the discipline of anthropology, but also of the archival logistics behind various forms of pathos (close to Aby Warburg's notion of Pathosformel). These can be traced through the study of key elements of ritualistic mediation. This article investigates the "tools," such as photographic and filmic imaging devices, by which De Martino sought to contribute to a research on "survivals."*

**Keywords**

Ernesto De Martino, Image, Archive, Survival, Possession, Tarantism, Aby Warburg, Italy, Memory, Photography

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<sup>1</sup> Translation: Matt Sendbuehler

Italian anthropologist Ernesto de Martino and his research team spent the winter of 1959 preparing for their upcoming encounter with tarantism, a possession ritual practiced in southern Italy that is oriented around a tarantula bite\*. The ritual is articulated around the double meaning of “*rimorso*” in Italian, which evokes both the spider bite (literally a “re-bite”) and remorse, specifically in the form of a haunting past that returns to torment the victim anew each year. Come summer, De Martino witnessed firsthand the ritual he had been studying with his team over several months; he articulated his first impressions as follows:

“[...] Extending an ear, we could hear the echo of a rustic concertino dominated by the pressing rhythm of the tambourine. [...]. The team got moving to the trail of the rhythm [...] [which] revealed the melodic line of the ‘dance of the little spider’ —[...] the ancient tarantella of the South in its original therapeutic function.”<sup>2</sup>

That the ritual has been described as a “musical-choreutic-chromatic exorcism”<sup>3</sup> is supported by De Martino’s description, in its evocation of music, rhythm, melody and dance as part of this ritualistic therapy. It is tempting to conclude, given these corporeal, affective displays, that no one would be immune to the inebriating “echoes” heard in the ritual’s music, not even the anthropologist and his specialists who, “hurled onto this other planet as [they] were, all had difficulty getting acclimated and taking on [their] respective roles.”

Upon arrival in the Apulian village of Nardò, the team’s first stop was the barbershop, in search of musicians who performed at tarantism exorcisms, most of whom were barbers by trade. Alas, the barbers weren’t there, as they were participating in the ritual that very day. Lacking directions, De Martino and his team intuitively followed the trail suggested by the

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<sup>2</sup> Ernesto de Martino, *The Land of Remorse*, London, Free Association Books, 2005, p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> Tarantism’s specific form was fixed in the Middle Ages and is found mainly in southern Italian peasant communities. The bite possesses the “tarantulated” person, whose ritual exorcism is performed in public through dance set to music. For English sources on southern Italian rituality, see the works of Georges Saunders as well as Thomas Hauschild, *Power and Magic in Italy*, Berhghan Books, 2010 and Karen Lüdtke, *Dancing With Spiders. Crisis, Celebration and Celebrity in Southern Italy*, Oxford, Berhghan Books, 2008.

sounds of the ritual. This “echo,” while recalling an ancient myth tinged with melancholy, also offered a first glimpse through a portal to what we might call the irrational, via the strangeness of the echo’s doubling. Echoes also change the listener’s relationship with time, as delayed sounds—traces of past intensity—are heard in the present. Added to this temporal (or “historical”) dimension is a lateral dynamism, “plural echoes” of the type that Baudelaire recognized as intermingling kinetic “correspondences” from passing through “forests of symbols / Which look at [man] with familiar eyes.”<sup>4</sup> Such glances, like poring over family photographs in search of subtle resemblances, complete this portrait of the echo, synthesizing Éric Méchoulan’s call for a “*genealogy*,” where genealogy and analogy intersect.<sup>5</sup> It is precisely in terms of this tension—between temporality and resemblance—that we might conceptualize De Martino’s interdisciplinary expeditions to southern Italian communities in the 1950s, where one could still encounter rituals transmitted through sounds, objects and bodies.

De Martino’s interdisciplinary ethnography expeditions,<sup>6</sup> innovative for their time, involved multiple experts (including an anthropologist, ethnomusicologist, psychiatrist, photographer and, at times, a filmmaker) and gave rise to heterogeneous documents, which provide numerous entry points to the social phenomenon being investigated, unfolding into a multitude of pasts and blurry filiations. The observational and archival efforts of anthropological endeavour were certainly bolstered by new tools and devices adopted by the discipline. In the case of De Martino, these “tools” comprised—in addition to the usual field notebooks—an extremely diverse team using a variety of devices, whether these be notebooks, audiotapes, film and or a still camera. His works, *La terra del rimorso* (1961) and *Morte e pianto rituale nel mondo antico. Dal lamento pagano al pianto di Maria* (1958), constitute a core anthropological study, articles written by experts from relevant disciplines, as well as powerful photographic and iconographic series that rise far above the status of mere appendices.

This paper presents, first, an outline of the objects of De Martino’s study, and what he calls “*surviving documents*.”<sup>7</sup> Such terminology may sound out-dated today, as it hides shades of

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Baudelaire, “IV. Correspondances,” in Claude Pichois (ed.), *Les fleurs du mal*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. Folio classique, 1996, p. 40, (my translation).

<sup>5</sup> Éric Méchoulan, “Intermedialité : ressemblances de famille,” *Intermedialités*, n° 16 Rythmer / Rhythimize, fall 2010, p. 233.

<sup>6</sup> Ernesto de Martino, “La ricerca indisciplinare nello studio dei fenomeni culturali,” *De Homine*, 17-18, 1966, p. 227, re-edited in Clara Gallini, *I rituali dell’Argia*, Padova, 1967, p. XI.

<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that concepts such as “relics,” “vestiges,” “traces,” and “survivals” may recall a particular phase of anthropological thought strongly influenced by sociologist Auguste Comte and functionalism. However, it would be imprudent to read De Martino only with the historical references of English, French or American anthropology, seeing as the discipline simply did not exist in Italy before him. Before the 1950s, foreign anthropological works were hardly even available in the country. De Martino, who is considered today the main founder of Italian anthropology, was originally a historian with close ties to philology, philosophy and even archaeology, who later developed his own ethnographic practice which was strongly driven by political action. Despite his problematic terminology, it is quite clear by reading *The Land of Remorse*, that Ernesto De Martino was aware of the dangers of evolutionary concepts. In fact, his introduction describes with irony the various trajectories of positivist doctors and missionaries in Southern Italy, while letting the reader understand that his method will strive

modernist and evolutionary ontologies which were widespread at the time. Yet it is interesting to notice nonetheless how, by their nature, these ritual phenomena balance the tension between memory and oblivion through their immanent mnemonic qualities, and the haphazardness of forgetting. This allows us to explore not only the possible relationship between archives and anthropological discipline, but also the archival logic inherent in an object of study that is composed of body, voice and colours—key elements in the mediation of the tarantism ritual over centuries. The aim is also to implicitly interrogate technological devices, such as photography and film, which “captured” and “reproduced” these possession rituals, by confronting them with the rituals’ own repetition processes and temporality, as well as their so-called “artificial” performativity.

Second, the paper investigates the methodology and devices, both linguistic and visual, that De Martino employed to describe what he saw as ethnographic “survivals.” By concentrating on only a few of the numerous images of de Martino’s corpus, this essay explores a visual repertoire that has almost escaped scholarly attention,<sup>8</sup> perhaps more generally due to the discipline’s former “iconophobia.”<sup>9</sup> My attempt is that of understanding both how the researcher’s use of a particular tool or medium leads to a specific type of observation and how the very nature of the object under study might suggest a means of organizing knowledge.

