



# ORG

## Fernando Birri

**Producer** Terence Hill. **Written and directed by** Fernando Birri. **Director of photography** Mario Masini, Ugo Piccone, Mario Vulpiani, Houston Simmons, Cesare Ferzi. **Editor** Fernando Birri, Paolo Zamattio, Giuliano Nucci, Settimio Presutto. **Music** Sergio Pagoni, Enrico Rava. **Sound design** Fernando Birri. **Sound** Eugenio Rondani, Houston Simmons. **Costumes** Nato Frasca, Dafne Ciriacchi, Giacomo Carlo Carducci, Sandro La Ferla. **Visual effects** Fernando Birri, Settimio Presutto.

**With** Terence Hill (Zohommm), Lidija Juračik (Shuick), Isaak Twen Obu (Grrr), Nolika Pereda (P.P. (Primer Piano)), Pietro Santalamazza (Toute-la-mémoire-du-monde), Francesco Di Giacomo (Ave phoenix).

1979, colour. 177 min. Italian.

**Premiere** August 31, 1979, Venice Film Festival

Fernando Birri's *ORG* is a monstrous, nearly three-hour long film that's only rarely been screened since it premiered at the 1979 Venice Film Festival. Ever since his debut *Tire Dié*, this 91-year-old director, who is also a poet, painter, teacher and film school founder, has been a key figure in Latin American cinema. For Birri, *ORG* was the result of his experience of exile in Italy: „The film is a nightmare with closed eyes because it counts among the most terrible moments of my life, my second exile, which lasted a very long time.“ The story of *ORG* is based on the same ancient Indian legend that Thomas Mann also drew on for his story „The Transposed Heads“. But above all, *ORG* is an experiment in perception that features over 26,000 cuts and some 700 audio tracks.

*ORG* was partly funded by leading actor Mario Girotti, better known as Terence Hill. Viewing the film today provides a kaleidoscopic insight into the experimental, aesthetic and political trends of the 1970s.

Birri bequeathed Arsenal a 35-mm print of his film in 1991. It was digitised as part of the „Living Archive“ project. A DVD of the film is also being released to coincide with the Berlinale.

Volker Pantenburg

## The egg of the Phoenix (almost half a century later)

Beyond the seven mountains and the seven seas of the moon, the Phoenix flies (or the Phoenician or the Happy Bird) to die.

This happens – as the old Arabic and Egyptian legends attest, who saw it – every five hundred years. The bird's feathers catch fire and shortly thereafter it is just a pile of hot ashes in its high nest. But... among the ashes, implacable and as patiently as the sun, a gleaming egg arises. Its size confuses the dimension of the galaxies, in its weight the infernal heaviness of lead and the angelic lightness of a feather. Its time – this has already been said – is that of an eternal and instantaneous flash, its name is written with blazing letters that sing of its own sublimation: **ORG**.

Today the hidden alchemy of the archives, editing rooms, and projects of the Arsenal in Berlin are breathing new life into this cinematic homunculus, which doesn't exist in the history of cinema, but only in the delirious imagination of those who close their eyes to see it. For a second, every five hundred years.

*Fernando Birri, Rome, 22 December 2016*

## For a cosmic, raving, lumpen cinema 1978. The First Cosmunist (Cosmic Communist) Manifesto

... thinking guts:

cosmunism cosmic and magical communism  
for a cosmic cinema, raving and lumpen  
totally disputable because of its methods  
and shooting and editing time  
(but the whole operation is a  
demonstration that Utopia can  
be put into practice) madness and rigor  
hand-in-hand there will be no lasting revolution  
without a revolution of language  
tabula rasa: cinema from zero to  
experiment ORG as a non-film  
an experience with each  
individual spectator ('only for  
crazy people') totally disputable because of its  
methods and shooting and editing time  
the verification of a cinema for mutants  
a total cinema ORG-experience as  
experiment: hope of communication  
(Pythagorean, oracular, alchemistic  
montage techniques) 'montage of attractions'  
new mental-ludic dimension (but the whole  
operation is a demonstration that  
Utopia can be put into practice)  
(the public not as a 'mass' but as a re-uniting  
of individual spectators) madness and rigor  
hand-in-hand (between cinema and non-cinema or  
beyond-cinema: filmunculus) (a filmic Rorschach  
test) thereby ideologising everything  
but also sensorialising everything heir to  
the travelling magic lantern carriers  
in order to experience oneself in answer  
to the stimulus ORG there will be no lasting revolution  
without revolutionising language  
sensual hedonistic erotic communism

thinking guts: cosmunist  
fabrication of a poem or a  
novel the clash of artisanship and industry  
cosmic and magical communism for a  
cosmic cinema, raving and lumpen ...

