The Institution of Documentary in Contemporary Italy

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The roominess of the term nonfiction: an entire dresser labelled ‘nonsocks.’ (Shields 131)

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Abstract

Documentary studies, and Italian documentary studies in particular, is a fairly young academic discipline. My research ventures in this somewhat uncharted territory with a multidisciplinary approach and in pursuit of a twofold objective: firstly to produce a brief account and a literature review concerning the major directors, movements, and theoretical trends in and about Italian documentary from the end of the Second World War to the present, which are not available in English; secondly to explore the debates about the definition of the documentary form, with a special focus on British and North-American scholars, and propose a solution to some contentious issues. The latter part of the research combines a philosophical approach that mainly draws on the works of Jürgen Habermas, Don Ihde and Kendall L. Walton, and a sociological methodology influenced by Mary Douglas and Basil Bernstein's theories; it is based on the hypothesis that documentary is not just a series of images and sounds, in whatever format the available technology provides us with, but an institution; to look at documentary as an institution means to define its features as a routinized cultural behaviour in the social context where it develops.

Insofar as documentary is an institution, individual documentaries can be considered cultural artifacts that express in fairly accessible ways subjective meanings that are then internalized and influence people in their constant process of creation and recreation of social contexts. Thus, in the last part of the dissertation, I focus on the concrete instances through which the institution of documentary becomes part of the socio-cognitive contexts of individuals. I identify four documentary types, characterized by the different weighting of a set of variables dependent on the ethical, cognitive and stylistic features of the institution of documentary that I have previously described. I then match these types with the group/grid categories of a neo-

Durkheimian theoretical framework to obtain a set of conceptual tools which are put to a preliminary test through the analysis of a recent Italian documentary.

Résumé

Les études sur le documentaire, et sur le documentaire italien en particulier, sont une discipline académique très jeune. Ma recherche s'aventure dans ce terroir plutôt inexploré avec une approche multidisciplinaire et à la poursuite d'un double objectif: premièrement de présenter une bref histoire et une critique de la littérature au sujet des réalisateurs, mouvements et théories du documentaire italien à partir de la fin de la deuxième guerre mondiale jusqu'à maintenant, parce que ce genre d'études ne sont pas disponible en anglais; deuxièmement de explorer le débat sur la définition de la forme documentaire, avec une attention particulière pour les théories anglaises et nord-américaines, et proposer une solutionne pour des points controversés. La dernière partie de la recherche combine une approche philosophique inspiré par les ouvres de Jürgen Habermas, Don Ihde et Kendall L. Walton avec une méthodologie sociologique influencé par les théories de Mary Douglas et Basil Bernstein; ce partie est fondé sur l'hypothèse que le documentaire n'est pas seulement une série d'images et sons, dans n'importe pas quelle technologie soit disponible au présent, mais il est une institution. Voir le documentaire comme une institution veut dire définir ces caractéristiques en tant que comportement culturel habitualisé dans le contexte social ou il se développe.

Si le documentaire est une institution, les documentaires sont des produits culturels qui expriment des significations subjectives d'une façon accessible, et qui sont tour à tour intériorisés et vont influencer les gens dans leur procès de création et recréation de contextes sociaux. C'est pour ça que la dernière partie de la thèse est consacré à l'analyse de la façon dans laquelle le documentaire devient partie des contextes sociocognitives des individus. Je identifie quatre types de documentaire, caractérisé par le diffèrent pois donné à une série de variables qui dépend par les aspects éthiques, cognitives et stylistiques de l'institution documentaire que j'ai

décrit précédemment. Ensuite, je combine ces types avec les catégories groupe/grille d'un système théorique nouveau-Durkheimien, et le cadre conceptuel qui en résulte est préliminairement vérifié à travers l'analyse d'un documentaire italien contemporain.

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In order to develop my theoretical framework, I have been in frequent epistolary contact with Don Ihde, Kendall L. Walton, John Hendry and Perri 6, who gave me kind and invaluable explanations of their theories and methodologies. Finally, special thanks goes to my supervisor,

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Introduction

Over the past twenty years, after the ground-breaking studies of Michael Renov and Bill Nichols, many scholars have endeavoured to define the documentary.[1] And yet, compared to other disciplines in the domain of arts and aesthetics, and even in the relatively fledgling field of film studies, documentary studies are still in their infancy. This is especially true in the case of Italian documentary, for reasons that can be easily identified: Italian documentaries after the Second World War until the late 1960's are generally considered a subsidized and uninspiring form of public education that audiences were forced to swallow, like a bad-tasting medicine, before any feature-length fiction film. Italy never had a public-funded body, like the Canadian National Film Board, that took charge of financing and promoting documentary, and with the emergence of private television in the early 1980's the space for non-fiction cinema in the public and private broadcasters' schedules became more and more sparse. In other words, the corpus of Italian documentaries has always looked poor to the eyes of film scholars, compared to that of fiction films. As a consequence, the production of valuable analyses of Italian documentary was, until the last decade, practically non-existent in the English language, and very scarce in Italian.

The situation has been modestly improving recently, especially since a new wave of Italian directors has been praised at an international level, and some scholars started to map with unprecedented accuracy the history of this neglected form of representation. However, original and documented contributions to a documentary theory are still lacking, even in Italian, and English-speaking scholars do not have access to a reliable and up-to-date history of Italian documentary yet. This study cannot remedy decades of oblivion, but it makes a strong argument for the re-evaluation of the documentary as an art form and of the role of Italian directors in the history of the practice: from an historical perspective, it gives a brief account of the major

directors and movements in Italian documentary from the end of the Second World War to the present, and produces a literature review of the main scholarly contributions, divided in theories, histories, and monographic studies about directors, genres, movements and periods. From a theoretical perspective, this study explores the debates about the definition of the documentary form, with a special focus on British and North-American theorists, offering a new methodology and a whole new set of theoretical tools, which provide a fresh perspective and new solutions to contentious issues in the field of film and media studies.

In my view, a meaningful way to look at the changes and transformations that occurred to the documentary practice in Italy after the end of the Second World War is to consider how generally subordinated to other disciplines, like art criticism, or anthropology, this practice was in the 1950's, and how, after decades of progressive steps in the direction of a mature and original style, it gained a more autonomous status, until it started, quite recently, to be considered a genuine form of artistic expression. Thus, chapter 1.1 of the dissertation identifies the first milestones of this path in the documentaries made in the 1950's by Ermanno Olmi, Cecilia Mangini and Lino Del Fra, and by Vittorio De Seta. In the 1960's and 1970's, the inevitable end of state subsidies for documentary films, together with the well-known radicalization of Italian politics, opened new spaces for experimentalism in both style and production forms, as the case of the collective group *Videobase* well illustrates. These experiments prepared the field for the true renaissance of Italian documentary filmmaking, which started with the first *auteur* documentaries of Silvano Agosti, Daniele Segre, Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi, and continues nowadays with the works of Pietro Marcello and Michelangelo Frammartino.

In chapter 1.2, I follow the parallel path of the documentary studies, which suffered, in Italy, a destiny similar to that of the documentary practice, in that only recently they emerged as

an autonomous field. I organized this literature review in four categories: in the first group, I discuss film theories that are partially, or exclusively, devoted to documentary. Among these contributions, two are for my purposes the most important: Francesco Casetti's *Teorie del cinema*, and Marco Bertozzi and Gianfranco Pannone's *L'idea documentaria*. The second group includes documentary histories written by Italian scholars, which are, surprisingly, not often dedicated specifically to the Italian productions. The third group includes monographic studies on single directors, which are usually devoted to renowned fiction film directors that occasionally turned their attention to documentary. The fourth group comprises studies on genres, movements, and particular periods, or Italian regions. The most important of all these contributions is, in my opinion, Marco Bertozzi's *Storia del documentario italiano*, which finally provides Italian documentary historiography with an authoritative set of data and fills a gap that until now prevented other scholars from approaching the field.

The second part of the thesis is devoted to an analysis of the institutional characteristics of the documentary practice.[2] In order to understand what motivates my assumption that documentary is, above all, an institution, one has to remember that at the core of documentary studies lie some apparently obvious questions, like the difference between documentary and fiction, and the similarity between photographic images and reality, that are not thoroughly answered yet by the methodologies and theoretical frameworks currently employed by the scholars of the discipline. An anecdote, related by Martina Parenti and Massimo D'Anolfi (Bignami 134) reminds us that these debates are not merely of a conceptual kind but rather affect the actual nature of the documentary practice: Krzysztof Kieslowski, the renowned Polish director, was appointed to shoot a documentary in Warsaw's train station in the early 1970's. After an accurate tour and a meticulous observation of the place, he decided to film the locker

room for luggage deposit, because he noticed that people there were forced to interact, and he wanted to capture those spontaneous moments of intimacy between strangers. Surprisingly enough, few weeks later, the police came to him and confiscated all the reels: a man had murdered a woman and put her in a luggage that he stored in one of the lockers of that very station, so they hoped to recognize the face of the killer in the images the director filmed. Kiéslowski was so shocked by the idea of being responsible for someone else's arrest that he refused to direct documentaries since.

The moral of the story is that, contrary to fictional images, documentary images are supposed to have a close link to events that happen in real life, to persons that really exist, or existed, to acts that had real consequences in the world we all live in. The meaning, weight, features and existence of this link are the ingredients of most of what has been, and probably will be, written about documentary. My research does not depart from this path, although I do try to look at the aforementioned link from a scarcely frequented multidisciplinary perspective, from which the documentary emerges not just as a series of images and sounds, in whatever format the available technology provides us with, but as an institution; considering the documentary as an institution means exploring a set of features that defines its role as a routinized cultural behaviour in the social context where the documentary develops.

According to Peter L. Berger, institutions are habitualized actions that come to be recognized as specific patterns; they "pattern human behavior in predictable routines" and "provide the individual with psychological relief from having to constantly make decisions about what to do" (Wuthnow et al. 41). Documentary moving images are a routinized cultural behaviour characterized by an ambiguous institutional role that overlaps more easily discernible

practices, like journalism, historiography, and the arts, and this may be one of the reasons why the documentary has been granted such a low interest, until very recently, by media scholars.

As in the case of journalism and other instruments of civic and political activism, one of the characteristics of the institution of documentary is the ethical commitment of the documentarist, which I link, in chapter 2.1, to the creation of the social space for public debate that Jürgen Habermas called the public sphere. Habermas's concept helps us recognize a communication practice, which can be defined as the political interaction of private citizens that come to be recognized as a public. This practice is a reliable indicator of the tensions between competing social configurations occurred in the Western world during the transition from a prevalently hierarchical to a predominantly individualistic society. I will argue that the documentary inherits the most fundamental feature of this form of communication: the mandate to help a public confront what is hidden, irrational, unfair, or dangerous in a given society, and the desire to help as large an audience as possible consider whether a different, more rational, more just, more democratic system is possible and necessary. The documentary, in what is probably the most essential of its institutional roles, is not meant primarily to entertain, but to let people know about relevant facts and promote a public debate about them. Like journalism, it finds its roots in the historical process that made modern democratic societies possible in the first place, namely the characterization of the basic principles of traditional societies as unjust and irrational, and for this reason many documentarists are driven by what I call an ethical commitment.

The tradition of debates about the common good, and around the shared values of a community, of which the term public sphere is a concise and effective designation, is a defining component of the documentary tradition. In fact, one of the characteristics that make the

documentary a different institution within the larger field of moving images media, is the idea that documentaries tell stories that interest spectators insofar as they are members of a community, share the same values and fight against the same obstacles. Documentaries about the most diverse topics, from corrupted political institutions, to endangered environment, from private stories, to the history of a nation, share a basic common denominator: they never address the spectator as an individual, but always as someone who is part of a group.

A few examples will clarify this point. In *Il giardino di Pupa* (2007), Giulia Frati narrates the life of her grandmother, who is taking care of her nephew, dying of multiple sclerosis. From its synopsis, *Il giardino* might seem to be a very private film, and yet it is a touching documentary, and not only because the inspiring 77-year-old lady is the director's actual grandmother, but also because its protagonist's personal drama is socialized in her life-long project to recuperate an abandoned piece of land, used by the local community as a garbage deposit, and transform it in a paradisiac garden for the whole village. Gianni Celati's *Case sparse* (2002) is about crumbling farmsteads in the Italian countryside and one of the key elements that make the documentary the ideal way of telling this story is the intention of the director to communicate, through the images of abandoned houses, the dissolving memory of the agricultural community where he was born. A fiction film can focus on a personal problem, like a troubling love, that resonates with every single spectator as an individual, because everyone has, or had, her own personal troubling loves; but a documentary must do more, it must explicitly focus on the social significance of its material, so as to resonate with the community as a whole, and address the fundamental values that bring people together.

A second important aspect to be considered when defining the institution of the documentary is its cognitive potential, which is a direct consequence of the technology on which

the documentary is based: technologically speaking, the documentary begins with the invention of photography, and it shares with photography two fiercely debated properties: that of being an evidence of the world, and that of enhancing the individual's perception of the world. In chapter 2.2, I explore these two characteristics of the technology of documentary reviewing the disputes around the notion of realism, and the theories that attempted a phenomenological approach to the definition of the film practice. I deal with the work of the two main scholars who endeavoured a film phenomenology, Allan Casebier and Vivian Sobchack. Casebier's is a sophisticated effort to apply Husserl's phenomenology to film studies, based on the assumptions that any theory of film must be first a feasible account of cinematic representation, and that a realist phenomenology is the best suited candidate for this task; Sobchack, instead, follows Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in order to draw an even more complex and comprehensive film theory with destabilizing consequences. The chapter ends with an exploration of the philosophy of Don Ihde, who is not a film scholar, but is particularly attentive to the ways the technology affects our perceptions. A phenomenological approach leads us to understand documentary as a technology of perception that enhances the human capacity to explore the environment, thus it gives a novel meaning to the controversial notion of cinematic realism. In the acceptation that I propose, documentary realism is the technologically mediated interaction between human intentionality and reality, and provides an epistemological justification for the cognitive potential that constitutes the documentary's second institutional characteristic.

The third characteristic of the institution of documentary is a set of features that defines the documentary style of artistic representation. In chapter 2.3, I consider the documentary as a representational art, and define it using concepts derived from Kendall L. Walton's theory of art objects as props in games of make-believe. Following this idea, I define the documentary as a

representational art, whose peculiar style is characterized by transparent representations made of props that represent themselves. In fact, contrary to what happens with other fictional representations, documentary images are those in which the object “photographed” and the object “pictured” are the same, or, in other words, they are constituted by props that represent themselves. The interaction of these transparent representations with other transparent, or more opaque representations, generate fictional and semi-fictional truths that characterize the story of the documentary.

The main advantage of addressing the issue of the documentary form from the point of view of its institutional features, rather than discussing the single instances, is that this position allows me to overlook the exceptions represented by isolated documentaries, which are distant from the pattern of habitualized actions that constitute the documentary as an institution. It is not necessary that all documentary movies be ethically committed, exploit their cognitive potential and adopt the documentary style, as long as the combination of these features can be seen as representative of the characteristics of the institution of documentary. For example, one may decide to record in an audiovisual format her personal walk in the park. She could adopt a documentary style and let us know many details about a geographic area that we might not be familiar with, but it may not show a particularly strong ethical commitment. My theoretical premise would allow me to disregard this behaviour as lateral, at least as long as this kind of attitudes remains atypical within the institution of documentary.

In part 3 of the dissertation, I abandon the abstract level of the institution and focus on the concrete instances through which the documentary becomes part of the socio-cognitive contexts of individuals. Borrowing from Basil Bernstein’s sociolinguistics, and Mary Douglas’s anthropology, I connect the social contexts and business models of documentary productions

with a range of ethical, cognitive and stylistic values. The underlying assumption that guides and justifies this operation is that documentaries are cultural artifacts that express subjective meanings in accessible ways, which are successively internalized and influence people in their constant process of creation and recreation of their worlds. Following this line of reasoning, the study of cultural artifacts becomes extremely important, because, as Peter L. Berger puts it, it is the sum of the subjective worlds expressed in all cultural artifacts that we come to designate as society (Wuthnow et al. 37-40).