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to avoid their mistakes by regulating a well-defined historical-religious problem. For example, he criticizes 1880s Italian folklorist and doctor Giuseppe Pitrè in these terms: “But in Pitrè, as his immediate disciples and collaborators, romantic Risorgimental (nationalistic) and positivistic themes co-existed in a contrast which was never settled by a coherent methodological resolution.” (De Martino, 2005, p. 6). In order to understand fully the incredibly eclectic and quite singular intellectual influences of Ernesto De Martino, as well the political nature of his project on Southern Italy, it is important to refer to Giordana Charuty, *Ernesto De Martino. Les vies antérieures d’un anthropologue*, Marseille, Parenthèses-Éditions de la MMSH, 2009. Other important sources have analyzed the intellectual trajectories of De Martino, such as Clara Gallini (ed.), *Ernesto De Martino e la formazione del suo pensiero*, Liguori, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> The function of images (in photographs, films, etc.) found and used for research purposes or produced in the course of De Martino’s fieldwork was traditionally glossed over in commentary on his work. To learn more about the visual components of Ernesto de Martino’s corpus, see Clara Gallini, Francesco Faeta (eds.), *I viaggi nel Sud di Ernesto De Martino*, Turin, Bollati-Boringhieri, 1999, p. 49-93; Francesco Faeta, *Strategie dell’occhio: Saggi di etnografia visiva*, 3<sup>e</sup> édition, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2003; Giovanni Agosti, Maurizio Sciuto, “L’Atlante del pianto di Ernesto De Martino,” in Riccardo Di Donato (ed.), *La contraddizione felice? Ernesto De Martino e gli altri*, Pise, ETS, 1990, p. 185-195. Francesco Faeta, Antonello Ricci (eds.), *Lo specchio infedele. Materiali per lo studio della fotografia etnografica in Italia*, Roma, Documenti e ricerche del Museo Nazionale delle Arti e Tradizioni Popolari, 1997; Francesco Faeta, *Fotografi e fotografie. Uno sguardo antropologico*, Milano, FrancoAngeli/Imagines, 2006; Clara Gallini, « Il documentario etnografico ‘demartiniano’ » in Enzo Minervini (ed.), *La Ricerca Folklorica 3* « Antropologia visiva. Il cinema », Edizioni Grafo; Diego Carpitella, « La registrazione fotografica nelle ricerche etnofoniche » in *Popular Photography Italiana*, 1968, p. 130-131, re-edited in *Musica e tradizione orale*, Flaccovio, Palermo, 1973, p. 183-196; Antonello Ricci, *I suoni e lo sguardo. Etnografia visiva e musica popolare nell’Italia centrale e meridionale*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2007; Gianluca Sciannameo, *Nelle Indie di quaggiù. Il cinema etnografico di Ernesto De Martino*, 2006, Bari, Palomar. Very recently, Georges Didi-Huberman has stressed the relevance of the photographs of Ernesto De Martino’s corpus in his book *Peuples exposés, peuples figurants. L’Oeil de l’histoire*, 4, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Lucien Castaing-Taylor, “Iconophobia,” *Transition*, vol. 6, n° 69, spring 1996.

### (In)voluntary resistances. Ethnography and archival practices

Repetition is one of ritual's strength, giving it durability over time. It may seem paradoxical that despite their inherent power of transmission, rituals have been the object of "salvage ethnography"<sup>10</sup>—the intriguing practice of the anthropologist/collector whose mission included, as Mauss suggested, "compil[ing] in scientific fashion the archives of societies."<sup>11</sup> Indeed, it is not only part of ethnography's methodology—the collection, cataloguing and taxonomic classification of data, as detailed meticulously by Mauss in his *Manuel d'ethnographie* (1947)—that the practice had come to resemble archival science, but also in its ethos. In a sense, the ethnographer's work implicitly encompasses the duality inherent in the Derridean concept of archiving and its dual status as both authoritative "*commandment*" and "*commencement*,"<sup>12</sup> in the sense of providing access to an original. When thinking about De Martino's work, two types of archives come to mind. On the one hand, there are "involuntary" resistances, in the form of what he saw as "surviving" rituals, whose "documents" are the expressive bodies of the communities he studied. Indeed, this problematic idea of body as document is particularly striking in his study of tarantism, and reveals his original training as a historian of religion<sup>13</sup>. In the preface to his analysis of tarantism, he warned that, "[b]y its very nature, a study such as this one is indebted to many. First of all, there are those 'living persons' who were forced to take the unnatural role of 'historical documents' in the process of ethnographic investigation."<sup>14</sup> Such documentary violence was, he explained in the book's fifth appendix, tempered by Vittoria De Palma, the social worker who kindly "took on the task of reminding the members of the team that their 'documents' were really 'living persons'."<sup>15</sup>

The other type of archive is the post-facto document created purposefully by the researcher; a document that would defy death, transcend time and give future generations a meticulous portrait of their past—or of other people's past. The emergence of recording technologies and the use of the camera during fieldwork only intensified this ideal in anthropological discourse, activating what Robert Gardner has called "the impulse to preserve"<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Jacob Gruber, "Ethnographic Salvage and the Shaping of Anthropology," *American Anthropologist*, New Series 72, 6, December 1970, p. 1289–1299. Elizabeth Edwards traces the links between survival and photography in "Salvaging our past: photography and survival," in Christopher Morton, Elizabeth Edwards (eds.), *Photography, Anthropology and History. Expanding the Frame*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Marcel Mauss, *Manual of Ethnography*, New York, Oxford, Durkheim Press/Berghahn Books, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Mal d'archive. Une impression freudienne*, Paris, Galilée, 1995.

<sup>13</sup> In order to understand the complex intellectual influences of Ernesto De Martino, first a historian and then a self-taught anthropologist, who founded Italian anthropology by drawing from various schools of thought in Italy, mainly the ones of Benedetto Croce and Antonio Gramsci, see the astonishing book by Giordana Charuty, *Ernesto De Martino. Les vies antérieures d'un anthropologue*, Marseille, Parenthèses-Éditions de la MMSH, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> De Martino, 2005, p. viii.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Gardner, "The Impulse to Preserve," in Charles Warren (ed.), *Beyond Document: Essays on Nonfiction Film*, Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 1996.

Margaret Mead's "Visual Anthropology in a Discipline of Words," a classic article from the dawn of the discipline, provides an admirable illustration of the renewed desire to immortalize cultures, and was sparked by the rise of image-capture tools that went beyond traditional note-taking:

Anthropology, as a conglomerate of disciplines [...] has both implicitly and explicitly accepted the responsibility of making and preserving records of the vanishing customs and human beings of this earth. [...] The recognition that forms of human behavior still extant will inevitably disappear has been part of our whole scientific and humanistic heritage.<sup>17</sup>

De Martino is well aware, in 1959, that tarantism would soon disappear almost entirely from the Salentine Peninsula and that his documentary efforts represented an opportunity to archive. He had also observed, with a certain degree of irony, an archival urge in his own predecessors. In the introduction to *La terra del rimorso*, he includes a lengthy acknowledgment of those who had documented southern Italian religious practices well before his day. They included late 19<sup>th</sup> century folklorist Giuseppe Pitré, whose colossal works, with evocative titles such as *Biblioteca delle tradizioni popolari siciliane* (1882) and *Archivio per lo studio delle tradizioni popolari* (1885), illustrated a delight in identifying elements of religious folklore that he "idolized as 'relics' to 'salvage'."<sup>18</sup> De Martino without entirely sharing such positivist ideologies, recognized nonetheless the tension between these conservation efforts and the fact that he was himself accelerating the disappearance of these phenomena that were "already condemned to disappear completely in the space of a few decades."<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, De Martino was more interested in the rituals' mnemonic power than in the fear of their being forgotten. The rituals' internal resistance, anachronism and, especially, their greatly undervalued contribution as "religious-folkloric relic[s]" not only to the history of southern Italy, but to the history of Christian world—that very same religious culture that tried to keep them out of view. Thus, he saw these cultural demonstrations as a kind of "document," not of a parallel history in opposition to that of the cultural elite, but "of a single history: that of the religious civilization of which it is a relic, or of the religious civilization in which it *survives* [emphasis added] or is more or less profoundly remolded."<sup>20</sup> As a historico-religious phenomenon, tarantism is thus, for De Martino, contiguous with those phenomena opposed by the Christian religion, which unwittingly became steeped in them. De Martino richly evokes this contagion: "The Mother of God—the Christian symbol of grief—assumed some of the forms of ancient lamenting women."<sup>21</sup> The question of survivals<sup>22</sup> has already entered the picture.

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<sup>17</sup> Margaret Mead, "Visual Anthropology in a Discipline of Words" [1975], in Paul Hockings (ed.), *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, New York, Mouton de Gruyter, 1995.

