

THE NATURE OF THINGS

a film by Laura Viezzoli



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A documentary by Laura Viezzoli

68 min; HD and Super8

Produced by: Lorenzo Cioffi for Ladoc and Laura Viezzoli for Bicchieri di Pandora



Co-produced by: Giorgio Giampà

in association with: Associazione Home Movies



With the support of: Fondazione Marche Cinema Multimedia - Marche
Film Commission, bando sostegno alla produzione di opere audiovisive regionali 2012



With the contribution of: Milano Film Network, Lombardia Film Commission, Filmmaker and Fondazione Cariplo for the IN PROGRESS 2014 development workshop: development counseling by Luca Mosso



and the support of: Atelier di post-produzione - Milano Film Network 2015: Editing counseling by Carlotta Cristiani; sound design and mix by Massimo Mariani

sponsored by: Movie & Sound Firenze workshop; Kodak; Associazione per Mano; Help I Care.



and thanks to: the 150 supporters of the *Eppela* crowdfunding campaign



Written by: Laura Viezzoli con Sergio Borrelli, Enrica Gatto, Angelo Santagostino

Directed by: Laura Viezzoli

Voice for Angelo Santagostino: Roberto Citran

Cinematographer: Laura Viezzoli

Editing: Enrica Gatto

Sound Design and Mix: Massimo Mariani e Tommaso Barbaro

Colour correction: Simona Infante

Original Music: Giorgio Giampà

Producer: Lorenzo Cioffi

Assistant Producer: Paolo Louis Vincent Marrelli

Home Movies Archive Supervisor: Claudio Giapponesi

Translation and Subtitling: Paolo Louis Vincent Marrelli

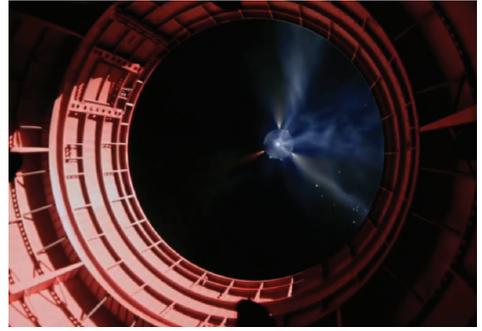
Graphic Design: Andrea Cioffi

International Distribution: WideHouse



Logline

A philosophical and emotive immersion in that precious period of life that is the end of life, through one year of meetings and dialogues between the author and a man who is terminally ill with ALS. A journey into the human soul where present time merges with past and future becoming a landscape background for a dialogue about love, pain and the need for freedom.



Synopsis

This is the story of a director's tenacity but also that of an intergenerational friendship between a 35 year-old filmmaker and a 70 year-old theologian, an exploration of the I and the You, and of that strictly individual and little respected borderline between a life worth continuing with and one that is not.

"I first met Angelo Santagostino in July 2013 when he was already seriously affected by ALS. A completely motionless body, except for the eyes, so bright and intelligent and so wishing to communicate. Letter after letter his thought would take shape thanks to an optical position sensor which interprets the movement of his eyes on the keyboard. An extreme life clinging to 21 micro-possibilities, the 21 letters of the Italian alphabet."

ALS is tangible and can be seen in all its cruelty in a few chosen statue-like moments of Angelo's day to day life, the immobility forgotten each time thanks to the dialogue which transports the spectator elsewhere, into a dimension of encounter and of exploration. In the dialectical encounter which emerges, Angelo is not a sick person to be pitied but rather an astronaut on a mission exploring and challenging the spectator to explore, the limits of what it means to be human and alive, with the passion of one who loves life but knows that he must soon leave it.

The immobility of his body is thus merely the starting point from which to explore the intense mobility of his mind and it is between these contrasting poles that the entire film visually and hypnotically moves. It's a journey among the lights and shadows of the human soul to become aware of our limits, and to reaffirm the sacred value of listening and of free will.

Director's intention

The Nature of Things is a cinematic journey at life's end, an Italian story exploring a universal theme: the thoughts and emotions of a terminally ill person and his right to define the border between a life worth living and one that is not.

The film weaves together three threads.

The thread of reality, Angelo and ALS

A few essential, simple frames, long, wide takes, within which the illness is shown as it is, in all its extraordinary slowness, its tedium and loneliness: Angelo being lifted from bed to wheel-chair, being shaved by his carer, having his arms and legs moved by the physiotherapist, the communicator being positioned and the eye-pointer being calibrated, close-ups of his eyes when trying to write but the task getting progressively more arduous ...