In Berger's view, culture is socially constructed, but it is also socially maintained. All kinds of knowledge contribute to create a plausibility structure, which is disseminated through conversation with significant others, and ultimately perform legitimating functions (Wuthnow et al. 50). Even if we do not accept Berger's radical conclusion, we can agree that institutions, if not all knowledge, have legitimating functions: institutions develop, as Mary Douglas wrote (*Natural Symbols* 54) in order for a community to internalize its structure and its norms and, in so doing, make them legitimate. If it is true that institutions are ways for social systems to reproduce themselves and their values through legitimization, we can assume that there is a causal relationship between social configurations and styles of thought. The recognition and establishment of this causal link has not only epistemological consequences, but methodological as well: in fact, it gives us the opportunity to make verifiable theoretical statements that can be accepted or rejected after careful data analysis, and therefore to support a theory that is explanatory and not merely descriptive.

In chapter 3.1 of the dissertation, I attempt to build an explanatory theory of the relationship between documentary types and contexts of production adapting a neo-Durkheimian theoretical framework, such as that developed by Perri 6 in political sciences. For this purpose I

identify four documentary types, characterized by the different weighting of a set of variables dependent on the ethical, cognitive and stylistic features of the institution of documentary that I have described in part 2 of the dissertation. After having matched these types with the group/grid categories of the neo-Durkheimian model, I define the social contexts of documentary production and then, in chapter 3.2, I verify, through the analysis of a recent Italian documentary, whether context and type correspond, and therefore if the theory, at least in the case examined, is correct.

The last part of the dissertation is meant to be a first exploration of a promising strand of research, which will need, however, substantial developments before its full potential can be properly assessed. At its core, this study defines a peculiar institution, that of the documentary, and attempts to follow some of its connections to specific social contexts in contemporary Italy. I hope that, while doing this, it also highlights the complexity, richness and potentiality of a representational art whose neglected place among art institutions of Western societies is a symptom of a deep miscomprehension of the singularity of its stylistic features.

1. Discourses on Italian Documentary

1.1 A Brief History of Italian Documentary from World War II to the Present

The brief history of post-war Italian documentary that I present in the next few pages purposely avoids a thorough discussion of the documentary production of Italian *auteurs* of mainly fiction films, like Michelangelo Antonioni and Pier Paolo Pasolini. It is not my intention to belittle the importance of their documentaries, but my first objective is to explore the less widely known history of professional documentarists, who, particularly in Italy, used to live on the fringes of film production. This is especially true if one looks at the first years after the end of the Second World War, when Italian cinema was living a contradictory life. On the one hand, Neorealism, with its documentary-like photography and acting style, put Italy on the forefront of fictional cinematic innovation. On the other hand, the documentary was relegated to the ancillary role of furnishing a copious but uniform and uninspired mass of short and unambitious films. One of the main reason for this situation was the system of public funding installed by several legislative measures that began with Law 678 in 1945 and continued until Law 1213 in 1965 (Bernagozzi 117). The point of these laws was to enforce the projection in theatres of short documentaries (minimum 150-180 and maximum 1800-2000 meters of film) and to assign them a percentage (3% for 3-4 years) of the average income of the films with which the documentary was paired. Theoretically, it was a system designed to recognize and award the cultural importance of the documentary form. Practically, it fostered the establishment of big production companies, specialized in mass production of documentaries with the sole purpose of receiving governmental money (Brunetta 3: 485), and totally disinterested in the quality of the products, to the point that in many cases the documentaries were not even screened, but only registered in the theatre schedule for bookkeeping (Bernagozzi 120). As a matter of fact, national bureaucracies

and political parties financed documentaries not because they believed in the artistic expressivity of the genre, or in its ethical and cultural significance, but because they considered it as one of the few media they could effectively exploit for their own purposes, be them educational, political or ideological.[3]

The same logic was applied by those industries and cultural elites that imitated state bureaucracies in financing documentaries because of their supposed malleability: entrepreneurs produced documentaries as if they were ill-concealed forms of advertisement, art critics made them as if they were visual versions of their academic papers, anthropologists used them as data for their research. As a result, the enormous Italian documentary production from the 1950's to the 1980's revolved around a few topics (industry, art, anthropology and nature) and was characterized, with few exceptions, by a substantial exploitation of the documentary genre by political and cultural institutions that prevented it from acquiring an autonomous role in the Italian media landscape.

1.1.1 The First Wave: From Subordination to Relative Autonomy

Although recent contributions aimed at diminishing the significance of the post-Second-World-War industrial boom and revealed surprising levels of industrialization in pre-war Italy,[4] it is undisputed that in the 1950's the Italian industrial sector was recovering from the devastations of the conflict and the development of a strong industrial base became one of the national top priorities. In this socio-historical and cultural context, industrial documentary had a key role to play and became a training camp for young directors, some of whom were heading, like Ermanno Olmi, for a distinguished career in fiction filmmaking. Olmi worked for Edisonvolta, one of the biggest and oldest Italian energy companies, which at that time was expanding its production facilities and was one of the major players in the modernization of

Italian infrastructures. In some of his documentaries, like *Tre fili fino a Milano* (1958), Olmi innovated the classical formula of the industrial film, guided throughout all its length by an authoritative and often judgemental voice over, leaving more room for sounds and images from the sites of production and for the acts and faces of a hard-working humanity, usually dwarfed, in the documentaries of the period, by the will to emphasize the wonders of mechanization.

The interest enjoyed by the industrial documentary in the late 50's is testified by the proliferation of dedicated Festivals and events. In 1957 the first edition of Monza's *Festival del documentario artigiano e industriale* took place, while in 1960 Turin's *Festival internazionale del film industriale* was born. Success and wide distribution emphasized a problem intrinsic to the genre, which is the divergence between the requirements of the sponsors and the artistic needs of the directors. This contrast appears all too evident, for example, if looking at the vicissitudes of one of the most high-flying and controversial films of the period, Joris Ivens's *Italy is not a poor country* (1960).

Enrico Mattei, President of Eni, another big Italian energy company, envisioned the possibility to launch a message of innovation and modernity through a grandiose documentary that would contradict the image of Italy as a backward and rural country and would insist on the benefits of his company's commitment on search and development of oil and gas wells. In order to fulfil his dream, he called the renowned Dutch filmmaker Joris Ivens and encircled him with important collaborators, such as Alberto Moravia, Enrico Maria Salerno, Tinto Brass, Paolo and Vittorio Taviani. The result is an epic of the gas distribution in the North of Italy, narrated through the "voices" of various protagonists: an olive tree, an oil well, a young wife, whose husband works for an oil rig, which indulges on the residual areas of poverty, like Matera, instead of glorifying the wealth of the North, and which is a far cry from Mattei's intentions. The

film was meant for a television audience, but RAI (*Radiotelevisione Italiana*), the national broadcaster, refused to transmit it in its original form, exerting a proper censorship, and manifesting the fragility of a genre suspended between the requirements of the sponsor companies and the need for expression of the directors.

A different approach to the sponsorship of documentary – both in terms of the themes tackled and the objectives pursued – was taken by one of the leading post-war Italian industrialists, Adriano Olivetti. He was a visionary business magnate with a genuine interest in the improvement of workers' conditions and the redefinition of Western society as a whole. In the mid-1950's, Ivrea, the mid-size town in Piedmont where his typewriter and calculator machines were made, became an attraction pole for intellectuals from all over the world (Ochetto 229). Personalities such as Henry Kissinger tightened strong relationships with him and his products were a source of inspiration even for J. Watson Jr., president of IBM (Ochetto 154). The cultural activities in his factories were vibrant and well-financed, and the documentary, particularly the art documentary, was one of the art forms that attracted his patronage.

In 1954, Olivetti begun to finance a series of documentaries on historical monuments and masterpiece paintings; the man who inspired this interest and was in charge of the project was art critic Carlo Ragghianti, director of the journal *SeleARTE*. From 1954 to 1964, *SeleARTE cinematografica*, the production company created by Olivetti and Ragghianti, produced 20 films; among them, *Il cenacolo di Andrea del Castagno* (1954), *Stile di Piero della Francesca* (1954), *Urne etrusche di Volterra* (1958), *Certosa di Pavia* (1962). The last movie of the series, *Michelangiolo* (1964), was a Technicolor feature-length spectacular film translated in various languages and presented at the 1965 Venice *Mostra d'arte cinematografica*.

Ragghianti theorized his approach to cinema in a series of essays, later collected in the volume *Arti della visione*. In relation to the documentary practice, he argued that art documentaries reconstruct through time what an artwork developed through space, and therefore confirm his presupposition that the essence of any artistic representation is narrative (228). Examples of this kind of "literary" approach to the documentary are Luciano Emmer's *Racconto da un affresco: Giotto* (1938), or *Carpaccio* (1947), by Roberto Longhi and Umberto Barbaro. "Critofilms," as Ragghianti calls them, do not simply visualize any interpretation of an artwork, but are dignified by the text of an art critic, which is the true protagonist of the documentary, to the point that, in his view, such films without a commentary would be utterly insignificant (232).

Ragghianti's theories and practices can still be considered an example of the instrumental use of the documentary, though in this case the subordination is not a crude surrendering to the agenda of a sponsor but a more subtle subjection in which the film becomes the vehicle for the communication of the knowledge developed by another established discipline. And yet not all interactions between the documentary and the scientific or academic milieus were based on the idea that films were merely to be used as instruments. A research domain that allowed the development of the Italian documentary in the 1950s in a more autonomous direction was anthropology. Since Robert J. Flaherty's work in the 1920's, the curiosity and wonder for different human customs and living conditions have always been a main topic of documentary practice. All around the world, national institutions were born with the specific intent of exploring the living conditions of particular human communities. The Canadian Film Board, for example, was created with the mandate of "helping Canadians in all part of Canada to understand the ways of living and the problems of Canadians in other parts [of the country]" (Ellis and McLane 121). Same applies for the British Film Board, whose exploration scope was even

vaster, because of the amplitude of the British Empire's borders and the cultural differences within it. In Italy, despite the relatively small size of the country, the cultural differences between North and South were equally relevant and needed to be seriously confronted. At the end of the Second World War, Carlo Levi's *Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli* (1945) shocked Italian intellectuals and middle classes with its portrayal of the condition of remote areas of Southern Italy. The novel ignited a fierce debate on the possible solutions to the problem of Southern Italy's economic and social poverty, triggering a renewed interest in Gramsci's famous formulation of the *questione meridionale* (Grasso 16).

The work of anthropologist Ernesto De Martino made a powerful contribution to the rediscovery of a deeply pre-modern Italy and to the social, political and cultural debates that this discovery generated. De Martino analyzed magic and religious practices in Southern Italy, arguing that they were not the result of intrinsic characteristics of those areas' inhabitants, but a product of psychological defence mechanisms and historical circumstances, like the behaviour of Neapolitan aristocracy in 18th century (De Martino 182). His research inspired the work of several documentarists, like Michele Gandin, Luigi Di Gianni, Gian Vittorio Baldi, Cecilia Mangini, and Lino Del Fra, who set out to film folkloric and religious practices in Southern Italy. Their efforts were enthusiastically backed by De Martino and gained a widespread influence in Italian culture as a whole, encouraging well-known intellectuals to collaborate on some of these projects.[5]

The most interesting aspect of these anthropological documentaries, from my perspective, is that they caused a debate inside the scientific community. Not all scientists were ready to accept films as reliable sources of data and information. For example, Gandin's *Lamento funebre* (1953), which witnesses the practice of wailing in grieving in a small village of Basilicata, an

ancient and almost extinct ritual, was criticized because of the cooperation between film director and film subjects: in fact, in order to improve the quality of the images, the people of the village accepted to perform the ritual in an open space, instead of in a closed room as they were used to (Marano 148). Mangini's *Stendalì* was also criticized by the ethnologists of Rome's *Museo delle arti e tradizioni popolari*, on the basis of the supposed inadmissibility of an edited film for scientific purposes: to them, only a sequence shot would count as an objective document (Bertozzi 149). On the other hand, these documentaries were not mere tools for the practice of anthropology, and the documentarists claimed, implicitly, the right to pursue their own, autonomous goals, be them communicative, political, or aesthetic.

The claim to autonomy becomes explicit in the documentaries of Vittorio De Seta, a corpus of brilliant simplicity and enduring appeal. De Seta knew and respected De Martino's books and research, but he had too much fondness for the artistic side of his own work to be interested in its scientific aspects (Fofi and Volpi 25). He did not have qualms about telling to his characters what to do (Fofi and Volpi 17), or choosing the best angle for a shot; he was not interested in producing objective cinema, or data for a better understanding of, e.g., Sicilian fishermen; he wanted to make meaningful cinematic portraits of cultures, practices, people, communities that he cared about and felt were about to vanish. His short documentaries about Southern Italy, shot between 1954 and 1959, may look simple, but they are extremely innovative and, for some aspects, even radical. They were self-produced with limited crew, but they used the latest technical innovations: colour film, cinemascope, light and portable sound recording equipment. In that period, and for many years to come, the voice over commentary was not only a standard presence in any documentary, but almost a defining feature of the genre. De Seta abandons it, and uses instead a recorded soundtrack of voices, songs, noises as a base for the film

editing. He does not combine images with a direct sound but literally composes the image editing using the soundtrack as a reference. The elimination of the voiceover in De Seta's films is a huge step in the direction of a more autonomous documentary. Focusing on the quality of the images and sounds, he aims at representing the essential elements of a particular event as he perceives it, rather than an ideological message of which the voiceover is usually the guarantor.

Isole di fuoco (1954) shows the epic fight of the inhabitants of the Aeolian Islands against all elements: strong wind and big waves make difficult for the fishermen to come back to the harbour: De Seta's camera is on one of the boats and captures the ominous colours of the sky, the violent rolling of the rowed boat, the fear on the fishermen's faces. The night is long, and illuminated by the red explosions of Stromboli, the constantly active volcano. When the sun finally rises, the island changes abruptly: different colours and sounds spread through the villages, smiles appear on the faces of women and children, the men prepare for another day at sea. *Contadini del mare* (1955) follows a narrative thread as well, a day of tuna fishing on the Sicilian coast. The fishermen sail off at dawn for a precise spot where tunas have been passing every year for centuries. There are moments of idle waiting, when some of them eat, other sleep, or repair the nets; then tunas arrive and the action becomes hectic, until the nets are recovered and the huge tunas harpooned into the boats, bleeding, still violently shaking.

De Seta directed feature-length fiction movies in the ensuing years, some of them absolutely brilliant, like *Banditi a Orgosolo* (1961), and even films and documentaries for television, like *Diario di un maestro* (1973), but his short movies of the 1950's are his most innovative works. Their pure originality was unlikely to become a standard, but they had an enduring influence on Italian cinema, and even nowadays some of the most talented young Italian directors pay explicit homage to his cinema, like Franco Maresco does in more than an

interview (Fofi and Volpi 5), or Michelangelo Frammartino does, when he cites De Seta's *I dimenticati* (1959) in his last movie *Le quattro volte* (2010).[6]

De Seta's work is also central to the last important genre in Italian post-Second-World-War documentary: the nature documentary. Indeed, De Seta begun his career by collaborating with Panaria Film, a small Sicilian production company specialized in documentaries on the sea. One of their directors, Francesco Alliata, invented a camera case that allowed him to shoot beautiful underwater images already in 1946 for the documentary *Cacciatori sottomarini* (Bertozzi 153). Ten years later, they produced the most ambitious and successful nature documentary of the period, Folco Quilici's *Sesto continente* (1954). The young Quilici embarked in 1952 with a team of Italian scientists upon the boat Formica, for a four-month National Expedition to the Red Sea (Caputi 33). He was appointed director of the film department after few weeks and was able to capture the vegetal and animal inhabitants of the colourful coral reefs in amazing underwater images, and also to give an authentic feeling of the life on board the boat. The film was screened in 1954 at the Venice *Mostra* and acclaimed by public and critics alike.