<sup>18</sup> De Martino, 2005, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 33.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 23. The term "sopravvivenza" ("survival") is used by De Martino in his original text: "sopravvivenze pagane come documenti di una certa storia religiosa da ricostruire" ("pagan survivals of a certain religious history to

### The tarantula as an ahistorical hybrid symbol

De Martino thus undertook a reconstruction of this marginalized phenomenon, this supposed incoherent fragment, irreverent hoax, and ahistorical fact. On the one hand, he stressed the ritual's potent, cyclical durability over time: the Salentine choreutic-musical exorcism has its own, highly codified, temporality. Its normative precision allows oral and ritual forms to survive over time—the ancient poets would have enjoyed limited posterity if not for this formal verse structure. On the other hand, De Martino reveals the power of this molecular, ritual fragment through its correspondence with a much larger territory—what he calls “a history of high points.” He developed a true cartography of tarantism, which Carlo Ginzburg, an early reader of De Martino, could probably identify, with its attention to detail and analogy as “constellations by isomorphism.”<sup>23</sup>

With impressive philological rigour, De Martino used diachronic literature and sources from as far back as the Middle Ages—when the only witnesses to these “historico-religious” phenomena were missionaries and clerics—to identify “traces” that participate fully in his present-tense analysis of his subject. The temporality of tarantism, which is not explicitly provoked, but rather, “experienced” by the victims of tarantula bites, turned out to have a seasonal pattern. Specifically, the number of “tarantulated” people rose in Apulia around June 29, the feast day of St. Peter and St. Paul. This surprising consistency was one of the first clues that allowed De Martino to systematically debunk the conventional wisdom that held that tarantism was a “real” disease, a belief that his team's physician was also able to refute. The Christian cultural influence had thus sought to make these phenomena fit into its own religious calendar, and had partly succeeded by disciplining the possession attacks. This first temporal consideration allowed De Martino to undertake his historical anthropological research on syncretic processes and the dominance mechanisms that engendered them. This therefore constituted another fundamental part of De Martino's thinking, which Daniel Fabre crystallized around the concept of the “crossroads” (*carrefour*) in an article addressing the originality of the anthropologist's work.<sup>24</sup>

In the case of tarantism, the crossroads is manifest at the level of both religious syncretism and symbolic complexity. Regarding the latter, this is an illness that constantly oscillates between the real and the represented. The figure of the tarantula, along with its bite, is a hybrid anchoring point whose symbolic autonomy was thought to have emerged progressively. Latrodectism “carries” the cultural forms of tarantism, and vice versa, in a sense becoming the historical condition of the latter. The figure of the tarantula is “grafted” onto a nervous breakdown, at which point it becomes impossible—and futile—to know which form is the original. De Martino knows it is impossible to identify an “essential core” or “root cause” of tarantism, but he does

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be reconstructed”; my translation), Ernesto De Martino, *La terra del rimorso. Contributo a una storia religiosa del Sud* [1961], Milan, Il Saggiatore, 2009, p. 48

<sup>23</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies. Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1991.

<sup>24</sup> Daniel Fabre, “Un rendez-vous manqué. Ernesto De Martino et sa réception en France,” *L'homme*, tome 39, n° 151, 1999, p. 207-236.

not dwell on this fact. At the same time, an awareness of this impossibility is implicit across the entire project. In contrast, Aby Warburg, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Italian Renaissance art historian, image theorist and predecessor of De Martino, who was strongly influenced by anthropology's controversial notion of *survival*, had a more radical view on the question of "origins." While we will consider Warburg in more detail below, it suffices here to state his position regarding the question of "origins," which is present as a subtext in De Martino's work and summarized as follows in a suggestive article about "archives of intensities" by Georges Didi-Huberman: "The 'original words' exist only as *surviving*, that is to say, as impure, masked, contaminated, transformed, or even completely inverted forms."<sup>25</sup> The "contaminated" origin of this ecstatic practice, which implies a form of corporeal device—the body as medium—, reminds us of this same idea, in an intermedial perspective, of the incremental autonomy of a new technical device or emerging medium, and its constant cross-pollination with previous media. It is perhaps possible to consider the "apparatus of choreutic-chromatic-musical exorcism" as a communications "device", or "apparatus"—such a parallel has even been established quite surprisingly by De Martino himself in a rather ambiguous and scholarly overlooked article he wrote about "mass media" in which he tackles Marshall McLuhan's theories<sup>26</sup>. Yet what, precisely, is this archaic mediation of the ritual, which De Martino does not hesitate to call an "apparatus," and whose effects he is measuring?

### **Reproducible possession: the "choreutic-musical apparatus" and the technical eye**

As might be deduced by its name, tarantism references the spider—most often a tarantula, or other biting creature—a species whose symbolic meaning remains nebulous, even superfluous, from the perspective of symbolic efficiency. As a recurring symbol of the ritual, the tarantula's role is to evoke, to represent and it relives through a range of properties that are specific to the spider: "she communicates to her victim a set of corresponding choreutic, melodic and chromatic tendencies."<sup>27</sup> She has multiple names, and several affective nuances; she is a "dancer," a "singer," or "sad and mute." During the summer (re)biting, as De Martino described it, the "tarantulated" person engaged in a complex, choreutic-mimetic performance organized into several "phases,"<sup>28</sup> in which exorcism and erotic drives mingle—first at one's home with only musicians and family, then at the church of St. Paul in Galatina, in front of a larger audience. The choreography in the church acted out the actions of the tarantula, and every ritual element was

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<sup>25</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, "Aby Warburg et l'archive des intensités," *Études Photographiques*, numéro spécial "La ressemblance du visible/Mémoire de l'art," n° 10, novembre 2001, p. 146. "Les 'mots originaires' n'existent que *survivants*: c'est-à-dire impurs, masqués, contaminés, transformés, voire antithétiquement renversés," (my translation).

<sup>26</sup> Ernesto de Martino, "Simbolismo mitico-rituale e mezzi di comunicazione di massa," *Ulisse*, XIV, vol. VII, fascicolo 41, July, p. 25-29.

<sup>27</sup> De Martino, 1966, p. 62.

<sup>28</sup> For more on the order of dance movements, see ethnomusicologist Diego Carpitella's appended account, "The Choreutic-Musical Exorcism of Tarantism," in De Martino, 2005, p. 286-315.



synchronized to it: the musicians played appropriate tunes, the audience provided “true colours” by throwing particular coloured ribbons on their relatives. In people’s homes, there were certain constants in the décor: the ceremonial perimeter was very often enhanced with foliage and small water fountains and a white sheet was laid on the ground to mark off a “stage” for the tarantism victims and “brightly coloured” images of St. Peter and St. Paul were placed at their disposal.

When the Italian official religious instances first attempted to neutralize these forms of possession, the figures of these saints were incorporated into the ritual, in a sense “ordering” the “tarantulated” person to return to the church of Galatina. Victims congregated there in hope of being granted grace, a key element of the final resolution—exorcism. The apparatus is thus constituted by the operative alliance of choreutic movements, vivid colours, sounds—all of which are crucially important—and an audience. The tarantella musicians are, for De Martino, “mediators,” “stimulators” and guides in evolving the *body-taranta* into a melodic and rhythmic *body-instrument*. This therapy is not accomplished “solely through sounds and colors,” writes De Martino, “but even scents could play a part.”<sup>29</sup> These media of exorcism could also, however, prove ineffectual: De Martino relates an incident in which a tarantulated woman, disturbed by the unexpected appearance of a man wearing the “wrong colours” (in this case, a yellow and red striped sweater), interrupted her choreutic cycle. In response, the audience suddenly showed her new colours to counteract the spontaneous interruption, allowing the performance to get back on track: “The damage was repaired, the speck of dust which had filtered into the gears was eliminated, and the apparatus functioned again to the satisfaction of all.”<sup>30</sup> It is here that we see the eloquent internal workings of possession for De Martino, and the ingenuity of his choice of the term “apparatus” to describe this complex, polymorphous and socially multifaceted ritualistic “machine” that consisted of a series of techniques, including those of the body,<sup>31</sup> capable of hearing, seeing, feeling and moving.