That look in his eyes which contains a love for life and the pain at having to lose it, lays before the spectator Angelo's worst fear, the dramatic thread of the entire film: "What if my eyes seize up before I die? What if I vanish before I die?"

An essential visual approach which frames the silent solitude of ALS within which Angelo allows the author to film him, and allows his carers to move him, as if he were somehow extraneous, unaffected, deadpan. His body is a pendulum which marks the passing of time.

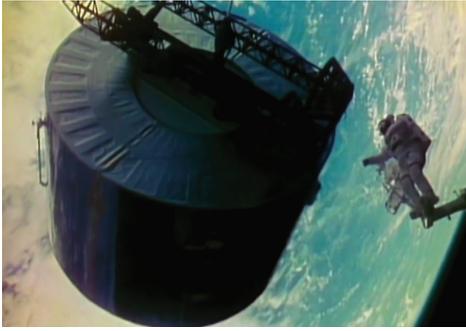
The thread of extreme adventure, the astronaut's journey into space

Angelo becomes whole again in the dialogue, where a few words are enough to make us forget ALS and transport us to an unconfined space, a vast and lively elsewhere.

In the dialectical exchange, Angelo is not a sick person of whom we should have pity, but rather an astronaut on a mission exploring the edges and limits of what it is to be human.

This thread provides a powerful and fascinating dimension allowing us to see beyond the outer stillness of the disease and to experience Angelo's inner beauty.

The astronaut's experience becomes a visual transposition of the fears and the constant transformations which a sick body must learn to face, a repertoire rich in suggestive metaphors which take us from the clumsy



phases of training in a pool, to the extraordinary slowness of movements when wearing a space suit, the adventure of flying, the gentle calmness of weightless bodies, and the spectacle of Space seen through a porthole. The aim is to create a dialogue between the disease which paralyses and the gentle composure of bodies in zero-gravity, Angelo's awareness and the astronauts' journey into space. Both are extreme missions, mirror images, parallel. Both involve people and bodies whose lives are sustained, their survival made possible, exclusively by technology. If, on the one hand, however, technology allows one to go beyond oneself, to fly, to make a dream come true, on the other, for Angelo, it becomes in the end a cage from which one must escape.

The mental thread of life's end, a nostalgic, human journey

In this thread everything becomes extremely important, and there is no difference between present, past and future. Life appears as a single flowing stream of images, memories, adventures, fears and passions. "It is too easy to flee from life without having realised how everything is connected", says Angelo. It is with these words that he begins a flowing yet non-chronological narrative of his being a person, simultaneously an old man, a child, a youth, and an adult. Angelo's memoirs are both vivid and cloudy, just like the grain of the Super8 footage accompanying them. Super8 video becomes the mirror of life and its magical imperfection, the ideal format for depicting and collecting some of the most fundamental stages between coming into the world and leaving it.

Human landscapes and seasonal rites of passage brush the spectator's eye and weave the exquisitely intimate and precious temporal labyrinth which is our protagonist, Angelo's, end of life.

The author

Laura Viezzoli is a graduate of the *DAMS (Discipline delle Arti della Musica e dello Spettacolo)* Faculty of Bologna University, and has a postgraduate degree in Directing and Production from the *Scuola del Documentario* of Milan. She works with the *SKY* group, with the *Cinemovel* Foundation, the *Corto Dorico* Festival, *Enece* Films and with the University of Milan's Television Centre. In 2010, together with the director Roberto Nisi, she founded the *I Bicchieri di Pandora* Cultural Association. Together they have produced two editions of the "*Conero Doc Campus*" advanced training course in documentary film making, the "*CineResidenze*" series of seminars and the "*Live in Sferisterio*" documentary film.

La Natura delle Cose (The Nature of Things) is her first feature-length documentary.

Production



Ladoc, founded by Andrea and Lorenzo Cioffi, is a production company specialising in documentaries for television and cinema. Among Ladoc's most recent productions are *Napolislam* (70', by Ernesto Pagano; Biografilm 2015; IDFA 2015) and *Rustam Casanova* (by Alessandro De Toni, Biografilm 2014; Zagreb Dox 2015).



I Bicchieri di Pandora* Association** was founded in 2011 by Roberto Nisi and Laura Viezzoli following on from their experience with the first edition of the "*Conero Doc Campus*" advanced training course in documentary film making. The ***I Bicchieri di Pandora Association was set up with the aim of promoting a quality cinema ethos, through both training and production activities.



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