1.1.2 The Second Wave: Experimentalism, Crisis, Renaissance

Amid the end of the 1960's and the beginning of the 1970's many factors contributed to Italian cinema's fall into what was perceived by many as an irreversible crisis (Grassi and Aprà 11). Arguably the most important one was the surge of television as a major contender in the audiovisual entertainment industry. In 1964, Italian households spent on cinema half of their expenses for entertainment, but ten years before the ratio was two third: cinema spectators were decreasing sharply, while television owners were increasing at an annual rate of 18% (Pinto 45). This transformation produced radical changes in all Western societies, but whereas in other parts of the world it brought also fresh and promising new possibilities, like the production of

documentary series specifically intended for television, as it happened in Great Britain, Canada and the United States already in the mid-1950's (Ellis and McLane 180), in Italy it opened a divide between commercial and independent cinema that still largely characterizes the Italian audiovisual production.[7]

Politics was a main factor as well, at least until the end of the 1970's. Educational institutions, like the *Centro sperimentale di cinematografia* in Rome, and professional associations, like ANAC (*Associazione Nazionale Autori Cinematografici*) and AID (*Associazione Internazionale Documentaristi*), were either split or transformed by radical ideas and revolutionary intentions (Bertozzi 209-10). New kinds of film distribution were experimented as well. In 1967, Turin's *Cooperativa cinema indipendente* and Rome's *Filmstudio '70* attracted cinephiles, intellectuals, students willing to invent new, more participatory and politically engaged forms of film experience (Carabba 64).

On the one hand, authors felt the need to work free from any commercial constraints and express their creativity without abiding by any rule; cultural organizers begun to conceive films as debate opportunities and political tools; and spectators flocked to small theatres and private screenings. On the other hand, Italian screens were invaded by thousands of soft porn movies and unsophisticated comedies (Miccichè, *Cinema italiano degli anni '70* 8-10). As a result of this polarization, institutional practices like the public funding of documentaries for theatrical release languished on the verge of extinction. The government continued to fund documentaries that were neither commercially successful nor politically engaged, but it became obvious that this practice was becoming increasingly ineffective: in 25 years, between 1952 and 1977, only 286 documentaries were produced with governmental funds and only a handful of them were actually screened (Bertozzi 213).

However, the national broadcaster RAI, thanks to the monopoly it enjoyed in its first twenty years of existence, provided some space for what its administrators judged as culturally relevant documentary projects. Most often, these documentary productions were the work of well-known fiction film directors, as in the case of Luigi Comencini's *I bambini e noi* (1970), a TV series centered on interviews to Italian children of different social and geographical backgrounds, or the already mentioned innovative hybrid between fiction and documentary by Vittorio De Seta, *Diario di un maestro*, a touching portrait of a young school teacher and his students in a poor district of Rome.

Fruitful collaborations between RAI and independent producers were not too rare. An example is the series of films and videos of the collective group *Videobase*. It was formed in 1970 by Anna Lajolo, Guido Lombardi and Alfredo Leonardi, who were among the first Italian videomakers. They put their expertise on light and movable recording equipment in the service of underground, experimental and political cinema, documenting or reporting on some of the most controversial issues of the period. The titles of some of their works are self-explanatory: *La casa è un diritto, non un privilegio* (1970), *Valpreda è innocente, la strage è di stato* (1972),[8] *Lotta di classe alla Fiat* (1973). RAI produced many of their documentaries, particularly *L'isola dell'isola* (1974), on a small community in Sardinia, and *E nua ca simu a forza du mundu* (1971), about the high number of deaths on the job in the construction sector. Even though these documentaries were inspired by a genuine ethical commitment for better justice and social improvement, they were not different from almost all documentaries of the period in their subordinated and ancillary role: they were instruments of institutions, in this case leftist political parties, that were extremely powerful in Italy in the 1970's, instead of being made and regarded as autonomous forms of expression with peculiar characteristics. It is only in the following

decade that the Italian documentary began to acquire a sharper consciousness of its autonomy and to develop its own institutional role.

1.1.3 Italian Documentary from the 1980's to the Present

In 1976, a sentence from the Constitutional Court imposed the end of the public national broadcaster's monopoly. The dawn of private television was a time of unbridled experimentation and witnessed the budding of dozens of local broadcasters throughout Italy, some of them keen to rely on a new generation of filmmakers, who were testing lighter and more affordable technologies and formats, like Super8 and Betamax. This period ended in 1980, when *TeleMilano* was transformed in *Canale 5* and, thanks to its immediate success, set the standard for both public and commercial Italian television, which became entangled in a race for maximization of audience and profit (Sinclair and Turner 78).

Some critics maintained that the media clash between private and public television in the 1980's left Italian cinema dead on the battlefield. Lino Micciché, for example, writes that, because television absorbed all the attention and energy of the media sector, the 1980's are "the long grey decade" of Italian cinema (*Schermi opachi* 5). From the point of view of documentary filmmaking, the crisis was even more acute: until the advent of private television, the documentary had been exploited by political parties, associations, and all sorts of social and economic groups for ideological, political and scientific purposes, but nobody was interested in developing its commercial potential. When commercial exploitation became the golden rule of Italian media, the documentary lost even its subordinated role as instrumental genre of film and video production and seemed to be destined to complete oblivion (Bertozzi 242-43). However, while the number of documentary productions was becoming increasingly smaller, Italian documentary was finally gaining artistic and cultural autonomy; abandoned by patrons and

politicians, disregarded by TV executive officers, the documentary became the favourite genre of experimental artists and ethically-conscious filmmakers like Silvano Agosti, Yervant Gianikian, Angela Ricci Lucchi, and Daniele Segre. Thanks to their work, the documentary started its way towards cultural rehabilitation and turned into a mature form of artistic expression.

Agosti's first important work is *Matti da slegare* (1975), a film co-directed with Marco Bellocchio, Sandro Petraglia and Stefano Rulli, that joined the debate around the reform of the psychiatric institutes, promoted by neurologist Franco Basaglia, which led five years later to the closure of the asylums. The film follows three men, fortuitously released from an asylum, and witnesses their difficulties to reintegrate into society because of the traumatic experiences they suffered. The idea of the film was suggested by a public officer of the Health Administration in Parma, which co-financed the project (Bertozzi 225). Agosti continued to collaborate with this institution in the following years, notably for *D'amore si vive* (1983), a reportage on sexuality and love, reminiscent of Pasolini's *Comizi d'amore* (1965). Agosti's documentaries are never ideological, never guided by a pre-determined thesis, and always inspired by a sincere pursuit for truthfulness and a profound respect of reality.

A completely different aesthetic approach is that of Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi. They work with found and stock footage, which they reinterpret and transform, changing, e.g., the colour, or the speed of the film. For this purpose, they build specific machines, capable of re-photographing the original materials, and making them available for a complete re-contextualization (Mereghetti and Nosei 23). *From the Pole to the Equator* (1986) is their longest and most ambitious film, made from the archive footage of early Italian cinematographer Luca Comerio, with the addition of an impressive soundtrack from US musicians Keith Ullrich and Charles Anderson. The original footage is of uncertain date, but was

probably shot in the late 1920's, and shows Italian missionaries educating natives in Africa, a big game hunting, British military parades in India and all sorts of imperialistic imagery. Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's re-editing of the material is extraordinarily effective in giving the spectator a sense of "presence" of history and in suggesting a reflection upon the role of images in the perception of the past.

Daniele Segre begun his career as a set photographer for *Matti da slegare*, but rapidly evolved an original and prolific approach to filmmaking that established him as reference point for the Italian documentary scene of the last three decades. Since his first movies, like *Perché droga* (1976), first Italian documentary on the problem of drug addiction, shot in the Mirafiori district of Turin, and *Ragazzi di stadio* (1980), on Juventus football club's supporters, first look at the once neglected phenomenon of football hooligans, he manifested an outstanding ability to focus on the fringes of Italian society and point out to public opinion ignored issues and social emergences. His pragmatic attitude towards the documentary production allowed him not only to be a very prolific and longstanding filmmaker, but to found a school, *I cammelli*, in 1989, where his idea of the documentary as "conscious resistance to homologation" (Lischi 14) could thrive and be passed on to younger generations.

In the last twenty years the Italian documentary evolved at an unprecedented pace. Brilliant young directors made their debut during the 1990's, like Roberto Nanni, who reinstated the interview-genre, at that time associated with old-fashion documentary practices, with his dramatic *The Victory of Love - A Conversation with Derek Jarman* (1993); Alessandro Rossetto, director of *Il fuoco di Napoli* (1995), the compassionate portrait of a family of fireworks manufacturers in Naples; Gianfranco Rosi, who started his international career with *Boatman* (1994), a film on the tranquil cycle of life and death along the banks of the Ganges, sacred and

polluted river where Indians bath, prey, and mourn their deaths; and Marco Amenta, director of *Diario di una siciliana ribelle* (1997), the story of Rita Atria, daughter of a Mafia boss, who decided to denounce his father and brother's killers despite her fear of reprisals.

At the end of the 1990's, a couple of events brought fresh promises of new spaces for documentary in television schedules. In 1999, the birth of *Doc/it*, the Association of Documentary professionals, gave the category an official representative, appointed to deal with broadcasters and politicians. In 1997 *Canal+* acquired the 90% of *Telepiù*, the first Italian pay television, and started to invest in the production of documentaries, importing in Italy its business model, that proved to be so successful in France.[9] Even if not all the promises of the late 1990's lived up to the expectations they created, the last decade saw an amazing number of internationally acclaimed documentaries coming to the fore, and this fact alone is a demonstration of the extraordinary vitality of the sector.

From Costanza Quatriglio's moving debut *Ècosaimale?* (2000), on the street life of female young children in an old neighbourhood of Palermo, to the metaphysical deepness of Michelangelo Frammartino's *Le quattro volte* (2010), the whole decade is punctuated by original and provocative documentaries. In 2009 alone, around 300 documentaries were produced in Italy, and 15 obtained theatrical release (Viganò and Sovena *Rapporto 2009* 131). Among them, there were such gems as Sergio Basso's *Giallo a Milano* (2009), on the Milanese Chinese community; Marcello Sannino's *Corde* (2009), on the life of a shy Neapolitan boxer with a childish face; Federica di Giacomo's *Housing*, on the obsessive fears of the inhabitants of a neighbourhood in Bari, who cling to the walls of their housing projects for fear of their apartments being squatted overnight; and Pietro Marcello's *La bocca del lupo* (2009), on the intense love story of Enzo and Mary, who met in prison, and then started a life together, in the

alleys of old Genoa. While Italian fiction cinema is perennially "waiting to be reborn" (Ghelli 19), documentary is clearly becoming its most innovative and vibrant face.

1.1.4 Focus on Production and Distribution

In the last fifteen years, the Italian independent producers have abandoned the experimentalism of the alternative production modes of the 1970's and are now largely basing their business models on public subsidies. A typical independent producer does not invest risk money, she covers the budget of her films in advance, with money coming from the Media fund of the European Union, or Italian Film Commissions and Regional Funds, and pre-selling the film to various broadcasters. The biggest independent producers, like Stefilm and Fandango, work with European and in some cases worldwide televisions, so they have to comply with international broadcast standards, not only in terms of length and technical details, but also in terms of creative choices. In order to avoid these constraints, some directors try to produce their documentaries themselves, but it is a risky and quite rare circumstance (Bignami 93-95). In either case, an almost obligated choice is to submit the final work to an international festival, hoping that a win will secure theatrical distribution. Indeed, many Italian documentaries recently enjoyed unanimous recognition at international festivals: it is the case of *La bocca del lupo* (2009), *Le quattro volte* (2010), Alessandro Fasulo's *Rumore bianco* (2008), Benoit Felici's *Unfinished Italy* (2010). Such a recognition usually opens the doors of a small distribution in selected cities, and the mounting interest in documentary even prompted the creation of theatrical distribution circuits specialized in documentary, like "Doc in Tour," in the Emilia Romagna region, that resemble the alternative circuits of the 1970's.

Another production and distribution model that is also gaining popularity is crowdsourcing, which is a particular form of business management that outsources important

business functions of a company not to another company, with which the parent company can have hierarchical ties, but to an anonymous crowd. From a cultural point of view, it is a way to elude the hierarchical networks constituted by small juries of experts, be them Festival juries or political committees. From an economic point of view, it is a new way to exploit a business model that is as old as the history of human communities, but whose potentiality has expanded enormously in the last ten-fifteen years, thanks to new technologies such as internet. What really sets crowdsourcing apart from other business solutions is that the primary motivation of those who participate in it is not money: one could describe it as amateur activity, with a business side. According to Jeff Howe, who studied the topic from an economic point of view, "crowdsourcing has arisen organically to capitalize on the economic value the amateur class creates" (Howe 39).

Crowdfunding is a special inflection of crowdsourcing, which is focused on capital-raising through crowdsourcing. Italian entrepreneurs were relatively fast in adopting the new technology: when Alberto Falossi, a professor at the University of Pisa, started Kapipal.com in 2009, it was one of the first platforms devoted to personal projects. From its foundation, it helped raising $250,000 for 8,000 projects.[10] Other Italian crowdfunding websites are Eppela, Kapipal, Boomstarter, Trancemedia, Cineama, and Produzioni dal basso. None of them, however, can compete, in terms of revenues and accesses, with Kickstarter.com, based in the US, which is the most important crowdfunding player worldwide. As of April 2012, the company could claim more than $175 million pledged and more than 20,000 successfully funded projects, and it already financed several hundred projects worth more than $50,000, some of which worth millions of dollars.[11]

Two of the most successful Italian examples of crowd-funded projects are *Subbuteopia* (2011) and *Vinylmania* (2011). Both could count on vast communities of fans to support their

fundraising: fans of Subbuteo, the soccer table game, for the first one, and fans of the vinyl records for the second one. The latter was produced by Stefilm, with a budget of around €200,000, but they financed on kickstarter.com the production of a double DVD with special content. The campaign was called *Our 33 in 45* and raised $33,000 in 45 days.

Most of Italian crowd-funded projects are posted by amateur individuals, and their target is below €5,000. Produzioni dal basso has more than 15,000 members, and, as of July 2012, around 200 projects were in the process of being financed. Some of them were very ambitious: Emanuele Caruso's *E fu sera e fu mattina* is a feature- length with a budget of €300,000, 150,000 of which financed through the website. It is produced by the *Associazione culturale il nucleo*, with the support of Turin Film Commision but the organizing effort is directed by the priest of Mussotto, Alba.[12] Another ambitious project is Pietro Faiella and Pierlorenzo Puglielli's *Dietro il paesaggio*, a psychological western, which is not sponsored by any association or community, and at the moment seems much less successful, since only a tenth of the pledged budget has been funded.[13]

Any crowdfunded platform allows contributors to comment. Some, like Cineama, even permits users to manipulate the scripts and re-edit the sequences. This demand for participation was not born with crowdfunding. It was typical, for example, of 1970's collective filmmaking practices, particularly what Argentine filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino called "Third Cinema." In their manifesto, published in 1969 in Cuban cinema journal "Tricontinental," they envisioned a film practice based on: "Group-level cooperation between different countries […] to assure the completion of a film," (280) and "distribution mechanisms provided by the revolutionary organization," (280) which, however, rest "upon the strengthening of rigorously underground base structures" (281). The emphasis on the network is just one of the similarities

between crowdfunded projects and Third cinema, more striking is the idea that the film itself is not the most important aspect of this kind of communication: “Each showing […] became […] a kind of enlarged cell meeting of which the films were a part, but not the most important factor. We discovered a new facet of cinema: the participation of people, who, until then, were considered spectators” (282). The creation of a community is what really connects these two forms of filmmaking. What sets Third Cinema apart, instead, is mainly its political dimension, which is not necessarily a characteristic of crowdfunded projects.

Other aspects of this technology, especially the scale of collaboration allowed by the internet platform, are genuinely original, but they sometimes hide dangerous features. From an economic point of view, crowdfunding websites are marketing tools that store extremely valuable information for corporations. They allow corporations to know not only how many people are watching an audiovisual product, but, commercially speaking, who: the whole history of one’s preferences and purchases. Every investor and user is traceable, and these technologies, which are now used by people for creating and sharing original content, are actually building a market for future, more commercially-oriented, industrial developments (Gates 132). These websites are already making huge profits: Kickstarter applies a 5% fee on any transaction, then Amazon, through which the payment method passes, apply another 3-5%, which means that, as in the case of Facebook, they are turning into commodities people’s own connections, friendships, fantasies and projects. I think that, as of now, there are still positive cultural aspects in this phenomenon, but the tide could rapidly reverse in the near future.