As hinted previously, there is an subtle mirroring effect between this reproducible ritual apparatus, which was substantially “captured” (photographically) during De Martino’s 1959 expedition, and the “technical eye” itself. In fact, this comparison can be imagined in several senses, as possession rituals and image-making apparati are reproducible in character, have performative and mimetic qualities and they are both potentially, perhaps inevitably, on the blurry frontier between fiction and reality. For De Martino, the “real” character of ritual was utterly superfluous, to the extent that it was a performance; an apparatus that, once activated, no longer depended on the conditions of its creation<sup>32</sup>. Thus, the anthropologist does not hesitate to

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<sup>29</sup> De Martino, 2005, p. 90.

<sup>30</sup> De Martino, 2005, p. 41.

<sup>31</sup> See Marcel Mauss, “Les techniques du corps” [1934], in *Sociologie et anthropologie*, Paris, PUF, coll. “Bibliothèque de sociologie contemporaine,” 1968. De Martino has also written about the “techniques of the body,” partly in dialogue with Mauss, in the posthumous work *La fine del mondo*, Clara Gallini, Marcello Massenzio (eds.), Turin, Einaudi, 2002, in particular Chapter 5.2.2 “Le tecniche del corpo,” p. 600.

<sup>32</sup> This ability to move in and out of states of crises or altered consciousness through ritual practices is expressed by De Martino’s concept of *destorificazione*, when one temporarily moves “out of History”. See Marcello Massenzio, « Il

include photographs of lamentations he describes as “artificial” productions staged for the purposes of illustration in the research volume, *Morte e pianto rituale nel mondo antico. Dal lamento pagano al pianto di Maria*. And yet, this artificiality is not entirely on display, as the photographs have been cropped to remove all visible signs of researcher intervention (microphones, anthropologists’ bodies, etc.), as evidenced by the photographer’s red editing marks on the contact sheets<sup>33</sup>.

In fact, the photographs, and particularly the films made about these southern Italian rituals, enlisted tarantulated people and mourners, who took the occasion to relive their grief or their possession in a staged context. The choreutic-musical apparatus and its cycles were meticulously reproduced, for example, in major photographic series by photographer Franco Pinna. One of these series, called “*Raccolta 48 – Ricostruzione del tarantismo*,”<sup>34</sup> differs from the more well-known photographic appendices in De Martino’s books; it is fascinating despite its marginal status and what is, on the surface, extremely repetitive imagery. The shoot was conducted in the ethnographer’s room at the *Cavallino bianco* hotel, and the ritual performed was described by De Martino as having being done “*in vitro*”<sup>35</sup>. Pinna produced the frenetic visuals, while an audio portion is recorded by an RAI<sup>36</sup> technician who appears in the photograph with his recording machine. In this highly repetitive, even monotonous, series of images, we recognize a rite excised from its original context and experienced fully by two women under the watchful eyes of anthropologist Ernesto De Martino and ethnomusicologist Diego Carpitella, who take notes and sketch the ritual gestures taking place before them in an intuitive, mimetic flurry<sup>37</sup>.

### **Managing time: between oblivion and mnemonic forces**

Thus was articulated this complex therapy, this remorse—*rimorso*—whose very name suggests a predisposition to resist<sup>38</sup> the passage of time. Repetition, fundamental to this ritual, is at its core, as the very existence of the curse presupposes its return. The people De Martino

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problema della destorificazione », *La Ricerca Folklorica* 13, avril 1986, ; « Destorificazione istituzionale e destorificazione irrelativa », Ernesto De Martino, *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni*, 51, 1985.

<sup>33</sup> I refer to a series of photographs by Franco Pinna depicting “artificial” mourning scenes, with red editing marks, available at the *Archivio fotografico dell’Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia* in Rome. The microphones which were being suppressed from the image were used by ethnomusicologist Diego Carpitella.

<sup>34</sup> Available at the Accademia Santa Cecilia’s Bibliomediateca.

<sup>35</sup> This “staged” and performative nature of photographs was very common in early 20<sup>th</sup> century anthropological works, as evidenced by Elizabeth Edwards, “Tracing Photography,” in Jay Ruby, Marcus Banks (eds.), *Made to be Seen. Perspectives on the History of Visual Anthropology*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2011.

<sup>36</sup> RAI, Radiotelevisione italiana, is Italy’s main radio and television broadcaster.

<sup>37</sup> These photographs are in the *Raccolta 48 – “Ricostruzione del tarantismo,” Archivio fotografico dell’Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia* in Rome.

<sup>38</sup> Mariella Pandolfi offers a highly relevant analysis of the political aspect of “resistance” signified through the traces of possession ritual among women. This resistance, which also involves the idea of temporal survival, takes the form of an “iconic language” and narration about the body. Mariella Pandolfi, “Le *self*, le corps, la ‘crise de la présence’,” *Anthropologie et sociétés*, vol. 17, n 1-2, 1993, p. 57-77.

observed were afflicted with sufferings and frustrations that the bite symbolically channelled to a fixed point, allowing them to forget their afflictions for the remainder of the year. Forgetting in fact plays a central role in the possession ritual. This “return” is memorized: it happens every year and resists erasure. Marc Augé, in his anthropological study of oblivion and memory processes, places “*remorse, obsession, or resentment, in line with memory.*”<sup>39</sup> His study evokes the proximity and reciprocal influence of life/death and memory/forgetting by recalling the idea of salvation, the Christian idea, on the one hand, and the idea of return, the pagan idea of successive reincarnations, on the other. Following Augé’s definition, tarantism involves the wait for an inescapable return, placing it among so-called “pagan” concepts, and involves repetition, which inevitably inscribes the rite in social memory. Paradoxically, it is the identification with the tarantula that provokes the literal and inexplicable forgetting in the possessed, and through the suspension of their “reason” that the possessed accesses an alternative form of communication. This forgetting contributes to therapeutic effectiveness, and Augé (though only touching on the question of forgetting as it arises from states of possession) underscores the inherent and active role of forgetting in the preservation of mnemonic traces, as well as in healing painful memories.

When Augé enumerated the three forms of forgetting, it is striking that he drew support and examples from the “great African rites, which thus present themselves before all else as systems intended for thinking and managing time.”<sup>40</sup> In fact, Augé uses the following phrasing in the original French version “*dispositifs destinés à penser et à gérer le temps.*” The term “*dispositif*” could also, and perhaps more accurately, be translated by “apparatus,” or “device” which is useful for this analysis. Ritual’s role as apparatus appears to reside, therefore, and as noted above, in its evocative power, its power of corporeal communication, its therapeutic power. But ritual also operates on a temporal level, “to the extent that it organizes the passage from a before to an after, of which it is at once the interpreter and the landmark.”<sup>41</sup> The first of the three figures of forgetting suggested by Augé is the return, of which possession is emblematic, and “whose primary ambition is to find a lost past by forgetting the present—as well as the immediate past with which it tends to be confused—in order to reestablish a continuity with the more remote past, to eliminate the ‘compound’ past in favour of a ‘simple’ past.”<sup>42</sup> If the great rituals open the door to this past, they do so with the knowledge of future repetition: transmission.

### **Opening the text: deciphering the analogies of *pathos***

Starting from these considerations, this study will take a closer look at the analytical methods De Martino used to document the “survivals” he intuited, specifically the echoes between the ritual reality he was observing and Augé’s “simple” past. These reflections take up the final third of *La terra del rimorso*, under the heading of “Historical Commentary.” In this

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<sup>39</sup> Marc Augé, *Oblivion*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2004, p. 13.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p. 55.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p. 55.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, p. 56.

section, De Martino switches to a different scale by removing tarantism, as molecular object, from the isolation in which he had temporarily placed it, while maintaining a cautious approach. “Although we must avoid these two reductions so as to keep tarantism from disappearing into a type or antecedent, the comparison with similar phenomena or the search for classical or ancient antecedents are in and of themselves beyond criticism.”<sup>43</sup> Subsequent chapters<sup>44</sup> are devoted exclusively to parallels between ancient Greek texts and active constituents of the ritual in Apulia, a land that was once part of *Magna Graecia*.