*translated by Julianne Burton, Argentine Cinema, ed. Tim Barnard,  
(Toronto: Nightwood Edition, 1986), 82–83*

## The rediscovery of ORG

When the members of the group Entuziazm (Michael Baute, Volker Pantenburg, Stefan Pethke) discovered **ORG** in the original version (177 min) in the archive of the Arsenal – Institute for Film and Video Art and Markus Ruff contacted me, neither they nor I knew that the journey would last much longer than it seemed at the time.

When the idea to produce a DVD came up, in order to breathe new life into the film that had been premiered in 1979 at the Venice Film Festival, it was also not yet clear to us that four years would pass realising this idea.

The world premiere of **ORG** at the Venice Film Festival drew attention to the film. The information about the work was printed in the accompanying catalogue and the images reached the eyes of the spectators attending the premiere. After this event almost nothing more was heard about the film. It ended up in the realm of legends due to its technical process and never really got into distribution. It was rarely screened, and then only in an abridged version (104 min) at retrospectives of the work of Fernando Birri. In 1991 Fernando Birri was invited to the Arsenal Cinema as a DAAD fellow. He presented a screening of the film – this print then remained in the archive. The group Entuziazm discovered the film in 2012 as part of their Living Archive project. This was followed by a screening on 29 June 2013 as part of the closing festival.

The Latin American and German spectators and the multicultural and pluricultural audience with its questions and its physical stamina during the long conversation after the film screening made it clear that the work was still very much alive. (NB: An audio file of the conversation is also contained on the DVD.)

The time was long past, but I had the impression that the passage of time worked in the film's favour. The transition from analogue to digital technology, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the subjugation of the world by the dominance of neoliberalism, and uncontrolled growth in the economy that was smothering human beings all turned **ORG** into a work to be rediscovered.

Some spectators said it was an abnormal work, beyond all classification, which resisted all parameters, and although it was then thirty-four years that it had spent in solitude and silence, many of those who were there on that evening told me that it seemed 'as if we had made the film just yesterday'.

In reality we had jumped from one technological age into another, from one world, ideologically divided into east and west, into other realities. The Berlin Wall had fallen and when capitalism, without adjectives, began to raise its voice in victory, cries were already being heard from the rebellion in Chiapas, progressive processes were being established in many Latin American countries, and the search for the dignity of the human being became a truly primordial necessity, even if it already always had been, but had been suppressed or squelched.

The new languages that creators were striving for were colliding with the ever-tighter boundaries of the dominant structures that set the condition for contents.

At the test screening in the empty cinema at the Arsenal with Markus Ruff and the projectionist, I discovered and became certain that many of the optical effects and the special effects in the film could not be realised today despite the technological leaps in film production.

I said that it seemed as if we had made the film yesterday because it emerged as a film of rupture, in which the actors appeared naked, and because the linguistic search during the editing and the sound work took place later in the process of experimenting. After the idea had been conceived between the end of 1967 and the beginning of 1968, we began shooting on 15 August 1968 in Rome, Caput Mundi, in the director's house in the district of Nomentano, which was turned into a film set.

From this moment on, the path that should have been as easy as any other film became complicated. The cameraman was changed several times, shooting was interrupted more than once, the lighting conditions changed, what happened in summer was in the end filmed in winter.

The same thing happened to the technical-creative process. The first editor left us after a year and a half. I was the assistant to the second editor. One day he also went away. Birri asked me to take over the editing. I was panicked. We did a test for the director and for me. After two weeks of working I took over the editing. I learned on the job. I even went beyond limits that editors normally don't dare to cross, but due to the complexity of cutting the negative I had to supervise it with two women who carried it out in practice, and after a period of apprenticeship I set the coding for the light correction along with the director – normally this is the task of the technical department at the laboratory where the film is processed. I will not go any further here into the fascinating journey of optical effects, live effects, the experience of setting the colour for the film, and, finally, the way that the film came to the Venice Film Festival.

But it doesn't stop there. Things change, people change. And what should have been a joy for everyone that had set off on this journey ended up at a dead end; the journey didn't go any further. For unclear and incomprehensible reasons, further screenings of the film were prohibited. The existing work turned into a 'disappeared' work.