In Italy, local and personal interests are the main driving force behind crowd-funded content. Few are bold enough to propose ambitious projects like those in Kickstarter, but the interest is growing and there are encouraging signals. If this is going to change the way Italian

documentaries will be made in the future is too soon to say. Even though there are potential dangers in these new production and distribution opportunities, they may still favour a new generation of creative individuals, supported by autonomous communities of internet users.

As a final remark to this brief history of post-war Italian documentary, I would add that my aim was to emphasize the profound changes that transformed the genre in the last thirty years. Italian documentary emerged from recent industrial and technological media revolutions with substantial modifications in its institutional role and aesthetic ambitions. The documentary has been frequently employed as a tool to gauge, describe and vindicate social and political issues in any society, but its political role is less ideologically constrained now than it was in the 1970's, when the complex relationship between image and reality was often put aside in the name of political urgency. In the meantime, its role as a technology of perception and as an art form gained space and relevance in light of a renewed autonomy from ideological, cultural and economic pressures. If nowadays the documentary is not a commercially more successful genre than it was in the 1960's and 1970's, at least in Italy, it is certainly a more mature form of artistic expression, and for this reason, I argue, it deserves a more careful critical examination.

1.2 Italian Documentary Studies

The marginalization of documentary directors to which I alluded at the beginning of the previous chapter is echoed by a similar condition of documentary studies in the domain of academic research; it was even worst in the past, but even nowadays only a few scholars are actively involved in documentary research in Italy, and most of the cultural and promotional activities for a broader diffusion and better appreciation of the documentary production are carried out by associations and activists (Bertozzi 13).

The works discussed in this literature review of the academic studies on Italian documentary are organized in four categories. The first one groups film theories that are partially, or exclusively, devoted to documentary. Among these contributions, two are for my purposes the most important: Francesco Casetti's *Teorie del cinema*, which was one of the first attempts to historicize film theories of the 1950's, and revise their focus on the problem of cinematic realism from the standpoint of semiotics and structuralism; and Marco Bertozzi and Gianfranco Pannone's *L'idea documentaria*, which is a recent study specifically dedicated to a definition of the theory and practice of the documentary form. The second group includes documentary histories written by Italian scholars. Surprisingly, very few are dedicated specifically to Italian films, and the vast majority deals mainly with international schools and authors; this is another signal of the underrated status of the documentary production within the national borders. The third group includes monographic studies on single directors; as I already mentioned, it does not come as a surprise that most of them are devoted to renowned fiction film directors that occasionally turned their attention to the documentary. The fourth group comprises studies on genres, movements, and particular periods, or regions, such as studies on 1950's documentaries, or Sicilian documentaries.

I deliberately left out of the picture, even if their contributions to the domain of documentary studies may have been of great importance, all monographs on Italian cinema that did not specifically address the documentary, like the important works by Millicent Marcus on Italian Neorealism,[14] or Peter Bondanella's *History of Italian Cinema*. This negligence is merely motivated by the restricted focus of my research and by the awareness that their work is already widely known by North-American scholars.

1.2.1 Documentary Theories

Francesco Casetti is one of the most important Italian film theorists, and, even though he has never addressed the documentary specifically, he has tackled the question of realism in several occasions, and particularly in his volume *Teorie del cinema*. Casetti begins the book with an analysis of the works of two important critics and theorists of the 1950's, André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer; he maintains that the importance of these authors consists primarily in their successful overturning of previous definitions of cinema technology, which used to negate the artistic quality of the medium, because of its mechanical reproducibility. Bazin and Kracauer, on the contrary, opened new theoretical possibilities when they moved realism from a category that discriminates between realistic and less realistic representations to an ontological category that defines the relationship between reality and the cinematic experience (Casetti 31). In this sense, Casetti interprets Bazin in a way not too dissimilar from that of Vivian Sobchack and the other scholars whose works I will discuss in the next chapter. The latter builds on Bazin's theory in order to develop a phenomenological approach to film studies that understands film experience as a perceptual modality (*The Address of the Eye* 9-23), the former considers Bazin the precursor of any ontological approach to film study.

Even the highly criticized idea of the "forbidden montage" turns out to be less controversial, if looked upon through Casetti's lenses. Bazin criticized the practice of separating in two shots important elements of a sequence. As an example, he describes a scene in which the hunter and the dangerous game he is hunting are never filmed within the same frame, and maintains that this kind of montage results in a far less powerful cinematic experience, compared to that provided by a continuous shot portraying the two in hazardous proximity (Casetti 29). As Casetti points out, this is not as to say that film must faithfully reproduce reality, as some critics

maintained, but that any film should exploit its powerful resources, and not try to trick the audience with disappointing montage effects. One of the consequences of this theory, as Casetti notices, is that the purest the filmic experience, the closest a film is to a documentary: if there is no montage trick, it means that the hunter is really risking his life, and therefore that the scene is representing not only a character engaged in a fictitious adventure, but a man putting his own life at risk (Casetti 30).

Sigfried Kracauer's theory is not too distant from that of Bazin, in Casetti's perspective, even though the German theorist is more dogmatic and his thought sometimes evolves in a normative aesthetics. The main merit of Kracauer is to focus on the technology of cinema and its characteristics, in order to justify the peculiar tendency of cinema towards the reproduction of reality. Casetti summarizes well the differences between the two theorists writing that, for Bazin, cinema has to look for the "truth" of things, it is a method that allows for deep explorations beneath the surface of things, whereas for Kracauer cinema has to look for "reality," it is a method to show how things really are (37). For both, however, cinematic realism is not just a stylistic feature used by some directors in pursuit of more dramatic effects, but the distinctive quality that defines cinema's relationship with reality and with the other arts.

The most important characteristic of Casetti's book is therefore its well-elaborated appeal for a better reading of two of the most important theorists of realism, and its call for a systematic understanding of their profound and lasting influence, which is evident not only on a generation of filmmakers that are not usually called realists, like Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut and Pier Paolo Pasolini, but on generations of scholars and theorists that confronted their positions in fruitful ways, from Gilles Deleuze to Vivian Sobchack, [15] often in relation to documentary theory.

L'idea documentaria, the recent study by Marco Bertozzi in collaboration with Gianfranco Pannone, is completely devoted to the documentary, but exemplifies an approach diametrically opposed to Casetti's. The editor of the volume has collected interviews with directors, producers, commissioning editors, critics and theorists, in which the interviewees recount their personal experiences and describe their own work and methodologies. Through these interviews, the book also provides important information about the Italian documentary production, especially its legal, political, economic, and industrial aspects. To all of the contributors to the volume, the editor asks the same question: what is the condition of documentary in contemporary Italy?

The interviewees' answers cover a wide spectrum: they range from Adriano Aprà's optimism, justified by a list of more than ten documentaries produced between the end of the 1990's and the beginning of the 2000's, which, in his opinion, are the products of a new generation of filmmakers that overcame the creative crisis of the 1970's and 1980's (187), to the pessimism of Gianfranco Pannone and Alessandro Signetto, who highlight the backwardness of the Italian situation, in comparison to that of countries like France, Germany, Great Britain, Canada and the United States (Signetto 280). According to the pessimists, the problem is twofold: on the one hand, there is a persistent underestimation of the documentary genre in Italy, which, combined with the everlasting myth of the *auteur*, pushes the majority of young filmmakers to try fiction film first, and documentary only as a second choice; on the other hand, there is the indifference of the television duopoly,[16] which does not invest in the production of documentary and instead it contents itself and its audience with the acquisition of international products that are subsequently disassembled and used to fill educational programs about nature or history.[17]

And yet, even the more pessimistic among the interviewees cannot ignore the strong signals of change in the Italian documentary scene. Whether they ascribe it to the emergence of a new generation of filmmakers more interested in reality, to some European initiatives, like the MEDIA programme, that stimulate the co-production and distribution of documentaries within the European countries, or to the diffusion of new technologies that lower the costs of production, they all agree that the Italian documentary is changing for the better. Bertozzi and Pannone's book is important, in this respect, because it provides a multi-perspective and non-superficial picture of this evolving scenario.

Even though it seems unquestionable to me that there is not a strong tradition of theoretical reflection on the documentary form in Italy, the reasons why this tradition never developed may be difficult to grasp. It might be that the theoretical reflection on fiction cinema, being mostly focused on the definition of realism, brought to a general overlooking of documentary cinema as a specific form and to an assimilation of the latter to realist and neorealist fiction cinema. This attitude could have been justified by the objectively poor quality of many Italian documentaries of the 1950's and 1960's, which were almost never screened and served, as I already recalled, mostly to provide easy money for unscrupulous producers. However, as I hope the brief history that I traced can testify, I believe that a bright tradition of Italian documentary can be isolated and should be studied. The main obstacle to this task is arguably the lack of interest by Italian film scholars for a systematic analysis of the theoretical aspects concerning the documentary form. Since I am convinced that without a clear definition of the specificities of the documentary form and its differences from fiction cinema any kind of investigation, neither theoretical nor historical, can be produced, I consider the definition of the

institution of documentary as an absolute priority of Italian film studies and I will devote the whole second part of this dissertation to this purpose.

1.2.2 Documentary Histories

Italian film criticism has tended to be primarily of a historical kind, which is consistent with the prevalent historicism of the Italian humanistic and literary tradition. Even in this respect, however, the first and easiest thing to note, when comparing the space dedicated to Italian documentary in the publications on Italian film history, is the marginal role that documentary had, compared to that of fiction film. For example, in Gian Piero Brunetta's approximately 3000-page long *Storia del cinema italiano*, only five pages are devoted to documentary, and they are headed by the curious title *Il gioco delle riserve* ("The game of the second string"). While this title and the chapter discuss only the documentaries from the end of the 1940's to the end of the 1950's, it remains true and significant that there are no other chapters in Brunetta's massive work about documentary.

The content of this little chapter is consistent with its brevity and title. Brunetta laments the absence, in Italy, of an authentic documentary school, comparable to the Canadian, and the English ones, and deplores the conformism and servile subordination to narrow didactic objectives of most of the documentary productions of the 1950's, which were, incidentally, generously financed by the state. The pre-eminent Italian film historian exempts from such a negative judgment only a very few works, principally the efforts of major fiction film directors, like Michelangelo Antonioni, Dino Risi, Luigi Comencini and Ermanno Olmi, whose documentaries, according to Brunetta, were the juvenile training camp where they could test and elaborate the "authorial poetics" that was about to blossom in their fiction film productions (3: 487). In the midst of the other, "minor," works, he cites art documentaries, particularly those by

Massimo Mida and Luciano Emmer, the documentaries on the resistance against fascism by Domenico Paolella and Fausto Fornari, and finally the first attempts to realize anthropological and sociological documentaries, even though, as I already mentioned in the previous chapter, the most significant achievements of this genre were realized only from the 1960's on.

Brunetta's attitude towards documentary is not isolated, and the lack of interest from Italian film scholar is reflected in the scarcity of works dedicated to the history of the documentary form. The first true historical account of Italian documentary is Gianpaolo Bernagozzi's *Il cinema corto*. Bernagozzi's book is the outcome of an intense archival and research work; he went as far as sending a questionnaire to all documentarists that were active, to his knowledge, at that time (the 1970's) in Italy. Thanks to this initiative, he obtained biographies and filmographies of more than one hundred directors, whose documentaries are often difficult, or impossible, to find.

In addition to providing this useful collection of data, Bernagozzi's book traces the history of the Italian documentary from 1940 to the end of the 1970's. The author opts for a very inclusive definition of the genre, and comprises in his account even marginalized sub-genres like touristic and industrial documentaries. This is a very far-reaching idea, whose impact, however, is somewhat diminished by the ideological approach of the book. In fact, Bernagozzi welcomes these sub-genres only to treat them as degraded forms of cinematic expressions: touristic documentary, for example, is, in his view, "uno strappalacrime per richiamare in Italia gli appetiti erotici delle mature signore della Mitteleuropa" (161),[18] while industrial documentaries are not, as they should be, faithful and objective watchers of companies and firms, but part of advertising campaigns (166). True documentary, instead, should be, for Bernagozzi, loyal to Grierson's and Ivens's teachings; it should count on its capacity to select the important facts of

real life and transform them in a lively form of art (48), and should be aware of its political function, because it is the only ammunition left to avant-garde cinema in its battle against the big corporations (48).

From these foundational principles, Bernagozzi draws a critical methodology that interprets the documentary principally as instrumental in supporting political action, and therefore measures only its efficacy as a political tool. Were it methodologically rigorous and coherent, this approach would be potentially fruitful; yet, unfortunately, not only the theoretical premises are not well defined, but the syntax of Bernagozzi's prose itself is so abstract and formulaic to prevent any clear concept from emerging. As an example, it will suffice this paragraph on the 1960's militant cine-clubs:

> Ed anche in questi casi - scuola e fabbrica - si tratta di cinema-momento che serve da analisi di un particolare istante della lotta e della informazione, di cinema più che mai a struttura orizzontale, permeato di ridondanze naturalistiche ed innervato, anche per gli spazi contingenti che gli sono necessari, nella antinomia - non dialettica - di due realtà (138).[19]

It is only thirty years after Bernagozzi's book that finally another scholar, Marco Bertozzi, focused on the history of Italian documentary, and he did it with such an authoritativeness and competence to put his work, *Storia del documentario italiano*, at the forefront of a renaissance of Italian documentary studies. Inspired by a sincere passion for what he calls "cinema del reale" (14),[20] and its powers of revelation, Bertozzi follows the history of Italian documentary from its beginnings to 2008. In his view, it is thanks to the documentary that images and stories of everyday existence in Italy finally emerge and find a public, revealing a much more diverse and fascinating country than the one represented in daily television images.

These stories are not only part of the history of Italian cinema, but they help understand and shape Italian history tout-court.

Bertozzi's historiographical project is to follow and register the transformations of what he calls *l'idea documentaria* (the documentary idea), starting from its first appearances in the *vedute* of Italian monuments and art treasures at the beginning of the 20th century (12). During Fascism, the ideological and propagandistic needs of the regime affected the production of the *cinema del reale*, which became more inclined to educate than to explore. The documentary idea, though, was not annihilated, but nurtured several strands of cinematography that converged to the experience of the Neorealism. The moment when fiction cinema appropriated the *idea documentaria* marks the beginning of a profound crisis of Italian documentary that lasted, according to Bertozzi, well into the 1990's (13). His book, together with such festivals as *Incontri internazionali di Udine* and the efforts of the *Cineteca di Bologna* towards the preservation of pre-Second-World-War documentaries is, at his own admission, one of the symptoms of a very recent resurgence of interest in the *idea documentaria* as something not related, or at least not primarily and uniquely related, to fiction cinema.

Bertozzi seems to be driven by the intention to inaugurate a new perspective on Italian documentary, one cleared of prejudices and the persistence of old categories. He even refuses the usual definitions of the documentary practice:

> I tentativi di classificazioni tematiche del documentario - d'arte, turistico, industriale, scientifico… - lo consegnano a una curiosa vaghezza semantica. Non ci aiutano a definirlo se non come ricettacolo del mondo e scarto del 'vero cinema.' Facile risulta l'inaugurazione di nuovi generi, in un'iperbole

> tassonomica che camuffa un'ossessione di controllo funzionale ai palinsesti da riempire.[21] (17)

Paraphrasing Deleuze, Bertozzi states that documentary is not an instrumental genre, which can be used indifferently by journalists for showing reality, or by intellectuals for reflecting on an event, but it has a specific identity, which is inseparable from its cinematic roots (19), and this is the reason why it is so important to discover its history. Most importantly, Bertozzi does not narrate a generic and vague transnational history of the documentary form, but the specificities of the Italian documentary production.