Even though De Martino posited the fixing of tarantism’s symbolic autonomy in the Middle Ages, it is the “traces” of tarantism as embodied in figures that interest him. It is here that he turns to ancient literary texts to highlight the parallels. The first “family resemblance” consists, for example, in what he calls the “symbolism of the bite,” which is central to the idea of *rimorso*. In the first instance, the anthropologist relies on the mentions of animal bites (spiders, snakes, rabid dogs) in the erudite medical-literary genres<sup>45</sup> popular in the Greek world. To the figure of the bite is added that of the *oistros* (often involving *errores*, that “anguished, delirious, hallucinating and furious flight”<sup>46</sup>), which is indissociable from it. It is a form that he finds in Aeschylus, not only in the myth of Lyssa and the Erinyes (indeed, Lyssa’s stinger was called the “scorpion’s sting”), but also in the myth of Io, the wayward virgin pursued by the horsefly sent by Hera to sting her. Through the Aeschylean vision of the myth of Io, De Martino succeeds in going beyond the simple bite and discovers a symbolic space filled with endless correspondences, where even the sensory elements that set off the choreutic-chromatic-musical apparatus find their equivalents. He evokes the episode in *The Suppliants* in which Io is finally delivered from her furious flight by being impregnated by Zeus, and reclaims reason in a landscape dominated by luxuriant trees and the infinite flow of healing waters. This place recalls the leaf and water decorations used in home-based tarantism ceremonies, in which flight (*errores*) takes place in a circumscribed rhythmic form, its space limited to the perimeter of the white sheet. With the support of these images recorded by Aeschylus and found in “real historical”—even documentary—testimonials from Pseudo-Hippocrates,<sup>47</sup> Plutarch<sup>48</sup> and Aristoxenus of

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<sup>43</sup> De Martino, 2005, p. 177.

<sup>44</sup> Specifically chapter II, “The Symbolism of *Oistros*,” chapter III, “The Symbolism of *Aiôresis*,” and chapter IV, “The Musical Catharsis.”

<sup>45</sup> In Nicander, he found a description of a spider-bite crisis whose symptoms were consistent with a skull-spider bite. Philoumenos, a historian of religious life, confirms the contagiousness of this physical state following a bite. Texts by Pliny allowed him to recognize the arbitrary and purely symbolic character of the territorial location of the bite and its effects, which reminded him of the tarantula-free territory around the Apulian town of Galatina.

<sup>46</sup> De Martino, 2005, p. 220.

<sup>47</sup> “A fragment of a short pseudo-Hippocratic treatise on women’s illnesses describes some forms of crisis in the Greek world which frequently afflicted maidens and women whose equilibrium had been altered by remaining childless. Such crises [...] were characterized by a form of stupor, followed by fever and then *mania*,” *Ibid*, p. 191

<sup>48</sup> De Martino relates, via Plutarch, the suicide of the virgins of Miletus.

Tarentum,<sup>49</sup> De Martino succeeds in bringing recurring elements into alignment, traced back to a mythological foundation:

Animal-type possession accompanied by a violent retreat from social life and the refusal of the civil order of human world, [...] the hypnotic melody which accompanies the running about [...] the resolution of the crisis in an arboreal paradise flowing with perennial healing waters, where the reintegration of the unsettled female destiny is carried out and human form and reason are regained symbolically.<sup>50</sup>

In the passages from ancient literature, it is these vibrant, if not “iconic,” analogous forms of which tarantism preserves traces that De Martino locates and brings into dialogue in his textual research. We cannot help but note a correlation between these fertile images and Warburg’s concept of “afterlife” (*Nachleben*), developed specifically around recurring images in iconography. It is important however to recall the terminological distinction noted by Giorgio Agamben<sup>51</sup> between “survival” and Aby Warburg’s concept of “*Nachleben*,” which means “afterlife” rather than “survival,” and thus does implies the (symbolic) interruption of death. Francesco Faeta, in a comparative study of the approaches of Warburg and De Martino, reminds us of the possible influence on Warburg of the concept of “survival” as defined by anthropologist Edward B. Tylor<sup>52</sup>. In addition to the problematic nature of connections between ethnographic facts and records from antiquity, Faeta discerns a “crypto-evolutionist” spirit in anthropology, which De Martino of course approaches with his attention to “survivals” and “relics.”<sup>53</sup> If “survival,” is for Warburg a profoundly fertile rupture, for De Martino it suggests a certain “lag” with respect to modernity, a connotation that makes his posture even more ambivalent when we consider that he enthusiastically dedicated his career as an anthropologist to these surviving forms.

In De Martino’s final analysis, entitled “Historical Commentary,” he argues that a lucid study of tarantism requires us to recall the Greek experience of *pathos*, which involved a constant passage, as he described it,

from the somatic sphere to the psychic one and to the moral and religious one, and, in relation to this, the therapeutic use of music (and of dance) always implied a catharsis, embracing within a common horizon of symbolic efficacies, illness that we would qualify from case to case as illnesses of the body, disorders of the psyche or moral conflicts.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Aristoxenus of Tarentum relates an episode in which a group of women is suddenly struck with ecstasy, and the remedy proves to be music.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, p. 191.

<sup>51</sup> See Giorgio Agamben, *Image et mémoire*,” trans. Marco Dell’Omodarme, Paris, Hoëbeke, 1998

<sup>52</sup> According to Faeta, this influence from anthropology would appear, in Warburg’s time, to have already been outdated. Regarding the concept of survival (*Nachleben*) for Aby Warburg, it is essential to refer to Georges Didi-Huberman, *L’image survivante. L’histoire de l’art et le temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg*, Paris, Minuit, 2002.

<sup>53</sup> See Faeta, 2003, p. 89.

<sup>54</sup> De Martino, 2005, p. 204.

Using primarily textual sources, he therefore attempts to capture an intensity whose effectiveness plays out on the body. For Warburg, the idea of *pathos* reappears in his “formulae” (*Pathosformeln*), which constitute what Didi-Huberman called an “archive of intensities.” Such an archive is essential to the study of tarantism as a choreutic-musical apparatus in that it is fixed, as Didi-Huberman explains, into a *choreutic* paradigm

responsible for interrogating, more radically, the status of the “formula” to the extent that it gives rise to a “pathos,” i.e. a physical and emotional crisis in the human body. We could hypothesize that the “bodily techniques”—greetings, dances, rules of combat, sports, relaxed postures, sex positions—offer a privileged articulation of this ‘connaturalité between word and image’ sought by Warburg.<sup>55</sup>

### **The power of the image: De Martino and the archive of gesture**

The correspondences between Ernesto De Martino and Aby Warburg<sup>56</sup> thus go beyond the question of transmission and move into the forms that encourage transmission and the means of identifying these forms; the relationship between these concerns seems to play out in the researchers’ (implicit or explicit) reliance on images. Warburg, an art historian who, in his search for “survivals,” took an ethnographic detour into the world of the Hopi Indians, casually shot a series of photographs in 1895, which he then put on display almost 30 years later at the Kreuzlingen sanatorium as part of a conference intended to prove to his doctors and psychiatrist he was now ready to leave the psychiatric institution in which he had been placed. The analogies Warburg identified between Ancient Greek animal cults and the Hopi Indians’ ritual use of snakes were presented here in their fully visual dimension. During his presentation, words were assigned a secondary role, as *image-by-image* presentation was seen to reveal deep correspondences and allow him to confirm his intuition about the “afterlife” (*Nachleben*) of the symbolic and corporeal image of the snake.<sup>57</sup> De Martino, as an anthropologist leading a multidisciplinary expedition, not only directed his research team to take countless photographs, shoot many feet of footage and make audio recordings—bearing witness to what he saw as “ancient traces” coming to life before his eyes—but engaged the image even before his fieldwork encounter with tarantism, in the form of drawings he made in his preparatory notebook.

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<sup>55</sup> Didi-Huberman, 2001, p. 144. “[P]our charge d’interroger plus radicalement le statut de la ‘formule’ en tant qu’elle donne existence à un ‘pathos,’ c’est-à-dire à une atteinte physique et affective du corps humain. On pourrait faire l’hypothèse que les ‘techniques du corps’ – salutations, danses, règles de combat, sports, attitudes de repos, positions sexuelles – offrent une articulation privilégiée pour cette ‘connaturalité entre le mot et l’image’ que cherchait Warburg,” (my translation).

<sup>56</sup> See the work of Francesco Faeta, but also of Riccardo Di Donato (ed.), *La contraddizione felice? Ernesto De Martino e gli altri*, Pise, ETS, 1990, p. 185-195.