After Venice we worked once again for several months and this resulted in a 'more commercial' version, which was shortened by more than an hour and which was also not shown in cinemas.

The rediscovery of the long version by the group Entuziazam, the digitisation of the 35mm print, the colour correction of the new 'positive' can provide the film – if the sustainability of the digital format can resist the ravages of time – with a new life.

From my point of view the visual and auditory power of the film has remained intact, it shows its multiple images and its dense and varied soundtrack, which was trying to get beyond visual and auditory limits at the time, to journey within a totality of images in order to produce new impressions. We wanted to achieve the superimposition of images in the eye, and not on the screen, we edited scenes that were only one frame long, it was our intention to make the pianissimos and fortissimos of the sound compositions audible, which find their way out of the speakers in the cinema and into the labyrinth of hearing.

In this way a dialogue can continue that began with the spectators at the Venice Film Festival in 1979 and then was interrupted, and

which can be taken up again at the screening at the Berlinale Forum in 2017 with other spectators.

*Settimio Presutto, Berlin, 28 December 2016, at new moon*

*Translation: Daniel Hendrickson*

## Statistics on the production of *ORG*

The gestation period of *ORG* took 10 years, 8 month and 14 days, from 24 December 1967 to 6 September 1978.

### Preparation

8 months

### Filming

59 days in 6 months (on set)

60 days in 6 months (special effects)

72,990 metres of film

84 days in 24 months (work on the optical printer)

18,848 metres of film in 8 establishments

### Developing, printing, and enlargement (16mm to 35mm) in 7 establishments

Editing: 120 months, 686 hours, and 5 minutes, in 3 different Moviolas

**Negative cut**, after the final edit, there were

26,625 cuts on 16mm negative (average film: 600–800 cuts)

26,625 cuts on 35mm negative (newly edited), done in 8,340 hours with

72 days of preparation on the work print

26,626 reference numbers

### Colour timing and colour tests

11 months and 3 weeks, of which 8 months and 2 weeks for analysis and evaluation of the colour tests in the Moviola

6,524 notches for light changes

159,808 numbers written on light sheets

### Synchronisation in 5 studios

The sound track was composed of

429 mix tracks with a length of 57 hours and 51 minutes

616 tracks for the pre-mix with a length of 43 hours and 57 minutes in total

1,045 tracks with a length of

101 hours 48 minutes

500 effects

produced in

114 hours of transcription

1 year of composition

960 hours of synchronisation

### Material used

419,922 metres of film (33 different emulsions), including

164,857 metres of negative

192,715 metres of positive

62,350 metres of film leader

### in addition

270,072 metres of audiotape, including

175,847 metres of magnetic tape

87,687 metres of static tape

6,538 metres of optical tape

to total  
 689,994 metres  
 108,925 metres of adhesive tape for the editing  
 1,181 markers  
 2,793 film canisters  
 1 mountain of set material and technical equipment, provided by  
 23 different companies.

The current version of *ORG* lasts 2 hours and 57 minutes, is 4,856 metres long and has 257,368 individual frames.

Sources: *Catalogue of the Venice Film Festival 1979*, and *Fernando Birri: Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae, Osnabrück: European Media Art Festival, 1992*

### Film print, subtitling, digitisation

For this digital version of *ORG* the 35mm print from the archive of the Arsenal – Institute for Film and Video Art was digitised. The print was given by Birri to be stored in the archive in 1991 after a retrospective at the Arsenal Cinema. To the best of our knowledge it is one of two known prints of the long version of the film (177 minutes). The second print is located in the Fernando Birri Archive at Brown University, where the majority of his materials are found.

These two prints differ in two points. The first is the French subtitles, which are only found on the print in the Arsenal Archive. We assume that this is the print shown at the Venice Film Festival in 1979, and the language of the subtitles attests to the dominance of the French in international festival distribution at the time. The second difference is in a deviation in the first act of the Arsenal print, in which one sequence of the film – six passages with a total of twelve seconds in length, in which Zohommm and Grrr can be seen unclothed in the bushes – was covered with black tape.

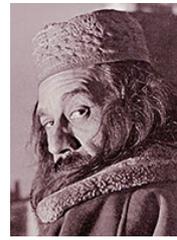
When projecting *ORG* it should be observed that at the beginning of the film's last shot – a monochrome red accompanied by the 'Internationale' – the house lights should be turned on.