The importance of Bertozzi's book is even more evident when one considers that most of the other Italian film historians that worked on documentary focused on the international scene rather than the Italian one. For example, Carlo Alberto Pinelli's book *La vita colta in flagrante* is a quick review of all main international documentary schools and directors from the 1920's to the 2000's, that does not delve too much into theoretical questions and provides instead chronological notes on the biography of the directors and on their works. The book is organized around the descriptions of movements and schools that occupy a decade, more or less, and pertain to specific geographical contexts, e.g. the Soviet school of the 1920's, or the English school of the 1930's. This kind of periodization, although it certainly offers a concise overview of documentary history, is evidently quite rigid, and forces the author to put together works and filmmakers that have nothing in common, like Victor Turin and Dziga Vertov, and spares him the effort to provide more comprehensive historical explanations and generalizations. Yet, the most disappointing aspect of Pinelli's book, at least from my point of view, is the tiny space accorded to Italian documentary: there are two chapters about Italian filmmakers, but they occupy just nine of the 159 pages of the essay.

Though primarily focused on the history of the documentary form, Pinelli's work briefly touches on theoretical issues when it tackles, in the introduction to the book, the definition of what a documentary is. After noting that the documentary is based on an investment of trust that goes from the spectator to the director (11), Pinelli distinguishes documentary from news, because, in his view, authentic documentary should always follow a narrative pattern, and thus exhibit a start, an elaboration, and a conclusion, not only consistent, but also permeated with a subtle artistic tension (11). While the exclusion of narrative in news reports is puzzling, the reference to the artistic tension of the documentary production is valuable, though it would need a great deal of elaboration.

Pinelli's limited interest in theorizing the documentary is in sharp contrast to Roberto Nepoti, who in his *Storia del documentario* considers in great detail general theoretical issues and specifically the definition of the documentary practice. Indeed, the title of the book seems to be almost inappropriate, given that Nepoti's work is less an historical account than a synchronic analysis of cinematic theories, principally continental (French and Italian) semiotic theory, applied to documentary. He stresses three main theoretical problems: the relationship between fiction and non-fiction, which he calls the diegetic level, the relationship between representation and reality, which is the linguistic level, and the relationship between film and spectator, or pragmatic level (9).

Nepoti's conclusions are interesting: he maintains that the difference between fiction film and documentary, on a diegetic level, depends on a different relationship, on a linguistic level, between representation and reality. In fact, documentary has to "documentarize" its linguistic aspects showing the process of signification, while fiction has to "fictionalize" them, hiding all references to the way it creates its meaning (145). This kind of categorization is not exhaustive

and cannot explain the differences, for example, between fiction and mockumentary, which, on a linguistic level, adopts the same traits. The problems of such a conclusion are evident to Nepoti himself, who admits that the distinction between documentary and fiction cannot be based on syntactic or semantic rules, but on a communicative convention, or, in other words, has to refer to a pragmatics (146). Even though this sentence seems to point towards an analysis of documentary as a social practice, in reality Nepoti does not move from his semiotic approach and thinks of "communicative conventions" as resulting from different relationships between sender and receiver of a text, not as social constructs. As a consequence, what he describes as a "documentary reading" (147) implies just a different positioning of the spectator in relation to the text, activated by linguistic practices. In the end, however, despite some methodological limits, Nepoti's effort is definitively praiseworthy, above all because it is one of the very few attempts to build a documentary theory from an Italian perspective.

In sum, despite their commendable efforts, Pinelli and Nepoti did not manage, in my opinion, to write the much needed comprehensive history of the Italian documentary they were aiming for, and it is only after Bertozzi's book that a reliable and exhaustive history finally exists; this means firstly that the rich corpus of Italian "cinema of the real" is now more easily accessible, not only to media scholars, but to historians and sociologists, and anyone interested in 20th century Italian and European societies; secondly that the Italian documentary can, at last, find a place in the larger map of world documentary history. However, as I already mentioned, the situation has not improved when it comes to theoretical analyses, and this deficit has repercussions even on books like that of Bertozzi. Without a clearer definition of what a documentary is, it is difficult, for example, to understand which films have to be inserted in a documentary history, or even just to understand what we mean when we say "documentary."

Writing about contemporary documentary, Bertozzi points to the growing penetration of what he calls the "documentary idea" in literature and theatre, and cites the increasing number of authors who, like Roberto Saviano and Marco Paolini, write fictions based on real events (278). Yet, a few lines later, he concludes that "l'idea documentaria è ormai consapevole di maneggiare 'immagini di realtà' piuttosto che attendibili 'realtà'" (279).[22] Without a theoretical framework that justifies and supports this kind of statements, Bertozzi's references to the relationships between reality and representation and reality and perception may appear problematic, because it is not easy to demonstrate how the documentary can address the reality and at the same time be conscious that it is not made of reality, but of images of it. I will give a tentative solution to this problem in section 2 of the dissertation, but it is fair to say that the lack of interest, in Italian film studies, for thorough theoretical elaborations that go beyond the semiotics of the moving image is hardly Bertozzi's fault, and his book remains an undisputable reference point for anyone interested in Italian documentary, and particularly those, like the ones I turn my attention to in the next section, that narrow the focus of their analyses to the works of single filmmakers or historical periods.

1.2.3 Monographic Studies

Monographic studies are usually less concerned with theoretical issues, thus it is not surprising that they tend to reproduce the already noted pattern of condescension toward the documentary that is typical of Italian film scholars in general. However, the critics' keen sensitivity to the talent of the directors in question leads inevitably to a more positive discourse on the documentary practice. This is true not only in the case of monographs about relatively little known documentarists like Marco Amenta, but also in the case of well-known directors such as Michelangelo Antonioni and Pier Paolo Pasolini, whose documentary work is perceived

by critics as powerful enough to challenge the supremacy of even their own fiction films. Moreover, the attention to the biography of the directors enables the writers of the monographic studies to provide important details and additions to the more general histories of Italian documentary.

As I already mentioned, most of the monographic studies on documentarists are about directors who worked at least as much for fiction as for non-fiction cinema. One of the few exceptions is Ilaria Caputi's book *Il cinema di Folco Quilici*, which is dedicated to the most well-known Italian director of documentaries about nature. In the introduction, Tullio Kezich underlines the peculiarity of Quilici on the Italian scene and discusses his international collaborations, such as the one with Fernand Braudel, the celebrated French historian, founder of the *Annales* school, from whom Quilici borrowed many methodological suggestions, particularly "l'illusione neoilluminista che ci sia sempre qualcosa di sconosciuto da ritrovare che può aiutare a comprendere il proprio destino" (10).[23] In this respect, the label of documentarist does not properly fit Quilici's production, according to Kezich, because, if it is true that his reference model was a documentarist, namely Robert J. Flaherty, it must also be noted that Flaherty's documentaries were "romanzi di genere particolare, [e anche] per il nostro, un documento senza un pizzico di fantasia non ha sapore. Da ciò l'azzardo di travestire da romanzi le sue inchieste" (10).[24] In Kezich's view, then, Quilici's importance resides in his being closer to a fiction filmmaker than to a pure documentarist; as I already noted, this kind of belittling statement is typical of Italian film critics approaching documentary studies. On the other hand, Kezich makes an acute observation when he notices that Quilici seemed to be completely disinterested in politics, in a period, the 1950's, in which Italian political parties' divisions and confrontations were an obsession for directors of fiction cinema. Looking at his production after forty years,

however, the topics of his movies, from ecology to racism, from decolonization to the preservation of natural resources, appear to be very political, since they address issues that are at the very heart of contemporary political debates (11).

In the main body of Caputi's book the absence of a definition of the documentary practice is noticeable, and, as in Kezich's introduction, it is evident the regrettable tendency towards a valorization of those parts, in Quilici's documentaries, which, according to Caputi, are not documentary-like: "molti dei suoi film contengono 'isole' di tipo documentario e molti dei suoi documentari presentano in forma sparsa elementi tipici dei film di fiction: nuclei narrativi, montaggio simbolico, design creativo delle luci" (18).[25] The book lingers on biographical details, but also develops historical and semiotic analyses of all the main films of the director, from *Sesto continente* (1954) to *Civiltà del Mediterraneo* (1976), the series for French Television realized in collaboration with Braudel, and ultimately succeeds in valorizing the work of this important Italian documentarist.

A shorter but significant contribution, in English, to monographic studies of Italian documentarists, is Robin Pickering-Iazzi's essay "Remembering Rita Atria: Gender, Testimony, and Witnessing in the Documentary *Diario di una siciliana ribelle*" (1997). At the time, Marco Amenta was beginning to emerge as an important figure among the young Italian documentarists, and the scholar is drawn to his documentary because she considers it as a text that blurs the borders between fiction and non-fiction films. Pickering-Iazzi does not hesitate to generalize this observation and boldly maintains that this fondness for blending genres is a peculiar characteristic of most of Italian documentaries of the 1990's and has given birth to a sub-genre, variously called "cinema of reality" or "creative documentary," characterized by a predilection for "narrative and poetic forms, heightened attention to the aesthetic value of

images, evocative strategies of montage, and styles developed in fiction filmmaking" (439). Still, it is clear that a documentary such as Amenta's, which is about the dramatic story of Rita Atria, the wife of a mafia boss, who decided to cooperate with the magistrates, then committed suicide in jail, is deeply embedded in the precise socio-historical reality that aims to represent. In fact, Pickering-Iazzi maintains that one of the goals of the documentary is that of demystifying the fake glamour that many Hollywood movies associated with the mafia and replaces it with a more precise sociological portrait of the Sicilian context.

From her feminist perspective, the author finds also negative aspects in Amenta's work. Particularly, she does not agree with those critics who applauded the universal appeal of the movie and its ambition to go beyond the particular story of Rita Atria and denounce the mafia system in general. According to Pickering-Iazzi, the aspiration to universality is a way to erase gender distinctions, which are, on the contrary, a vital aspect of this story. The critic's analysis of the narrative structure of the film points indeed at highlighting how, by organizing the events in a non-temporal causal sequence, the director creates a protagonist with an artificial subjectivity, modeled according to a traditional pattern of psychological and social behaviours that characterizes all "universal" stories (443). The beginning of the documentary is, in this respect, indicative, according to Pickering-Iazzi, since it shows Atria's testimony in front of the judge, an event that did not mark her birth as a person, but as a character of the story.

Pickering-Iazzi's feminist perspective on Italian documentary is quite unusual, and I gladly included her essay in this literature review because I am convinced that all Italian documentary studies could benefit from a greater variety of approaches to the subject. Italian film criticism has been dominated by historical and semiotic approaches for decades, and yet, as I have already pointed out, these approaches left too many questions unsolved, particularly

regarding the domain of documentary. In Italy, documentary studies were not graced by a proper historiographical attention, and they were crippled by the exclusive attention on the text brought up by semiotic analyses; this theoretical attitude contributed to the marginalization of topics like gender roles, and to the ostracism of less text-oriented approaches, like phenomenology, which I argue are more apt to examine foundational characteristics of the documentary form like the relationship between representation and reality.

Though monographic studies about well-known fiction film directors who also worked on documentaries are in general not pertinent to this study, for the reasons I have already mentioned, some scholarly contributions on Michelangelo Antonioni, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Roberto Rossellini need to be cited in this context insofar as they are central figures in Italian fiction film history who also left an important mark in the history of Italian documentary. As a matter of fact, the documentary work of these directors is so powerful that the critics who studied them are almost compelled to overcome their instinctive condescension for the documentary and explore a more positive approach to the form.

Maria Orsini's book *Michelangelo Antonioni: i film e la critica* is particularly useful, because it collects articles and reviews on all Antonioni's movies, documentaries included. The opinions voiced in these reviews strike a familiar note. For example, amid the critical responses to *Gente del Po* (1947), Orsini selects that of Aldo Bernardini, who, in his 1967 monographic study on Antonioni, emphasizes the subjective character of the gaze the filmmaker directed at the Po Valley landscape and "la tendenza ad un racconto che, più che in funzione strettamente documentaria, serve a precisare una verità umana e ambientale" (29).[26] Once again, for the Italian critic the documentary is judged according to the value categories developed for fiction cinema. In this case, Antonioni's authorial subjectivity permeates the filmic text enough to

elevate a simple documentary from its marginality, and justify its presence among the "true" films.

Interestingly, Orsini's book includes an article on *Gente del Po* that is written by Antonioni himself. Entitled "Per un film sul Po," Antonioni's piece elaborates on the genesis of the project. The director states that at the beginning he was not sure whether to shoot a documentary or a fiction film: the documentary would have been more attractive, because of the kind of footage he already had at his disposal, but it was dangerous, because it could fall prey to the "rhetorical attitude" of the genre (30). This is a very revealing note, which demonstrates Antonioni's awareness of the rigidity of the documentary style of the period, but it is also a testimony of his non-biased dedication to the documentary form for its intrinsic qualities.

Orsini also includes articles written by Antonioni about his second documentary on the street cleaning in Rome, *N.U.* (1948). In one of these articles, entitled "La malattia dei sentimenti," which appeared on the journal *Bianco e nero* in 1961, Antonioni criticizes the schematic composition of Italian documentaries of that period, particularly their narrative structure, that he defines as "a blocchi di sequenze, che avevano un loro principio, una loro fine, un loro ordine; questi blocchi messi insieme costituivano una certa parabola che dava al documentario una sua unità" (38).[27] By contrast, what he intends to do is to edit the sequences in total freedom, leaving them disconnected, and even stressing their separateness, in order to give a more mediated idea of what he intends to express (38). The critic Carlo di Carlo drew on this suggestive idea, and even expanded its range, as far as identifying it with the personal signature style of the director, in documentaries and fiction films alike: according to him, in all Antonioni's movies, the peculiar editing technique creates a different perception of the landscape, which becomes a situation, or even a character, to the point that the meaning of any

sequence is only partially the result of its order in a narrative structure, but mostly comes out of the relationship, internal to the frame, between characters and environment (39). Di Carlo's suggestive remarks confirm that a thorough and dedicated analysis of Antonioni's documentaries could shed light not only on the personal style of the director, which seems to be consistent in fiction and documentary films, but on a group of innovative documentaries that experimented with subjective and evocative editing techniques and explored the boundaries between reality and representation with originality and ingenuity.

Another book that relates effectively Antonioni's fiction films and documentaries is the collection edited by Lorenzo Cuccu, *Antonioni: il discorso dello sguardo e altri saggi*. In the part of the book dedicated to documentary, Cuccu refers primarily to Seymour Chatman's reading of Antonioni's movies (196). Not unlike Carlo di Carlo, Chatman finds a continuity between the fiction and documentary films of the director, which becomes evident when one looks at the importance given in both documentary and fiction films to the composition of the images, at the tension between characters and background, at the preference for long shots; all elements that, according to Chatman, denotes a keenness for description.

In Cuccu's view, two apparently opposite aspects make Antonioni's documentaries and critical interventions relevant: the first one is the closeness to the aesthetics of Neorealism and to Zavattini's theory of *fare i film attraverso il buco della serratura* (198). In this regard, Antonioni seems to hesitate between a desire to fully participate in reality, and the intention to place himself at a safer distance, which enables a more detached look at the mysterious aspects of things; The second desire is probably a consequence of his famous attempt to shoot a movie scene in an asylum (198),[28] and of his belief in the capacity of cinema not only to record and reproduce reality, but also provoke it. In the end, for Cuccu, the most curious and original facet

of Antonioni's filmmaking is that these two attitudes are at work in both fiction films and documentaries.

These two apparently contradictory aspects are not impossible to reconcile, according to Cuccu, if one disposes of the traditional distinction between documentary and fiction film and looks at the whole corpus of Antonioni's movies as based on the idea of cinema as a means to understand reality. Cuccu defends his statement recurring to André Gardies's theorization of the *monstratif/descriptif* ("monstrative/descriptive") feature of cinematic image, which results in a peculiar definition of documentary: according to the Italian scholar, fiction film images are mainly defined in relation to what they leave off-screen, because it is the operation of hiding something from the visual field of the spectator that creates the presupposition on which the narration can develop. Documentary, on the other hand, is predominantly *descriptive*, which means that non-fiction images do not leave anything off-screen, or, in other words, do not select the profilmic, and, as a consequence, can be defined only in relation to the paradigmatic series of their succession (205-06).