<sup>57</sup> Aby Warburg, *Le rituel du serpent*, Paris, Macula, 2003.

Photography plays an important role in De Martino's work, despite some skepticism, on the researcher's part, as to its communicative value. *La terra del rimorso* includes a substantial photographic appendix containing the rich photographic work of Franco Pinna, carried out according to De Martino's detailed instructions. A reading of Pinna's work contract<sup>58</sup> and those of other team members gives a clear indication of the level of control De Martino exercised over the production of images in the field. Team members were not to take any photographs unless they were strictly for personal use. And for each photograph that illustrated tarantism, Pinna was required to refer to De Martino's instructions and notes, as if the anthropologist were in some sense asserting rights to an entire "picture of tarantism."

These countless photographs seem to have had a consistent role only during the research phase. The task of restoring the ethnographic data and giving them meaning post facto, however, was left to words. This fact becomes more obvious when we recall the sources De Martino used in dealing with his "survivals," relying exclusively on ancient written texts, from Pliny<sup>59</sup> to Aeschylus to Plato. And yet, he writes of "Aeschylus' *image* of Io"<sup>60</sup>. Francesco Faeta provides some insight into this relationship between words and images, and the curious tension it produces:

[...] De Martino's writing is literarily astute and graced with complex poetic allusions; at the same time, it is rigorously incisive, giving the appearance of resulting from a preference for speech and the primacy of the *verbum*. [...] The truth is that speech often recovers the visual experience, almost by swallowing it whole.<sup>61</sup>

The photographs of chorographic cycles in *La terra del rimorso*, shot during "real" exorcism sessions in the tarantulated women's homes, can be understood as dynamic materials in deep complicity with the text; laid out in the sequence of the performance, it is difficult to determine whether the image shaped the text or vice versa. Photographic action and anthropological writing are brought very close together, becoming, according to Faeta, the site of synthesis of *a priori* anthropological ideas and hypotheses. It is quite clear De Martino carefully selected them to illustrate his written work. During fieldwork, however, it is not with De Martino's text in mind that Franco Pinna shot such a large number of photographs. The absence of a moving picture camera during fieldwork might partially account for Pinna's extreme photographic productivity; film would have enabled the researchers to archive and analyse gesture in more detail. The fact that Gianfranco Mingozzi's famous film *La taranta* (1962) was released so soon after De

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<sup>58</sup> All the work contracts of the members of the 1959 expedition are found in Ernesto de Martino's digital archive, kept by the Associazione Ernesto de Martino in Rome.

<sup>59</sup> Pliny, *Hist. nat.* VIII, cited in De Martino, 1966, p. 219.

<sup>60</sup> De Martino, 2005, p. 189.

<sup>61</sup> "Queste [...] indicano una peculiare tensione, una vigilanza e una misura rivelatrici, a mio avviso, di un atteggiamento ideologico: la scrittura di De Martino, letterariamente consapevole, colma di una complessa allusività poetica e, al contempo, rigorosamente incisiva, appare come conseguenza della preferenza della parola, del primato del *verbum*," Faeta, 2003, p. 73, (my translation).

Martino's *La terra del rimorso* (1961) was published and that both documents are very similar in content might lead one to think that Mingozzi was present during fieldwork. In reality, there was no filmmaker on De Martino's 1959 multidisciplinary expedition. Pinna's photographs of the tarantulated persons' choreutic cycles thus seem to make up for this marked absence of moving images. Indeed, Pinna's series of photographs pay special attention to bodily motions and break down those movements analytically. His previously mentioned photographic series of the "reconstruction of tarantism" (*Raccolta 38 - Ricostruzione del tarantismo*) in the hotel room is a case in point: the series only makes sense when the images are laid out side by side and as a group. This series offers a reverse portrait of the images selected for *La terra del rimorso*, which sought to capture reality. They precisely contrast by taking the viewer backstage, into the workings of a tenacious "in vitro" anthropological study. Although the *Raccolta 38* can be seen as a form of documentary excess, yet despite their scientific staging, these photographs allow us to understand the novelty of De Martino's approach for Italian scholarship: his profound interest in performance and its fully corporeal, sonic and visual dimension. At a time when in Italy, ritual was mainly studied philologically (hence purely as texts), De Martino asked to see it re-enacted in a privileged context, only for the researchers' eyes.

It is not surprising that on these photographs ethnomusicologist Diego Carpitella is proceeding to observational drawings of the choreographic cycles, as he will later elaborate extensive reflections on gesture, a study he calls "cinesica"<sup>62</sup> (kinesics), reminiscent not only of Ray Birdwhistell's theories on kinesics,<sup>63</sup> but more importantly of Andrea De Jorio's 1800s work on Neapolitan gesture.<sup>64</sup> In fact, Carpitella largely compensated for the lack of theoretical reflections made by De Martino specifically on the production of images during fieldwork, and he authored several sharp ontological analyses of photography and film<sup>65</sup>, discussing their contribution to ethnographic research. As an ethnomusicologist, his sensitivity to sound and its technical reproduction were, so to speak, transposed into the field of vision as he theorized what De Martino had intuitively set in motion with his "interdisciplinary ethnographies." Carpitella's fascination with moving images proved so visceral that precisely one year after the 1959

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<sup>62</sup> See for example Diego Carpitella, "I segni a Napoli ricerche sulla cinesica popolare (documenti filmici), *Sociologia della letteratura*, Acts of the first National Congress (Gaeta, October 1974), Fernando Ferrara, Michele Rak, Alberto Abruzzese, Romolo Runcini, Roma, Bulzoni (eds.), 1978, p. 204-207 ; "Cinesica 1. Napoli. Il linguaggio del corpo e le tradizioni popolari codici cinesici e ricerca cinematografica," *La Ricerca Folklorica*, vol. II no. 3, 1981, p. 61-70 ; "Cinesica e cultura. L'uso scientifico del cinema nello studio del linguaggio del corpo," *Bollettino dell'AICS*, December 1986, p. 27-28.

<sup>63</sup> Ray Birdwhistell, *Introduction to Kinesics: an Annotation System for Analysis of Body Motion and Gesture*, 1952 ; *Kinesics and Context. Essays on Body Motion Communication*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970.

<sup>64</sup> Andrea De Jorio, *La mimica degli antichi investigata nel gestire napoletano*, Naples, Fibreno, 1838.

<sup>65</sup> Diego Carpitella, "La registrazione foto-fonografica nelle ricerche etnofoniche," *Popular Photography Italiana*, no. 129, 1968 ; "Franco Pinna e la fotografia etnografica in Italia," in *Viaggio nelle terre del silenzio: reportage dal profondo Sud 1950-1959*, Milan, Idea Editions, 1980 ; "De Martino e le nuove discipline," *La Ricerca Folklorica*, vol. VII, no. 13, 1986, p. 69-70. Carpitella reflects upon media in numerous other articles, and was very involved in the Associazione Italiana di Cinematografia Scientifica (AICS), where he organized conferences and screenings for about a decade, contributing to the advancement of visual anthropology studies in Italy.



expedition, he decides to return in Apulia with a camera, in order capture images: the result of this solo expedition is an unclassifiable black and white 16 mm short film, *Meloterapia del tarantismo*<sup>66</sup>, which is the only “demartinian” film produced exclusively with the scientific intention of a research tool. More than a decade later, in a slightly conflictual debate of a symposium entitled *Cinema, fotografia e videotape nella ricerca etnografica*<sup>67</sup>, Carpitella continues to defend the use of film in anthropology by stating: “There are many things that can be seen in the editing room that cannot be seen by the naked eye.”<sup>68</sup> This attention to bodily gestures, and faith in photography and film as reliable tools to record and observe them with precision is central to understand the substantial production of images in De Martino’s research phases, and could almost be summed up in that utterly simple phrase.