After its premiere at the festival in Venice, *ORG* was abridged to open it to commercial assessment. Since then, the film has primarily circulated in this 104-minute version, that is, in a version shortened by more than an hour. This cut in the film took place on the original negative, which is located in Argentina today. Due to these special circumstances, the decision was made to use the unique print at the Arsenal Archive as the source material for the digitisation.

On the condition of the print: The print is infected with vinegar syndrome and indicates the first signs of corrosion. The visible defects in the film print are primarily a red cast and variations in the colour balance. In the colour correction the red cast was adjusted. Colour changes that can be traced back to the analogue printing process, however, have been maintained. The colour correction was carried out with Settimio Presutto's assistance. The German subtitles were produced in 2013 by Stefan Pethke and Michael Baute on the basis of the French subtitles. The standards of the French subtitles, both in content and style – timing and beat, capitalisation, italics, and punctuation – were adopted in order to avoid confusion due to a too strong autonomy of the additional subtitle language. The English subtitles were produced in 2016 by Daniel Hendrickson based on the same principles.

The digitisation in 2K was carried out in 2016 at Kornmanufaktur in Berlin. The colour correction was done at ARRI, and the sound work at Poleposition in Berlin.

Volker Pantenburg and Markus Ruff, January 2017



**Fernando Birri** was born in Santa Fe de la Vera Cruz, Argentina in 1925, a descendant of Italian emigrants. In 1952, he graduated in Film Direction at the Centro Sperimentale de Cinematografia in Rome, after shooting his first short films, *Selinunte* and *Alfabeto Notturmo*, a year earlier. He then had roles as an actor and wrote screenplays.

In 1956, Birri returned to Argentina and founded Latin America's first film school, the Instituto de Cinematografía de la Universidad del Litoral, in the city of his birth. From 1956 to 1958, he and his students shot the socially critical documentary film *Tire dié*, which was also the foundation of the collective film production method that Birri called for in various manifestos. By the time his feature film *Los Inundados* (1961) was released, Birri was considered one of the founders of the New Latin American Cinema. Political upheavals and the military coup of 1966 forced him to leave Argentina. His films were subsequently banned and the film school was closed. After sojourns in Central and South America, he settled again in Italy, where he worked as a screenwriter and actor. In 1967, Birri began working on the film *ORG*. In the mid-1980s, with *Remitente – Carta al mundo* and *Mi Hijo el Che*, he focussed on Latin American themes. Birri appeared again as the teacher and proponent of a 'different cinema' when he founded the Laboratorio ambulante de Poéticas Cinematográficas – Cátedra Glauber Rocha at the Universidad de Los Andes in Mérida in Venezuela. With this institute, he carried out a wide variety of projects and courses in Rome, Bilbao, Mexico City, Managua, Bogotá, Medellín, Maputo, Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Buenos Aires. The high point of Fernando Birri's pedagogical work was the opening in 1986 of the Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión de Tres Mundos (EICT) in San Antonio de los Baños, Cuba; its founders included Birri, Gabriel García Márquez and Julio García Espinosa. Birri headed this 'School of Three Worlds' for several years, which became a training site for filmmakers from Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa and Asia. In 1985, Birri accepted an invitation from the Instituto Nacional de Cinematografía (today INCAA) to return to Argentina, where he founded a new film school again. After a number of documentaries including *El siglo del viento* and *Che: Muerte de la utopía?*, Fernando Birri directed his most recent film, *El Fausto Criollo*, in 2011.

### Films (selection)

1951: *Selinunte, Alfabeto Notturmo/Night School in Toretta*. 1953: *Immagini popolari siciliane sacre e profane* (co-directed by Mario Verdone). 1959: *La verdadera historia de la primera fundacion de Buenos Aires*. 1960: *Tire dié, Buenos días, Buenos Aires*. 1961: *Los inundados/Flooded Out*. 1963: *La pampa gringa*. 1967: *Castagnino, diario romano*. 1979: *ORG*. 1983: *Rafael Alberti, un retrato de poeta*. 1984: *Remitente: Nicaragua/Carta al mundo*. 1985: *Mi hijo el Che*. 1988: *Un señor muy viejo con alas enormes*. 1997: *Che: Muerte de la utopía?*. 1999: *El siglo del viento*. 2006: *ZA 05. Lo viejo y lo nuevo*. 2007: *Elegia Friulana*. 2011: *El Fausto Criollo*.