This is a typical semiotic take on the problem of the definition of documentary, which applies linguistic categories to films as if films and linguistic systems were one and the same thing. As it will be clearer addressing Metz's semiotics in chapter 2.2.5, Saussurian categories should be used with parsimony in film studies, because film, in Metz's terms, is *langage*, and not *langue* (64), and therefore cannot simply *décrire*, but always, in a way, *il montre*. In fact, Cuccu's approach leads him to interpret reality and representation as sharing the same semiotic environment, when he states that documentary images do not leave anything off-screen. On the contrary, as I will explain in chapter 2.2, I believe that it is only by clearly distinguishing reality and representation that a solid theoretical framework for the study of documentary can be built.

What is more interesting in Cuccu's argument is that he admits that Antonioni's documentaries challenge his definition. He focuses principally on one of his latest documentaries, produced by Rai, *Ritorno a Lisca Bianca* (1983). Enrico Ghezzi, the producer, intended the film as an example of cinema archaeology, because it is set on the same island where Antonioni directed *L'avventura* (1960). Cuccu acknowledges that there is nothing descriptive in the film, which resembles to a *sguardo assoluto*, disconnected from reality; its images refer neither to an off-screen narration, nor to a descriptive syntax, but they are *vuota contemplazione* (207).

Cuccu's book is interesting because, unlike the authors of the other monographs I have discussed thus far, he seems to make a real effort to avoid subordinating the documentary to the fiction film. Indeed, it seems that it is precisely his appraisal of Antonioni's documentaries that pushes Cuccu to attempt a redefinition of the genre that modifies the usual balance between the two forms. Even though I have qualms about his semiotic approach, Cuccu raises some very interesting theoretical questions about the relationship between documentary and fiction film and the history of both.

Pier Paolo Pasolini is another director that attracted many critical contributions, some of which specifically dedicated to his documentary production. Among these, I will discuss the interventions that venture in original and innovative definitions of the relationship between fiction and documentary films, which is one of the main topics of my dissertation. For example, in a fascinating article entitled "How Much Does It Cost for Cinema to Tell the Truth of Sex? Cinéma Vérité and Sexography," Nicholas De Villiers confronts *Comizi d'amore* (1965) with other documentaries from different regions and periods, in order to analyse how a realist cinema, which he defines as one engaged with the notion of truth, treats sex as a place where the revelation of truth can occur.

Comizi d'amore contains a series of interviews that Pasolini personally carried out across Italy, from the South to the North; he recorded conversations with people on the street, in front of schools and factories, but also with Alberto Moravia and other Italian intellectuals, to whom Pasolini asked to comment on the answers he collected. De Villiers notes that, in this film, Pasolini deals with many social issues: women's freedom, machismo, prostitution, homosexuality, divorce, conformism, all of which can be grouped under the heading of "sex." This implies an expansion of the social category of sex, and it is this semantic operation that, according to the scholar, brings a fresh perspective on the biases and taboos in the Italian society of the 1960's.

In order to prove his point, De Villiers confronts *Comizi d'amore* with other, more recent, documentaries, like those by Wiktor Grodecki, *Body without Soul* (1996), and *Not Angels but Angels* (1994). In the former, Grodecki interviews young male prostitutes in Prague about their sexual habits. There are some striking similarities with Pasolini's movie: the topic, the technique of the interview, etc., and yet, according to De Villiers, the intention is totally different. While Pasolini wanted to perform a sociological survey and contribute to a political debate about the economic and cultural condition of Italian society, Grodecki isolates his interviewees, and records their conversations in private rooms, not on the street, as Pasolini had done, so that he has the power to control the situation and his interviewees are more inclined to tell him what he wants them to say, which is that homosexuals are victimized and have a subordinated role in society. According to De Villiers, Grodecki's documentary, contrary to Pasolini's, is a Christian film, guided by a moralistic attitude that mixes pity and disgust, and that reveals a homophobic perspective (348). De Villiers examines other movies about sexuality, some driven by a Manichean ethics and an inauthentic confessional style, like *Kids* (1995), others apparently

driven by a pure pleasure for the deconstruction of taboos about sexuality, like *Flesh* (1968), but in none he finds Pasolini's ability to show the ambiguities that accompany any discourse about sexuality, and the consciousness of the fact that freedom to talk about sex is not always a reliable sign of a more advanced and free society. De Villiers's conclusion is important if one wants to proceed towards an assessment of the characteristics of the documentary. As I will maintain in chapter 2.3.2, ambiguity is a central feature of any representational art, documentary included, and the overlooking of its role can lead to serious misinterpretations of the expressivity of the documentary form.

Fabio Vighi's "Beyond Objectivity: The Utopian in Pasolini's Documentaries" makes a crucial contribution to Pasolini's scholarship and documentary studies by exploring the theoretical implications of Pasolini's lasting and intense commitment to documentary. Vighi maintains that, especially in his documentaries, Pasolini tried to preserve a specific sense of history, challenging post-structuralist conventions that invited to distrust the apparent links between reality and representation. Vighi's theory is sustained by an original interpretation of Pasolini's theoretical essays, collected in the famous volume called *Empirismo eretico*, which he sees as the starting point of an innovative notion of mimetic realism. In developing this idea, Vighi encounters a series of issues that are central to a theory of documentary and therefore his reflections are worth canvassing in some detail.

To support his interpretation, Vighi analyses three movies: *La rabbia* (1963), *Appunti per un'Orestiade africana* (1970), and *12 dicembre* (1972), putting them in relation to Pasolini's theoretical essays. According to Vighi, in *Empirismo eretico* Pasolini aims to define a realist cinema ontology, based on the idea that cinema language is similar to the language of reality, because cinema appropriates the objects of reality and uses them to create the basic units of its

discourse; according to Vighi, this means that cinema language is, for Pasolini, the only artistic language that manages to create the illusion of an absence of mediation. Pasolini was aware of the theories of Christian Metz and other semiologists, like Umberto Eco, who maintained that the representation of reality is always a culturally mediated process. However, in Vighi's view, the Italian filmmaker assumed that, on a deeper level, reality was defined by inexplicable codes, only approximately discernible through sensorial perceptions. If Vighi were right, Pasolini would be much closer than usually thought to a phenomenological approach to reality, as the one that I discuss in chapter 2.2.7: the critic does not deny that Pasolini thinks in semiotic terms, and looks for the codes that constitute reality, but he argues that, in Pasolini's view, these codes do not refer to our linguistic description of reality, but to our perception of reality. This is the reason why Pasolini could believe that, through the cinema, particularly adopting such techniques as the *discorso indiretto libero*, one could oppose the rationality of the verbal language and approach mimetic forms of representation of reality.

According to Vighi, this is the "utopian" vision that supports Pasolini's approach to documentary cinema (497). He sees this vision at work in the three documentaries above cited, in which the bodies and the irreducible diversities of the people of the Third World, toward whom Pasolini addressed his hopes for a political and anthropological re-founding of humanity, are the objects of an almost morbid attention. In these films, Pasolini does not fall in the temptation to verbally rationalize the issues at stake, but he uses the documentary mimetic nature "for a historically based critique of Western rationality" (503). In Vighi's view, the political dimension of such a utopian perspective is made possible by the fact that Pasolini considered the cinematic experience, unlike that of poetry or literature, as true and objective, from a cognitive point of view, because of its semiotic proximity to reality.

To Pasolini's documentaries is dedicated also Luca Caminati's book *Orientalismo eretico*, which, like Vighi's, is engaged in a reflection on the problem of Pasolini's realism, but draws from such an investigation different conclusions. Caminati's goal is to read Pasolini's documentaries in the light of the renewed interest, ignited by post-colonial studies, for the representations of otherness in Western art; as a consequence, his main concern is to understand the origin of the fascination exerted on Pasolini by Africa and the East. He discovers two motivations: the first one is ideological and political, and is rooted in the connection between the Third World and a pre-modern era, an idealized period of full contact with nature that preceded the alienation brought by consumerism and industrialization; the second one is artistic and psychological, and brings Pasolini to see in the Third World a "perturbing" experience, in the sense used by Freud, and one that, because of its destabilizing power, can introduce a new artistic freedom (*Orientalismo eretico* 16).

Regarding the relationship between cinema and reality, so important to understand Pasolini's documentaries, Caminati writes that the director sides neither with the formalists, like Arnheim, Metz, Bettettini, and Eco, nor with the realists, like Kracauer and Bazin, but stays in an intermediate position, because, if, on the one hand, he is viscerally attracted to reality, on the other hand he is aware of the fact that reality is not "nature," (i.e., a non-mediated datum) but it is highly codified (*Orientalismo eretico* 35). From this premise, Caminati draws the conclusion that Pasolini's realism is a negation and repudiation of the "naturalism," which is the idea to reproduce reality in a non-mediated way, and rather aims at exposing the apparent objectivity of the world, and at showing its fragmentation through cinematic images (*Orientalismo eretico* 37).

These intentions are well-exemplified in the documentaries that Caminati defines ethnographic and experimental, like *Le Mura di Sana'a* (1964), *Sopralluoghi in Palestina*

(1965), *Appunti per un film sull'India* (1968), and *Appunti per un'Orestiade africana* (1970), which radically transform the genre of the exotic documentary into something that is "non più documento che rappresenta la realtà 'altra' per il pubblico occidentale, ma meditazione sul soggetto studiato (l'Altro e l'Alterità) e sull'apparato filmico" (*Orientalismo eretico* 76).[29]

In the end, even though Vighi and Caminati disagree on the definition of Pasolini's theoretical approach – which the former considers realist, while the latter not completely so – I find that they converge in their analysis of Pasolini's poetics, which both Vighi and Caminati consider marked by an aesthetic and political opposition to Western rationality, Vighi maintaining that Pasolini replaces rationality with a utopian irrationalism, and Caminati arguing that the Italian director aims to demystify the conventions of industrialized Western society. Thanks to the two critics' work, it is possible to look at Pasolini's documentaries and theoretical essays as precursors of a cinematic realism that fuses the instinctive attraction to reality of the neorealist directors with more sophisticated, post post-structuralist and post post-modern attitudes. In chapter 2.2.8, I will propose a different solution, inspired by Don Ihde's post-phenomenology, to the problem of realism, and particularly to the question of the correspondence between physical perceptions and filmic representation, but Vighi and Caminati's articles help us realize that Pasolini was already preoccupied, some forty years ago, by these very theoretical questions, and his solutions, although debatable, are compelling and deserve careful examination.

Luca Caminati is also the author of a recently published book entitled *Roberto Rossellini documentarista*. As Marco Bertozzi states in the preface (*Rossellini documentarista* 13-15), this work is important for many reasons. Firstly, because it is the first book specifically dedicated to the documentary films of the famous director, which is quite bewildering if one thinks that

Rossellini's career began and ended shooting documentaries (*Rossellini documentarista* 33); secondly, because it offers a fresh perspective on realism and documentary cinema under fascism, when Rossellini made his debut as a director. As the usual narrative goes, the neorealist movies of the 1940's were a stylistic revolution, compared to the Fascist cinema. Caminati's inquiry in Rossellini's first jobs as assistant director and screenwriter reveals a much more complex environment, open to John Grierson's and Robert Flaherty's ideas, mainly because of the active participation of Alberto Cavalcanti to the Italian milieu; he was a cosmopolitan intellectual, born in Brasil, but of Italian origin, who began working with John Grierson at the Empire Marketing Board and grew into one of his most enthusiastic collaborators at the Film Unit of the General Post Office. In Italy, he became an editorialist for the cinema journal *Bianco e nero* and a teacher of young Rossellini at the *Centro sperimentale di cinematografia*; thanks to Caminati's book, Cavalcanti's influence on the young generation of students of the *Centro*, who were about to become the famous neorealist directors, can now be properly assessed.

The main section of Caminati's book, enriched by a gorgeous collection of figures, is obviously dedicated to *L'India vista da Rossellini* (1957-8) and to the other films about India that Rossellini made in the 1950's. Caminati approaches these movies from a postcolonial perspective and considers them as the most fascinating results of a life-long research on the representation of the "Otherness." The last part of the book analyses the documentaries for the Italian television that Rossellini and his son made in the 1960's and 1970's on various topics, from Sicily and Turin to Chile's President Salvador Allende. Caminati's accurate historical analysis helps us understand better not only Rossellini's first films and documentaries, but the cultural field in which the unquestionably innovative first neorealist movies could emerge, and

for this reason can be considered as a very welcome contribution not only to the domain of documentary, but to that of Italian film studies in general.

1.2.4 Genres, Movements, Periods

The works that I grouped in this section are much more heterogeneous, but they have one thing in common: they all address a particular specificity, whether geographical, if linked to a territory, or historical, if restricted to a single past period, or cultural, if they refer to a group, or movement of directors. Put together, these specificities contribute to define with more accuracy the still insufficiently detailed topography of Italian documentary.

The essay "Vite sospese," by Bernadette Luciano and Susanna Scarparo, can be placed under the category of "cultural differences," since it deals with the representation of "otherness" in Italian documentaries directed by female authors. It analyses specifically two documentaries, *Badanti* (2007), by Katia Bernardi, and *La stoffa di Veronica* (2005) by Emma Rossi Landi. Both documentaries face the problem of the integration of migrants from a perspective that Luciano and Scarparo define "post-feminist," insofar as "in identifying with the distinctly feminine aspects of the women and experiences that they are representing, reflect extensively on the construction of the narrative and establish a three-way pact between documentary maker, subject of the documentary, and spectator" (194).

Both documentaries challenge the stereotypical portrait of the migrant woman as isolated and exploited and propose instead stories of women who, even among many difficulties, try to rebuild a certain idea of "home" in the country where they migrated. *La stoffa di Veronica* follows Veronica, a migrant from Romania, who has to serve eight years in a Venice prison for human smuggling, but refuses to consider herself as a criminal, and sets up a tailoring business that channels her creativity. *Badanti*, on the other hand, is a collective documentary that shows

many interviews with women who share the same job of care-giver, and the same experience of "dislocation."

Luciano and Scarparo cites feminist theorist Paola Merchiori, who believes that women experience migration in a different way, compared to men, because they do not feel the need to come back to the mother's home, but, on the contrary, they want to build a new home in the place where they are relocated; this depends on the fact that most of them flee from patriarchal societies where they are subjugated. According to the authors, the interviews in Rossi Landi's documentary confirm this theory, and provide the viewer with a new perspective on the world of female migration. In this respect, Luciano and Scarparo's article is an example of a feminist approach that throws some light on the relationship between audiovisual representations and complex social issues like female migration, and thus, together with the already cited article by Robin Pickering-Iazzi, is an example of the relevant contribution that feminist approaches are giving to the development of Italian documentary studies.

Ivelise Perniola's original book *Oltre il neorealismo* traces the connections between neorealist movies and documentaries of the 1950's, and therefore deals inevitably with problems of reality representation that are central to my dissertation. Her analysis is mainly historical, but the criteria she uses to organize the material are quite peculiar: for example, she groups the directors according to their "authoriality," and programmatically leaves out some genres that she considers not important, like industrial documentary. It is probably this declared interest for the *auteurs* that leads her to express a severe judgment on the Italian documentary production in the 1950's, defined as conformist and parasitical. According to Perniola, the underdevelopment of non-fiction products after the Second World War depends on some political and economic choices of the Italian government, like the law that imposed to pair up feature fiction films and

documentaries, and the creation of a system of public grants that became a sort of preventive censorship, because forced producers to film only certain types of documentaries, e.g. with a 300-meter color film. Moreover, this technical censorship was combined with a more ideological one, which was a consequence of the 1923 law that prevented directors and producers from creating films that were harmful to the image of the country, a law that was abolished only in 1962. As I have recalled in the previous section, other scholars, like Bertozzi and Caminati, would agree in general terms with these conclusions. However, they do not consider the Neorealism as an isolate phenomenon, but one that was prepared before, and followed after, by many original works, thus their considerations about the documentaries of the period are definitely less severe.