Although De Martino has explicitly written very little about images, various scholars have considered his books as sites of endless visualist metaphors. It also becomes clear, in exploring his personal archive,<sup>69</sup> that his unspoken attraction to images as a source of knowledge preceded his use of film and still photography in the field, and may have preceded his fieldwork altogether. While his team was put through intensive preparation before going into the field, De Martino spent countless hours studying analogous forms of *pathos*, particularly by copying images from then-contemporary German works on classical antiquity.<sup>70</sup> His personal notebooks are full of preliminary sketches that presage his direct study of forms of possession and mourning in southern Italy. In reviewing his journals, we find stick figures kneeling, with open arms and minutely detailed mimetic typologies of weeping mourners. We find lists of gestures headed “RAGE, HUNGER, LIBIDO” or “AMNESIA,” or small human figures copied from designs on ancient vases, “shaking a bough over death.” Some pages have sketches both rough and precise, with marks scratched out and redrawn as De Martino sought to pictorialize exact ritual postures. This reproducibility echoes the very essence of the ritual, whose image contains a true “afterlife” (*Nachleben*) through the hand of the anthropologist who so meticulously copies it. Where Michael Taussig demonstrates how fruitful the analysis of drawings in fieldwork notebooks can be,<sup>71</sup> De Martino’s case demonstrates the same productivity, but in a preparatory sense—his drawings do not seem to record events observed in the field. Moreover, De Martino’s drawings are reproductions of reproductions consulted beforehand, in books. Though there exists as yet no

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<sup>66</sup> Diego Carpitella, *Meloterapia del tarantismo*, 1960, 16mm, 14’.

<sup>67</sup> *Cinema, fotografia e videotape nella ricerca etnografica*, Nuoro, 1977.

<sup>68</sup> “Ci sono molte cose che si possono vedere in moviola e ad occhio nudo non si vedono,” *Cinema, fotografia e videotape nella ricerca etnografica in Italia*, Atti dell’omonimo Convegno Nazionale, ISRE (Nuoro, October 1977).

<sup>69</sup> Archivio Ernesto de Martino de l’Association Ernesto de Martino, Rome. Grateful acknowledgments to Clara Gallini and Adelina Talamonti, as well as Marcello Massenzio, without whom this study of these materials would not have been possible.

<sup>70</sup> We find notes and drawings based on the works of specialists of classical antiquity such as Marcelle Webrouck, Hans Bonnet, Edward William Lane, Gustaf Dalman, H.V. Sedilitz. E. Littman, Ignác Goldziher, Gertrud Thausing, P. Khale, Alexandre Moret, A. Erman, H. Ranke and Willy Zschietzschmann, among others.

<sup>71</sup> Michael Taussig, *I Swear I Saw This. Drawings in Fieldwork Notebooks, Namely my Own*, University of Chicago Press, 2011 ; “What Do Drawings Want?,” *Culture, Theory and Critique*, vol. 50, n° 2, 2009, p. 263-274.

detailed analysis of De Martino's drawings, it is nonetheless obvious that they reflect an "intimate" relationship with images that were essential to his intuitive understanding of the ritual phenomenon he was preparing to observe.

Not only do these examples allow us to judge the ambivalent role of iconographic sources in De Martino's search for survivals, they reveal deeper links with Warburg concerning the route toward the identification of analogies with the past. It is undeniable that the choreutic-chromatic-musical apparatus obliged De Martino to confront the problem of the image, whether openly or not. In effect, this choreutic paradigm is, according to Didi-Huberman, the privileged site of the articulation of the "connaturality between word and image."<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, the most explicit example of confidence in the productive comparison of historically varied iconographic materials is found in *Morte e pianto rituale nel mondo antico. Dal lamento pagano al pianto di Maria*,<sup>73</sup> which closes with a surprising "Figurative Atlas of Mourning" (*Atlante figurato del pianto*) comprising 66 images. The title is reminiscent of Warburg's *Mnemosyne* atlas<sup>74</sup> (unfinished, 1929) and stands in contrast to the anthropological vocabulary of the time. Indeed, De Martino describes this section of the book as "relatively new." It is an extremely heterogeneous iconographic collection (including photographs, film stills drawn from film strips, reproductions of pottery, etc.), the first part of which comprises a series of so-called "folkloric" photographs that are mainly presented as "artificial"<sup>75</sup>. The second part includes examples of archaic gestures and the third part consists of iconographic representations from the medieval era.

*Morte e pianto rituale* is a study of what De Martino calls *tecnica del piangere*<sup>76</sup> ("technique of lament"), a performative mourning ritual that he considers as linked to antiquity, whose echoes can be found both in literature, ancient iconography and Christian representations—which, as Warburg notes, carry "traces" while simultaneously repressing them—and in certain regions of southern Italy in the 1950s. De Martino's historico-religious perspective thus aims to create a comprehensive portrait of this ritual mimicry, which is why he states philological attention to ancient Greek texts is insufficient to understand this form of lamentation in its true light, across its verbal, gestural and melodic orders. "Folkloric documentation *allows us to see* [emphasis added], in all its dramatic obviousness, what the ancient documents only allow us to glimpse or imagine,

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<sup>72</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, "Aby Warburg et l'archive des intensités," *Études photographiques*, n° 10, novembre 2001. <http://etudesphotographiques.revues.org/index268.html> (last consultation on January 30<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>73</sup> Ernesto De Martino, *Morte e pianto rituale nel mondo antico. Dal lamento pagano al pianto di Maria*, Turin, Einaudi, 1958.

<sup>74</sup> See the recently edited Aby Warburg, *L'atlas Mnemosyne* (with an essay by Roland Recht), Paris / London, L'équarquillé – INHA and The Warburg Institute, 2012.

<sup>75</sup> As noted above, "artificial" lamentations are those done by weepers out of context, by De Martino's request. There is nothing unusual about this guileless performative act, which has been constitutive of the ritual since classical antiquity. Some of the mourners were chosen for their talent at this kind of performance, and were even occasionally paid to mourn total strangers.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, p 57.

i.e. the lamentation as an active rite.”<sup>77</sup> And so reappears the importance of “living documents” in the study of funerary lamentations, which, thanks to their visual and corporeal presence, gave the researcher the *enargeia* (“clarity, vitality,” in Ginzburg’s sense<sup>78</sup>) to fully understand the phenomenon. It may be this same *enargeia* that De Martino seeks to translate into his work, by collecting a series of audio and photographic recordings, “both [which are] indispensable for not losing the concrete relationship with ritual lamentation as a dynamic unit of speech, monotonous chant and gesture.”<sup>79</sup> This attention to the gestural components of performance is recognizable in the meticulous observation methods described above, and furthermore explains De Martino’s overall enthusiasm for photography and its power, especially during research phases.

De Martino’s atlas thus reflects the infinite scope of his definition of funerary lamentation. Given its taxonomic aspect, his approach reminds us of Mauss’s manual of ethnography: these are not just collections that simply illustrate theory, but are curated objects that—through their assemblage—reveal abstract principles. Yet De Martino’s primary divergence from conventional ethnographic data collection is his transcultural and profoundly transhistorical juxtaposition of iconographic elements (Greek, Egyptian, Phoenician and Italian). His series display multiple relationships articulated around the body: “mourning tends to be reflected in human faces and bodies in mimetic expressions.”<sup>80</sup> It is important to think of this collection of images not simply as an attempt to archive gestures, and particularly not for the sole purpose of preservation (moving pictures would have served better than photographs for this). Warburg’s method provides an interesting insight into the unique logic of this atlas, and Faeta identifies important intersections between the two methods:

[...] the central importance of the image in the demonstration of cultural processes (as not merely parenthetical [...]), the productive confidence in a comparison of iconographic sources of differing depth, [...] the critical presupposition of substantial continuity between the classical world, the Italian renaissance and the “primitive” world (in De Martino’s case a Lucanian and Transylvanian ethnic reality).<sup>81</sup>

For the purpose of our study, we add a final key parallel: the desire to build an “archive of intensities” of symbolic forms, in the sense that Didi-Huberman ascribes to Warburg’s lists of

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<sup>77</sup> “[...] È ciò che la documentazione antica ci lascia soltanto intravedere o immaginare, cioè il lamento come rito in azione, la documentazione folklorica ce lo pone sotto gli occhi in tutta la sua evidenza drammatica [...]” *Ibid*, p. 58-59, (my translation).

<sup>78</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, *Le fil et les traces. Vrai, Faux, Fictif*, Verdier, 2010, p. 27.

