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*Fuochi Fuochi d'artificio / Fireworks* – Directed by Susanna Nicchiarelli. Screenplay by Susanna Nicchiarelli, Marianna Cappi, Andrea Bouchard. Italy. Fandango-Matrioska and Rai Fiction. One Season, Six Episodes, 2025

From her debut feature *Cosmonauta* (2009) to *Chiara* (2022) and now *Fuochi d'artificio / Fireworks* (2025), Susanna Nicchiarelli has shown a recurring interest in female protagonists navigating moments of rupture—whether historical, existential, or spiritual. While not all her films center on youth—*Nico, 1988* (2017) and *Miss Marx* (2020) portray adult women grappling with decline, grief, or political disillusionment—Nicchiarelli returns, at key intervals, to stories of girlhood as a site of radical awakening. In *Cosmonauta*, Luciana (Miriana Raschillà) dreams of space travel and Communist revolution, finding in both a symbolic vehicle to break out of patriarchal constraint. Sixteen years later, Marta (Anna Losano), the heroine of *Fuochi d'artificio*, assumes a much more active role: she does not dream of rebellion—she orchestrates it. If Luciana gazed skyward, Marta, grounded in the muddy trails of the Italian Alps, maps out sabotage and counterintelligence. In this sense, the series expands the possibilities of Italian teen-centered storytelling both by foregrounding children as subversive yet non-violent antifascist actors, and by extending Nicchiarelli's broader project of tracing female genealogies across generations. With *Fuochi d'artificio*, Nicchiarelli comes full circle, renewing her commitment to portraying young girls not as symbols of purity or victims of circumstance, but as subjects of history.

Based on the novel by Andrea Bouchard (2015), *Fuochi d'artificio* is a six-part RAI television miniseries set during the final years of World War II. It follows four tweens—Marta, Davide (Luca Charles Brucini), Sara (Carlotta Dosi), and Marco (Lorenzo Enrico)—who, frustrated by being dismissed as “just children,” discover that their age affords them a tactical advantage: they can move through fascist checkpoints without arousing suspicion. Seizing this opportunity, the group creates a shared identity: Sandokan, an imaginary rebel inspired by Emilio Salgari's hero, whose name becomes legend in their Alpine valley. In secret, the children assist the partisans, smuggling messages, gathering intelligence, and sowing confusion among Nazi and fascist forces. What begins as a form of play morphs into a dangerous and ethically complex act of resistance. Though the series avoids graphic violence, it never trivializes the stakes. Marta, the natural leader of the group, emerges as a brilliant and determined strategist. Her acumen and willpower drive the narrative forward, anchoring the group and the viewer alike in a world where the border between innocence and political agency dissolves.

The children's political formation does not take place in isolation, since Marta's secret network remains deeply entangled within a broader web of intergenerational relations and political inheritances. Marta's mother, for example, is in political exile in Switzerland for antifascist activity. Her grandparents, former political activists, are initially cautious but ultimately support the children's secret activities. Rather than opposing or neutralizing the group's rebellion, the adults become enablers, reinforcing the idea that resistance is not the prerogative of a single generation. The children's contact with the young partisans hiding in the mountains further connects them to a broader network of antifascist struggle. In this way, *Fuochi d'artificio* breaks with dominant narratives of the *Resistenza* that isolate partisan activity in the youthful heroics of 20-year-olds. The result is not a fantasy of childhood omnipotence, but an original, multivocal and credible vision of resistance, embedded in collective struggle.

The figure of the child has long occupied a privileged position in theories of political cinema. Gilles Deleuze argued that children see differently, and that this altered perception allows for a reconfiguration of cinematic time and space. In the child's gaze, he wrote, “[a]nyone at all can be a

hero or heroine.”<sup>1</sup> For Deleuze, the child represents a figure of potentiality—not because of sentimental innocence, but because of a fundamental misalignment with the adult world and its stable regimes of meaning. Contemporary scholars such as Emma Wilson and Karen Lury have extended this insight, by examining how the child’s body, voice, and sensory perception resist narrative containment and open up alternative affective and temporal registers.<sup>2</sup> Wilson emphasizes the instability of the cinematic child, who “shifts between subject and object, actor and image, fantasy and real presence.”<sup>3</sup> In this sense, child figures in cinema often operate as destabilizing forces—interrupting continuity, blurring ontological categories, and opening affective spaces where meaning remains provisional and contested. Similarly, Lury highlights the child’s emotional and visual volatility, describing the child as oscillating “between presence and projection,” and as an image that is “both intensely material and deeply metaphorical.”<sup>4</sup>

In *Fuochi d’artificio*, the children shift from passive observers to central drivers of the story. Acting from the margins of adult attention, they are able to divert the action from the peripheral position of childhood to the very center of historical events. Their choices shape the course of the Resistance in the Alpine valley and, through Nicchiarelli’s lens, they determine the emotional and narrative direction of the series, challenging the assumption that political agency belongs only to adults.