In the end, according to Perniola, the only documentaries of the period that are worth mentioning are those about the resistance against fascism, because they were faithful to the neorealist tradition, in the sense that they were an instrument of political struggle and a means of counter-information. Social documentaries, on the other hand, were faithful to the neorealist tradition only on a formal level, but betrayed it on a deeper thematic level, because they did not face the real problems of the country, like industrialization and emigration (250). The implicit documentary theory that sustains such statements is not inspired by aesthetic evaluations, which means by reflections on the properties of the documentary form, but by an ideology, according to which documentary should be an instrument of political goals. This approach echoes the already discussed positions of Bernagozzi, and it is not uncommon in Italian scholarship. However, I believe that a similar approach reveals more about the implied ideology than about documentary, and it is therefore quite inadequate outside the political frame that encapsulates it.

Perniola's book suffers, in my opinion, from a disputable basic assumption, which is that of taking Neorealism as the sole model of valid and progressive filmmaking. There is no doubt that Neorealism was an extraordinary moment in Italian film history, but I believe that it is not always necessary, or even possible, to judge the value of different film periods, or schools, or genres in the light of that one-of-a-kind experience, and that these kinds of assumptions lead to misunderstand the peculiarities of the documentary practice in general, and of the very atypical 1950's Italian documentary scene in particular.

While Perniola's book focuses on a nation-wide movement, Mirko Grasso's *Scoprire l'Italia* is representative of a strongly regional approach to the post-Second-World-War Italian documentary production. Grasso's book starts from the consideration that, in the first years after the Second World War, when Italy had to rebuild its cities and the referendum gave birth to the Republic, the *questione meridionale*, which, as I already mentioned, is how Italian intellectuals called the problems linked to the economic and cultural backwardness of southern provinces, became the most important issue to address. Grasso's book traces the history of Italian documentary from this socio-cultural perspective and comes to some interesting conclusions. Firstly, he describes the cultural environment in which a specific "genre" – the *inchiesta sul Meridione* – became widespread, and attributes this genre's emergence to the integration of Gramsci's ideas (and therefor also of his famous essay on the southern question) into the political guidelines of the PCI (Italian Communist Party). Secondly, he goes over the most relevant examples of the new genre, recalling some documentary directors, but mostly focusing on essayists, like anthropologist Franco Cagnetta, author of several reportages on Sardinia, or Giovanni Russo, who wrote many articles on the condition of the peasants, successively collected in a volume called *Baroni e contadini*, edited by Laterza in 1955. The most important

documentary director of the period, according to Grasso, is Gianfranco Mingozzi, who directed *Li mali mistieri* (1963), about the *lumpenproletariat* of Palermo. In Grasso's book there are excerpts of an interview with Mingozzi, in which he tells some anecdotes on how difficult he found shooting a documentary in Palermo, but he makes just a few references to the documentary itself.

In the final part of the book, Grasso leaves southern Italy and analyses the adoption of the genre of the survey in other regions, like, Tuscany, where well-known writers like Carlo Cassola and Luciano Bianciardi employed it to explore marginalized social strata such as the miners of Maremma. Even in this part of the book, however, Grasso's attention is devoted mainly to writers, journalists, and novelists, and only briefly and sparsely he mentions documentarists. This is a symptom of the lack of consideration that documentary had, and still has, among intellectuals: even a brilliant work like *Fata Morgana* (1961), Lino del Fra's documentary on the Milan outskirts, is only marginally cited by Grasso. In the end, even though Grasso's book starts with a promising premise, which is the intention to analyse the cultural aspects that triggered the diffusion of the social and anthropological survey, this premise does not convert in a useful exploration of an important documentary genre, because of the peripheral role that documentary has in the interests of the scholar.

The impact of the "southern question" on the development of Italian documentary is also at the centre of Sebastiano Gesù's *La Sicilia della memoria*. This is a more useful contribution to the research than Grasso's insofar as Gesù lists all documentaries realized in Sicily from 1897 to 1978 and provides essential data for each item such as the year of production, the name of the director, and in most cases the name of the cinematographer and of the producer, length of the film, and a short synopsis. For the more recent works, more data are available, like names of

score composers, scriptwriters and editors. Besides this useful collection of data, the book presents also a history of Sicilian documentary. Overall, the book provides a rare glimpse at a corpus that is very little known and difficult to access.

According to Gesù, the first documentaries shot in the island were about nature and its most spectacular phenomena. For example, the earthquake of 1908, which caused 130,000 deaths and practically destroyed the cities of Messina and Reggio Calabria, attracted a flood of cinema operators from all over the world; and the same is true of the eruptions of the Etna volcano, which were filmed since the 1920's by international documentarists like Jean Epstein, and originated the popular sub-genre of documentaries about volcanic eruptions. Ugo Saitta became the most well-known representative of this sub-genre, especially after Visconti's *La terra trema* (1948) and other neorealist fiction movies gave prominence to the Sicilian location.

Another popular sub-genre that flourished in Sicily was that of fishermen at work, in which the directors of the small production company Panaria Film were specialized since the 1940's. They were among the first ones in the world to experiment with submarine filming, and critics and public alike acclaimed, at the 1947 Cannes Festival, their *Cacciatori sottomarini* (1946), about a skin diving expedition in the Aeolian isles. The rites and habits of fishermen, peasants and miners of the small Sicilian villages are also the topics of the cinematography of Vittorio De Seta, who, as I already mentioned, and as Gesù obviously points out, realized, from 1954 to 1959, eleven documentaries on the life in Sicily.

Another regional perspective that helps map the Italian documentary production is that of Sandra Lischi and Pucci Piazza in their book *A occhio nudo,* which is a tribute to the *Scuola video di documentazione sociale I cammelli,* founded in Turin in 1990 by documentarist Daniele Segre. In order to present the history of the school, the two scholars interviewed its founder

Daniele Segre and some students of the 1996-97 academic year, and they also collected scripts and synopses of the final hands-on projects of the students. The result is a book that testifies the energy and vitality of this local school founded by one of the mayor Italian players in the domain of social documentary.

For the purposes of this study, the most pertinent part of the book is precisely the interview to Daniele Segre, in which Piazza raises some relevant issues for a documentary theory: can social documentary really transform society? Is a documentary school the right tool to inspire the interest for social documentary in young people? Unfortunately, these questions are posed in a merely hypothetical fashion, and remain without answer, even though Segre does define the motivations that pushed him to create the school, and analyses what he thinks are its limits and qualities. According to his own explanation, one characteristic that defines both limits and merits of this educational experience is the link between the school and Segre's production company; this link means that the students have the opportunity to apply immediately the acquired knowledge and develop their professionalism in a short period of time, but it also means that more theoretical questions on the nature of the documentary filmmaking have to be overlooked, because the focus of the courses are mainly technical and practical. By the admission of his own founder, Segre's is therefore a school that aims to transmit a certain professional knowledge, more than the ability to reflect autonomously on society. In the context of the Italian educational system, however, traditionally centred on history, philosophy and the humanities in general, Segre's school represents an alternative approach, and it is one of the few initiatives that could improve the perception of the institutional role of documentary in Italian society, because it makes students and professionals realize the impact of documentary projects in the public sphere beyond the commercial network of TV broadcasters and film theatres.

1.2.5 Conclusions

Though not exhaustive, the review of the literature on Italian documentary provided in the previous sections of this chapter is extensive and systematic enough to give a clear indication of the main directions taken by the extant scholarship on Italian documentary, and it makes it possible to draw some basic conclusions.

As Perniola's book demonstrates, Neorealism casts such a long and wide shadow on the whole Italian post-Second-World-War Italian cinematic tradition that it becomes the instinctive, intuitive, automatic term of comparison for every type of filmmaking that is even remotely similar, and in this way it can become a major obstacle to the appreciation of the documentary form, with whom it undoubtedly shares some strong affinities, but also many differences. The shadow of Neorealism prevented, until recently, the development in Italy of a mature scholarship engaged in the definition of the documentary form and in the analysis of documentary films, because questions regarding the relationship between reality and representation, which are crucial to the definition of the documentary in both its institutional and aesthetic aspects, were almost exclusively considered in the light of the realist fictional narrative that became predominant after the Second World War.

This problem affected not only the development, in Italy, of theoretical studies on the documentary form, but also the completion of an exhaustive history of Italian documentary. Italian scholars have a penchant for local historical research, which often translated in brilliant monographic studies on local movements and directors, but rarely led to a comprehensive history. In this respect, Bertozzi's work has finally provided Italian documentary historiography with an authoritative set of data and a firm conceptual framework. Whatever its limits (and I signalled those that are relevant from my perspective), Bertozzi's book indubitably fills a gap

that until now prevented other scholars from approaching the field. Documentary is not an easy domain to define and study, because often documentaries are difficult to find and documentarists work on the fringe of the movie business, but it becomes almost impossible to penetrate when there is no map of what constitutes its territory.

There are, however, few other encouraging elements that I would like to signal. For example, Italian scholars are beginning to reflect more extensively on the documentary works and theoretical essays on documentary by important directors of fiction films, like Antonioni, Pasolini and Rossellini. This is important, because such documentaries and essays do not only help study with more accuracy the works of the abovementioned directors, but they are extremely valuable for documentary studies in general. As I have already mentioned, the focus of this review was not on the production of well-known fiction directors, but this choice was never meant as a belittlement of their contributions. On the contrary, their thoughts on the documentary form are often the most interesting and provoking interventions of recent Italian criticism. It is the case of Antonioni's articles, in which he confesses his doubts and difficulties with the documentary form, which he considers captivating, although hard to grab, and that of Pasolini's essays, which manifest a clear consciousness of the importance of documentary filmmaking. Many more would be equally interesting, starting, obviously, from Rossellini's interviews, which would be fascinating to analyse, maybe in a different context from the monographic study that normally presents and discusses them.[30]

Another trend of Italian criticism that is worth mentioning is the emergence of feminist and post-colonial approaches, which are providing a refreshing perspective on the studies of the documentary. The articles by Pickering-Iazzi, Luciano and Scarparo and Caminati that I mentioned in the previous sections contribute to expand the horizons of a discipline that has been

limited for decades by two opposed instances: on the one hand, a theoretical thinking inspired by a semiotic approach to the moving images that did not favour a clear comprehension of the specificities of the documentary form, as I will explain in chapter 2.2; on the other hand, as it became clear analysing Bernagozzi and Perniola's books, a tendency to appropriate documentary for ideological and political purposes, in complete disregard for its institutional and aesthetic characteristics, which I will discuss in chapters 2.1 and 2.3.

Finally, a recent, but nonetheless encouraging, phenomenon is the not too isolated appearance of publications in English that focus expressively on Italian documentary. I cited some examples, like the articles by Luciano and Scarparo, Pickering-Iazzi, and Vighi, but they are not alone; as a confirmation of the fact that this is a growing trend, an international journal dedicated to documentary studies, *Studies in Documentary Film*, just released an issue wholly devoted to Italian documentary.[31] The interest of these contributions, beside their intrinsic value, is that they help scholars open the domain of Italian film studies to impulses and methodologies elaborated outside the national borders and in different languages. This is a very welcome event, particularly in the field of documentary studies, which, especially in Italy, is still a young and fragile branch.

2. The Institution of Documentary

2.1 A Social Space for Public Debate

Arnold Gehlen would call the documentary a quasi-institution, and put it among those modern institutions, like psychology, that are not seen as objective, but can nonetheless give momentary relief to individuals, confirming them the existence of a relatively stable reality (xiii). What differentiates documentary from psychology, however, is the former's strong connection with a reality seen as objectively existent, as the very term that designates it, "documentary," testifies. As a consequence, a definition of the institution of documentary should first of all account for a genealogy of its controversial name, and for an explanation of the quite peculiar place that documentary occupies among contemporary art practices. In fact, although it is true that documentary has been showing, for the last thirty years, an extraordinary ability to mutate and adapt to rapidly changing social attitudes toward objectivity and truth, so as to become the ideal vehicle for the expression of personal feelings and subjective, autobiographical stories (Renov, *The Subject of Documentary* xvii), it is equally right that the etymology of its very name, and the history of its first appearances as a practice distinct from fiction filmmaking attest the existence of a different lineage: John Grierson, in his well-known review of Robert Flaherty's *Moana* (1926), was the first one to use the term "documentary value" in relation to a feature film, and this fortunate choice was motivated by the desire to emphasize what he considered the unquestionable fact that Flaherty's film transformed the spectators in witnesses of the actual daily life of a Polynesian family (25). The term and its connotation were quickly adopted and remained substantially untouched for decades. Subsequent theorists and practitioners, even those who belonged to radical new waves, like the *cinéma-vérité* and the direct cinema, built upon the foundations laid by Grierson, helped by technical innovations that

expanded the boundaries of what was previously achievable, in terms of proximity to places and events, but never contested the idea that documentary was primarily meant to witness and document.

It is only recently that some scholars started to emphasize the other, non-sober, non-rational, non-verifiable side of non-fiction film. Michael Renov was one of the first theorists to develop a theoretical system based on the assumption that documentary evolved as a separate discipline not only because of its different "access" to reality, but also as a consequence of its artistic and creative credentials (*Theorizing Documentary* 24). Building upon Derrida's argument that truth depends on speech and thus has to be separated from reality, which simply is, and cannot be explained or understood with the help of categories of discourse like truth and falseness, Renov states that "all discursive forms - documentary included - are, if not fictional, at least fictive, this by virtue of their tropic character (their recourse to tropes or rhetorical figures) [...] Every documentary representation depends upon its own detour from the real" (*Theorizing Documentary* 7).[32] As a consequence, according to Renov, what counts as a difference between fiction and non-fiction films is "the extent to which the referent of the documentary sign may be considered as a piece of the world plucked from its everyday context rather than fabricated for the screen" (*Theorizing Documentary* 7).

In Renov's effort to conciliate the traditional "documentary value" with the unavoidable distance that an art practice must retain from its subject, we already realize the tricky implications of a non-simplistic definition of the institution of documentary. Renov is not alone, of course, in this enterprise, and one well-known scholar that engaged with similar problems is Bill Nichols. He agrees with Renov that there is a distinction between the real world in which we live (truly existing, independent of the mind) and the world of fiction, inhabited, at various

degrees, by both fiction films and documentaries, and that the former is relatively accessible for cognitive purposes (*Introduction to Documentary* 145-46). Both maintain that fiction films and documentaries give access to a relative truth, although the truth of documentary is, in a way,[33] closer to reality than that of fiction cinema. Their theory differ, instead, for the emphasis placed by Renov in the emotional, artistic qualities of documentary, which he considers ultimately at odds with the traditional task of historical representation assigned to the documentary practice. The detection of the problem, for the documentary form, to justify an aesthetic dimension *and* its scientific pretensions is, in my view, the most important point of Nichols and Renov's theories. However, I believe that they fall short of providing a satisfactory account of the relationship between representation and reality in documentary filmmaking, and particularly of the complexity of the relationship between styles of documentary representation and social contexts. I conceived my definition of the institution of documentary, declined in ethical, cognitive and stylistic aspects, as a more exhaustive way to describe the documentary as both representation and evidence of reality. Thanks to this definition, I will be able, in part 3, to connect documentary styles with the social contexts in which they emerge.

In my view, the institution of documentary is the result of the overlapping of two different cultural practices: since it is constituted of audiovisual products that demand to be valued and appreciated, at least partially, as aesthetic objects, it has to be considered as an art form.[34] Since it differs from fiction filmmaking because of its more or less verifiable link to actual events,[35] it shares the subject matter of its narratives with journalism and history, and it is therefore one of the media that contribute to the circulation of information of political and historical value for a given community. However, there is one thing that distinguishes documentary from journalism and history, besides its belonging to the realm of arts, and this is

the peculiarity of its technology, which is focused on the enhancement of perceptions, and thus provides the viewer with a completely different cognitive experience.

I will discuss in more details contemporary theories on documentary in sections 2.2.3 and 2.2.4, and the other aspects of the institution of documentary, the cognitive and stylistic, in chapters 2.2 and 2.3 respectively. In this section I will discuss the origin of the first institutional feature of the documentary form, which is the ethical commitment of the documentarist. Specifically, I will investigate how the documentary benefits from cultural shifts occurred, firstly in Europe, than in the rest of the world, in the last two-three centuries, and trace a genealogy of the space where the political and historical debate was made possible and, in a certain extent, circumscribed, in Europe in the 18th century. This space is what Jürgen Habermas called the "public sphere." The historical account of the formation of the public sphere is necessary in order to realize that the documentary is a successor of the institutions that allowed the public sphere to exist, and that the very name of "documentary" would have a different meaning, were not for the political and social transformations created by the public sphere.