<sup>79</sup> “[...] le une e le altre indispensabili per non perdere mai il rapporto concreto con il lamento rituale come unità dinamica di parola, di melopea, di gesto,” De Martino, 1958, p. 76, (my translation).

<sup>80</sup> “[...] l’evento luttuoso tende a riflettersi nei volti e nei corpi umani secondo espressioni mimiche,” *Ibid*, p. 385.

<sup>81</sup> “la centrale importanza dell’immagine nel testimoniare i processi culturali (e non una sua mera funzione didascalica [...]), [...] una feconda fiducia nella comparazione di fonti iconografiche di origine e spessore diverso, nel presupposto critico di una sostanziale continuità culturale tra mondo classico, Rinascimento italiano, mondo « primitivo » (nel caso di de Martino realtà etniche lucane e transilvane), Faeta, 2003, p. 99 (my translation).

“mimetic degrees.” De Martino’s work also seems to “reconstitute the link of (anthropological) connaturality between word and image,”<sup>82</sup> a connaturality that, as we have seen, is inscribed in the history of bodies to which literary sources alone do not seem to do justice.

The inherent mnemonic power of ritual thus offers De Martino fertile ground for thinking about the question of so-called “pagan survivals.” In part because of its codified, repetitive structure, ritual has durability over time. That continuity, in the case of tarantism, is not only inscribed in memory, but is articulated in “remorse” (*rimorso*)—both remorse and the re-bite—and becomes manifest in the “return.” The role of forgetting in this process is incontestable—it is through possession in the present that the possessed gains access to a “simple past.” De Martino established correspondences by working mainly from literary sources, including texts from antiquity, in which he discovered a multitude of apparently familiar symbols. In these sources, elements such as the bite (*oistros*) clarify the reality playing out before him in Apulia, despite all the epistemological perils inherent in making such connections. These figures are reminiscent of those in Warburg’s atlas of Dionysian forms, in which he used iconographic comparison to identify the formula of *pathos* in the famous “figure of the nymph as Maenad, whether she be pagan or Christian.”<sup>83</sup> This method lends itself perfectly to the identification of a choreutic-chromatic-musical exorcism apparatus, as it questions the image as the site where “survivals” are inscribed. At the same time, images are not peripheral to De Martino’s research process. In the opening pages of *La terra del rimorso*, he even admitted that the idea of organizing the 1959 expedition was sparked by a photographic impulse:

The initial idea of carrying out an ethnographic investigation of Apulian tarantism [...] came to me as I was looking at some of André Martin’s excellent photographs. [...] These photographs could be seen as images of strange, eccentric behavior, arousing a momentary curiosity [...]; but for me, they were a stimulus for anchoring the planned religious history of the South [...] to a phenomenon which recalled the commitment to historiographic coherence in an exemplary manner precisely because it appeared as a knot of extreme contradiction.<sup>84</sup>

It is as though this image of “folkloric-religious” detail, a *molecular* history captured by photography, was enough to generate De Martino’s profound desire to put together a more comprehensive plan and adopt a transcultural and transhistorical perspective. How can one not foresee quite literally the power of Barthes’ *punctum*, caused by these muse-like images: photographs that also operate within a complex “evidential paradigm”<sup>85</sup>? This intense triggering feeling of being “hit,” “pointed” (*pointé*), emerges curiously, in the questionnaires used to interview the victims of tarantism during the 1959 field research. The notebooks of the team, and

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<sup>82</sup> Didi-Huberman, 2001.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> De Martino, 2005, p. 11.

<sup>85</sup> The concept of “evidential paradigm” is explained thoroughly in Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths and the Historical Method*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.

the various archives of the research phase have recently been edited in a fascinating and complex publication by Amalia Signorelli<sup>86</sup>, who was present as Ernesto De Martino's assistant, and actively took notes herself when interrogating and observing the possessed women of Apulia. In these interviews, which are in great part absent from *La terra del rimorso*, a question is asked systematically, until it formed an important category that haunted the whole team: "When did your first (spider) bite occur?" So began the narrations of the first *punctum* of tarantulated women who didn't know their own photographic image, had already passed on "these pain spots; precisely these marks, these wounds"<sup>87</sup> to the anthropologist several years earlier through André Martin's pictures.

The importance of the image is of course also evident in light of the *Atlante figurato del pianto*, which concluded De Martino's study of funerary lamentation. Curiously, the anthropologist comes close to a defensive stance towards this new form of analysis in this work, by arguing in the introduction that the images did not serve to answer purely "aesthetic" questions of style required for art historical purposes. Rather, they are to be seen as "archaeological" material, documents supporting ritual forms that the researcher is attempting to preserve within the disciplinary scope of an anthropology with undoubtedly blurry boundaries. We are to understand that the creation of an "archive of intensities," the juxtaposition of fossilized images of bodily expressions, easily extends beyond the interest of a single discipline. Indeed, the formulas of pathos identified by De Martino and Warburg, authors from different fields, ended up closely intersecting. Where De Martino undertook an archaeology of ancient mourning, Warburg revealed the Dionysian eroticization of the *Ninfa* through Mary Magdalene's convulsive sobs at the foot of the Cross, in an act of "orgiastic mourning." Lamentation thus becomes the site of ideal concordances for thinking about *Pathosformeln*. Late in life Warburg characterized such *Pathosformeln* as "'original words' of mimetic expression, in light of a veritable 'tragedy of the soul' (*Seelendramatik*) in which the 'ecstatic' – or 'demonic' – dimension of images is revealed."<sup>88</sup>

We thus return to one of our initial questions concerning the medium studied by the researcher and the types of conclusions the medium affords. The question is complex and essential to understand the nature of the "object" of study: does it suggest a specific mode of organization of knowledge? It is the question of mourning that De Martino attempts to elucidate conceptually in the introduction to his *Morte e pianto rituale*, though it is Benedetto Croce's *Frammenti di etica* (1922) that inspired De Martino's research. He quotes a passage from Croce that he believes contains a fundamental human truth:

What should we do with the dead, beings that were dear to us and were part of us? "Forget

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<sup>86</sup> Ernesto De Martino, *Etnografia del tarantismo pugliese. I materiali della spedizione nel Salento del 1959*, Amalia Signorelli, Valerio Panza (eds.), Lecce, Argo, 2011.

<sup>87</sup> "ces points sensibles; précisément, ces marques, ces blessures" (my translation) in Roland Barthes, *La chambre claire. Note sur la photographie*, Paris, Gallimard, 1980, p. 49.

<sup>88</sup> Didi-Huberman, 2001.

them,” says the wisdom of life somewhat euphemistically. “Forget them,” ethics confirms. “Flee the tombs,” exclaimed Goethe and, in chorus with him, the great spirits. And man forgets. We say it is the work of time, but too many good things, too many difficult works are credited to time, that is, to a non-existent being. No, this forgetting is not the work of time, it is our work. It is we who want to forget, and we forget.<sup>89</sup>

So begins a work that concludes with a collection of bodies afflicted with loss, in petrified movements even as evidenced by photographs, or carved right into tombs. It is possible that this human truth, as evoked by Croce, in some sense calls naturally for the creation of an archive of intensities. Does this confrontation with death not remain part of the archival ghost? Could anthropology not be, at times, infused with this desire to compensate for the disappearance of peoples, of which most are already extinct? Mourning may be what the archive both conceals and generates, as it saves one series and leaves the rest to die, proceeding to the necessary practice of what archivists call the “art of destruction.”

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<sup>89</sup> “Che cosa dobbiamo fare degli estinti, delle creature che ci furono care e che erano come parte di noi stessi? “Dimenticarli”, risponde, se pure con vario eufemismo, la saggezza della vita. “Dimenticarli”, conferme l’etica. “Via dalle tombe!” esclamava Goethe, e a coro con lui altri spiriti magni. E l’uomo dimentica. Si dice che ciò è opera del; ma troppe cose buone, e troppo ardue opere, si sogliono attribuire al tempo, cioè ad un essere che non esiste. No: quella dimenticanza non è opera del; è opera nostra, che vogliamo dimenticare e dimentichiamo,” De Martino, 1958, p. 4. Excerpt of Benedetto Croce, *Frammenti di etica* [1922], (my translation).

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