The dialogue reflects the children’s transformation from innocent tweens to active partisans—after all, this is a coming-of-age tale—with remarkable clarity. The collective persona of Sandokan functions both as camouflage and mythopoeia: it shields the children from adult suspicion while enabling a form of imaginative liberation. Their resistance is tactical, but also symbolic. As Giorgio Agamben has noted, the child, understood in the philosophical context of infancy (*in-fanzia*, literally “lacking speech”), occupies a critical liminal space between bare life and political subjecthood.<sup>5</sup> In her seminal study on teen movies, Catherine Driscoll has also defined adolescence as a “liminal,” utopian “non-place” and “a fantasy of freedom,” which sharpens the political charge of Marta’s position.<sup>6</sup> Nicchiarelli brilliantly exploits this liminality and horizon of freedom to suggest that political action is not confined to those granted formal citizenship, but is, rather, a mode of being-toward-justice that emerges in moments of historical fracture—and can be incarnated in a girl’s body. This transformative potential also recalls Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of “becoming-child”—not a return to infancy, but a breakdown of fixed identities like adult or rational, opening new ways of feeling and acting.<sup>7</sup> The children in *Fuochi d’artificio* embody this becoming as invention: they form unexpected connections, respond to the world differently and act politically without relying on adult authority. Marta enacts her radical politics through music and a disarmament plan that creatively and effectively paralyzes the Nazi headquarters in the valley. Her musical performances—played for the partisans and weaponized as a trap for the Nazi commander—are crucial to this shift. Characteristically, Nicchiarelli uses the interplay of diegetic and non-diegetic sound to carve out a space of expressive freedom, even fury, for her female

<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. (University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 213.

<sup>2</sup> See Emma Wilson, *Cinema’s Missing Children* (Wallflower Press, 2003); Karen Lury, *The Child in Film: Tears, Fears and Fairytales* (I.B. Tauris, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Cinema’s Missing Children*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Lury, *The Child in Film*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> See Giorgio Agamben, *Infanzia e storia* (Einaudi, 2001), 5-7.

<sup>6</sup> Catherine Driscoll, *Teen Film: A Critical Introduction* (Bloomsbury, 2011), 112.

<sup>7</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. By Brian Massumi (University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 265–273.

protagonists. In *Fuochi d'artificio*, this original strategy becomes one of the most distinctive and authorial signatures, underscoring Marta's passage from vulnerability to agency without resorting to adult-coded forms of heroism.

Much of the series' emotional and narrative force rests on the performances of the young actors. The portrayal of Marta is especially compelling: the actress brings a striking combination of tactical focus, emotional intelligence, and physical confidence in the Alpine setting, conveying both her narrative centrality and her familiarity with the environment. Her performance gives the character a credibility that is neither precocious nor naïve. The other three young actors—Sara, Marco, and Davide—have slightly more schematic roles, which offer less opportunity for expressive range. Their characters are written more as narrative supports to Marta's leadership, and this shapes the rhythm of their performances. That said, their presence is effective, their group chemistry is convincing, and their shared participation in the collective fiction of Sandokan remains one of the series' most resonant elements.

The decision to air *Fuochi d'artificio* on Italian public television on April 15, 22, and 25, 2025—in occasion of Italy's Liberation Day celebrations—is itself politically charged. RAI has long served as both a cultural commons and an instrument of pedagogical nation-building. The series reclaims the story of the *Resistenza* for a younger audience, while prompting viewers to reflect critically on the nature of political agency. In recent years, April 25<sup>th</sup> has become a site of ideological contestation, as post-fascist formations attempt to relativize or appropriate antifascist memory. Without moralizing or recycling familiar myths, Nicchiarelli's work resists this trend by rooting resistance in the everyday gestures of children who refuse neutrality. *Fuochi d'artificio* reimagines historical narration from below—from the hidden trails and secret codes of childhood. Marta and her friends are not learning history; they are rewriting it. In adapting a beautiful and urgent coming-of-age story to the small screen, Nicchiarelli also crafts a cinematic meditation on the child—particularly the girl, Marta—as counter-historian: the one who sees what adults cannot, who dares what adults no longer will, and who reminds us that history is not only what happened, but what could have happened, if only.

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