2.1.1 The Concept of Public Sphere

The discovery of the historical importance of the first public debates about the common good in modern societies, occurred in cafés and newspapers, in France and England, at the beginning of the 18th century, should be largely attributed to Jürgen Habermas and his 1962 book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere.* In that book, Habermas traces a genealogy of the concepts of public opinion and public sphere, arguing that the very ideas of private and public changed dramatically in the transition from traditional to modern societies (*The Structural Transformation* 3). In ancient Athens and Rome, the "public" was the social place for honourable distinction; these societies, particularly the Greek, rested in a slave economy that allowed private

citizens to be free form labour and participate actively in public life. Already during the Middle Ages, however, new forms of authority began to change this perception of public and private. Manorial authority, the local power of the lord, could not be fitted into previous categories of private dominion (*dominium*) and public autonomy (*imperium*), since it was a public dominion that prevented any form of public life for private people: "there was no status that in terms of private law defined in some fashion the capacity in which private people could step forward into a public sphere" (*The Structural Transformation* 5). "Private" became synonym with "common," and came to designate places and persons without peculiarities, because the "publicness" was enjoyed only by lords and kings; it was a status attribute, and the embodiment of higher power, strictly connected with representational duties. In today's use, this meaning of the term "representation" has partially survived, in the sense that we intend representation as something that cannot happen in private, but nowadays it is difficult to imagine the sense of embodiment of a higher power that medieval representation meant, because, except for certain parts of the Catholic liturgy, and maybe of royal ceremonies, it is a form of public life that did not survive the modern desacralization of the concept of authority.

When the Renaissance blossomed in Europe, new social models arose, and, together with them, new forms of privacy and publicity. The role model for public virtue was the cultivated noble man so accurately described in the most successful book of the 17th century, Baldassare Castiglione's *Il cortigiano*. The place for his public display of power and knowledge was not the square, but the palace of the king, a public place only for the court, hidden from the eyes of the rest of the population. And yet, even this secluded form of representation was lacking any idea of privacy, as we intend it today, since the court was always representing itself and its functions, both internally, cause even the awakening of the king was a public moment, and externally,

cause the court always depended on some sort of public display, like parades and inaugurations (*The Structural Transformation* 9). Only with the advent of the bourgeoisie, the exclusive event, happening behind closed doors, and the modern concept of privacy were invented. In fact, the term "private" is found in German only from the middle of the 16th century, designating the exclusion from the state apparatus that in the meanwhile had evolved in an entity with an existence over and above the person of the ruler (*The Structural Transformation* 10).

The ground-breaking innovation that facilitated the formation of the bourgeoisie as a separate class was "the traffic in commodities and news created by early capitalist long-distance trade" (*The Structural Transformation* 15), which started in Northern Italy in the 13th century. At the beginning it was neither a political, nor an economic revolution, because the news traffic was not public, and it was limited to a sort of newsletter for inside traders. But when, from the 16th century, merchant companies started to be organized on expanded capital basis, they became so powerful that they contributed to a political transformation, because they were able to influence political decisions and national economic strategies: "the modern state was basically a state based on taxation" (*The Structural Transformation* 17), because of its huge bureaucracy and financial needs, that only private bankers could back. Meanwhile, "public" became the public authority, with a permanent administration and a standing army made of public servants, and "civil society came into existence as the corollary of a depersonalized state authority. Activities and dependencies hitherto relegated to the framework of the household economy emerged from this confinement into the public sphere" (*The Structural Transformation* 19).

Beside capitalist trade, a second element contributed greatly to the creation of the public sphere: the press. The first political journals appeared in the middle of the 17th century. News started to be distributed because of its value, as any other commodity: "each item of information

contained in a letter had its price; it was therefore natural to increase the profits by selling [it] to more people" (*The Structural Transformation* 21). At first, however, the information that became public was a residual element of what was available, censured by merchants, the main news carriers, and state administration's official censorship. State authorities, in particular, had a great interest in controlling the press: they made use of it to promulgate instructions and ordinances, or to disseminate news of king's travels and events: it was a kind of "transposition of the publicity of representation into the new form of public sphere" (*The Structural Transformation* 23). State authorities addressed, through the press, the "publicum," the abstract counterpart of their public authority, and instilled in it "the awareness of itself as the latter's opponent, that is, as the public of now emerging public sphere of society" (*The Structural Transformation* 23). Even though, at the beginning, this public was very small, because it was limited to the educated classes of administrators, jurists, doctors, pastors, professors, and scholars, the few who had access to the press and were able to read it, its formation was of paramount importance, because these readers became the last element, the addressee, upon which a new means of communication could be built. The innovative strength of this new medium, with regard to political matters, was its role in what have been called the "principle of control." Bourgeois did not want to rule, they aimed at changing domination as such: they asked that the legitimization of domination be based not on inherited privileges, but on a principle of control, which means on the idea that power has to be publicly accepted and granted, and be based on a set of rational-critical, sharable presuppositions (*The Structural Transformation* 28).

The first places where the public sphere coalesced were the coffee houses. They opened in England around the middle of the 17th century: "By the first decade of the eighteenth century, London already had 3000 of them, each with a core group of regulars" (*The Structural*

Transformation 32). In England, they were immediately more business oriented, and Habermas suggests that this be a consequence of the fact that women were not allowed to join them, because in France, where salons were attended, and frequently organized by women, they were more oriented towards cultural issues. In both there was a disregard for the differences of status, which obviously were maintained, but did not prevent a mixed composition of the gatherings; and yet, because of the different composition of the salons, it was only in France that cultural qualities fostered by the public sphere, like personal opinion, rationality and intellectual wit, had an important role in the vast social movement that brought, in a bit more than a century, radical social changes and the abandonment of ancient privileges.

In this process, arts, as well as the press, played a central part. Culture became a commodity and an object of discussion in coffee houses and salons, along with other topics of "common concern." At the same time, the fact that culture was a commodity meant that it was potentially accessible to everybody. For the first time, public became inclusive, and abstract; any small group of discussants started, if not to equate itself with *the* public, at least to act in its name. Nowhere this process was more evident than in the institution of art criticism, where "the lay judgment of a public that had come of age, or at least thought it had, became organized [...] The art critics could see themselves as spokesmen for the public [...] because they knew no authority beside that of the better argument" (*The Structural Transformation* 41).

The bourgeois public sphere, with its corollary of a no less revolutionary private sphere that evolved in interiorized human intimacy, and prompted the illusion of freedom in the niche of domestic relationships, did not take long to bring about political consequences. The major one was the challenge to the established authority of the rulers, which was conducted on a cultural and jurisdictional level: the bourgeoisie managed to convince the people that civil law was based

on rational and lasting principles, and had moral authority over the decree or the command, which were perceived as contingent and dependent on the personal authority of the monarch. The transition from a government based on decrees to one based on laws is one of the first major accomplishments of the bourgeois public sphere.

Despite these accomplishments, and despite what most of his commentators say, Habermas did not idealize the bourgeois public sphere, not even its first forms and expression of the early 18th century, like the constitutional state. He clearly recognizes that:

> Nowhere did the constitutional establishment of a public sphere in the political realm [...] betray its character as an order of domination more than in the central article stating that all power came from the people [...][because] the private people on whose autonomy, socially guaranteed by property, the constitutional state counted, were in true a small minority. (*The Structural Transformation* 84)

Formally and in principle, the public sphere of civil society was based on universal access. Practically, education and property ownership were a fundamental prerequisite to its admittance. This divergence between *poiesis* and *praxis* of the public sphere was paralleled by a similar distance between the principle of classic economics, which states that under conditions of complete mobility and free competition, in a society made of commodity producers, supply and demand would always be in equilibrium, and the democratic idea that every person can have an equal chance to compete in society. In the end, "these conditions were by no means fulfilled even in the first half of the nineteenth century" (*The Structural Transformation* 87).

For this intrinsic contradiction, the bourgeois public sphere was a fragile institution, and its progressive dissolution started in the 19th century, when the state, because of its constitutionalization, "tended to adopt the interests of civil society as its own" (*The Structural*

Transformation 142). At the same time, the state extended its power over sectors of the private realm, because some conflicts of interest could not be settled within the private sphere alone. This process "destroyed the basis of the bourgeois public sphere – the separation of state and society" (*The Structural Transformation* 142). In fact, bourgeois society had evolved around economical needs linked to market exchange, that had nothing to do with public authority, while at the same time political administration had been released from the production task that held until the end of the Middle Ages (*The Structural Transformation* 141). This is what allowed private people to gather together as a public and discuss the needs of society with the state, without losing their status as private citizens; when this separation of the private from the public realm dissolved, the public sphere, according to Habermas, ceased to exist (*The Structural Transformation* 176).

The Habermasian model of the bourgeois public sphere, even though it may fail to capture a historical and concrete political institution,[36] reveals itself as a precious concept because it christens and describes that principle of civic inspiration that brought, in the 18th century, ordinary people to challenge established and traditional powers in the name of rational and sharable ideas. Only if the concept of public sphere is understood in this sense, it is possible to say that Habermas envisioned its deterioration and barbarization through the centuries until the contemporary time. There was never a golden age of perfect realization of the public sphere, but a period of closer awareness of the importance of a place for rational debate about public matters, so acute that those who participated in it came to envision and actuate a complete revolution of the social and political status quo; this moment was followed by a period, after most of the transformations were accomplished, of general re-assessment and reconfiguration of the public sphere itself. It is this reconfiguration that Habermas tries to describe, when he writes

that: “in an industrial society constituted as a social-welfare state, relationships and conditions multiplied which could not be adequately ordered through institutions or either purely private or purely public law” (*The Structural Transformation* 148), to the point that it was deemed necessary to change the internal mechanisms of the conjugal family: the paternal authority was replaced by a state authority and the pedagogical functions were transferred from the family to the school.

He saw the private space, which was one of the major conceptual achievements of the bourgeois family, disappearing in the common lawns and identical suburbs of North-American cities in the 1960’s, and all politically-oriented group activities, and discussions around political issues becoming a matter of economic interests (*The Structural Transformation* 163); indeed he realized that political magazines and associations survived, but maintained that the discussion “assumes the form of a consumer item” (*The Structural Transformation* 164). Before people had to pay for books, museum, theatre, but not for the conversation itself, today the conversation itself is administered: conferences, round table shows and similar consumer-oriented activities replaced free discussion among human beings. In his view, today the public sphere is a “platform for advertising” (*The Structural Transformation* 181); it is not a special realm anymore, is just like anything else, pure commerce. He even proposed a date for the transition from a press that took ideological and political sides to one that was primarily a business: it happened around 1830 in the UK, USA and France (*The Structural Transformation* 184). A century later, the capital requirements in the media sector were already so gigantic that the establishment of these media conglomerate happened under state control: “they turned private institutions of a public composed of private people into public corporations” (*The Structural Transformation* 187).

Advertising was distrusted up until 19th century even by large companies, because it was considered disreputable (*The Structural Transformation* 190). And yet, the investments in advertising, at the time of Habermas's writing, had already reached a share of 2% of the gross national product of Western countries (*The Structural Transformation* 191). In the practice of public relations, economic advertisement achieved an awareness of its political character: it became a tool to control and diagnose the public sphere's role in the political realm, because, feigning general interest, it turned out to be not only able to create the profile of a brand, but to mobilize for it a quasi-political credit (*The Structural Transformation* 194). This kind of consensus is obviously not based on rationality, but on manipulation, and has its feudal aspects, like the pomp showed by models and representatives of a global brand during public events, and has its political consequences, like the integration of mass entertainment and advertising under a political function; in fact, it happens that: "[since] private enterprises evoke in their customers the idea that in their consumption decisions they act in their capacity as citizens, the state has to 'address' its citizens like consumers. As a result, public authority too competes for publicity" (*The Structural Transformation* 195). Publicity, which now, unsurprisingly, not only means "the fact of being public," but is a synonym of advertising, made it possible for organizations and functionaries to display representation, instead of creating consensus through public discussion (*The Structural Transformation* 200). This process transformed parties in organizations similar to business enterprises geared towards the getting of votes (*The Structural Transformation* 203), so influential as to give imperative mandates to their candidates (*The Structural Transformation* 205).

I interpret this bleak vision not as a nostalgic regret for a past that cannot be back, but as an attempt to re-assess and re-define the public sphere model in order to adapt it to contemporary

society. Habermas's work is a paradigm-changing sociological thesis;[37] it forces us to change our perception of the impact of significant facts on a precise moment in history, like the first act abolishing censorship in Britain, or the foundation of the Bank of England, whose reciprocal relationship was not established, and to connect them in meaningful ways, so that new paths and new problems open for sociological and historical investigation. When this new paradigm is worked to shed light on different periods and problems, it goes through a process of normalization and serves different purposes. The second part of Habermas's book, that on contemporary society and the transformations of the public sphere, elaborates some of the scenarios that the theoretical model, outlined in the first part, makes possible and suggests. One may disagree with some of the results of Habermas's normalization of the public sphere model, and yet I think that the paradigm is right and can provide brilliant insights on crucial aspects of contemporary societies.

If one looks at the debate around the public sphere from this perspective, even the strongest critiques that theorists had advanced towards the model in recent years become resources that help shape the normalization of the theory. For example, Nancy Fraser, one of the contributors to an important volume edited by Craig Calhoun three years after the publication of the English translation of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* and called *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, maintained that in societies where systemic social inequalities exist, full parity of participation in public debate is not possible and that, in absence of regulation, dominant groups always prevail. She proposes a model in which the contestation finds a place among a plurality of competing publics, and where subordinated groups, like minorities and the poor, have the chance to aggregate in what she calls "subaltern counterpublics" (123). Obviously, her model cannot explain the development of the bourgeois

public sphere, which was too small and homogeneous to be fragmented in counterpublics, even though the European society of the 18th century was all but immune from social inequalities. Hers is therefore a clear case of normalization of the theory, made in order to befit the complexity of contemporary societies. Yet, it is a far cry from demolishing Habermas's paradigm, which, in my opinion, is defined by the pre-eminence of what we could call a "principle of rationality." However disunited contemporary societies may be, rational criteria, as suggested by Habermas, should still guide the political claims of each representative, and one or more public spheres should still be the places where rational debates around each claim are held. Of course, rationality is not enough to command the adoption of a political stance, but it is central to Habermas's notion of public sphere the idea that any action aimed at gaining enough political consensus for a political change should be taken in the public eye, and that any proposition should be meaningful, not merely a rhetorical, demagogic exercise. In this sense, I argue that Habermas's paradigm, even in the face of strong critiques, such as Fraser's, that exposed some of its shortcomings, can still be used to define the role of today's media, and the documentary in particular, in contemporary Italy.

2.1.2 The Public Sphere Concept in Media and Documentary Studies

In recent years, the debate over the concept of public sphere proved to be extremely fruitful and many scholars responded to the challenge of refining Habermas's model, raising questions and highlighting problems in regards to its adaptation to contemporary society in general, or to concrete, particular situations, putting Habermas's premises to the test of quantitative analyses.[38]

For what my research is concerned, I will not deal, if not sporadically, with quantitative data about documentary production and fruition. My main concern is to examine the institution

of documentary and its interaction with a specific social context, namely contemporary Italy, and to build a theoretical framework and a set of categories and parameters that may enable a qualitative survey of documentary as an agent in the public sphere. This theoretical framework revolves around the notion of responsible communication as a central feature of the public sphere model. In this respect, the Habermasian concept of public sphere can be better understood as the result of a technological revolution in communication practices, caused, among other factors, by the implementation and diffusion of a new medium, the newspaper, whose main merit was to improve largely the speed and quality of information and to broaden its potential audience. This formidable carrier of information enabled a new form of communication among people, which not surprisingly Habermas calls "rational." He uses "rationality" in a very general sense: he does not refer to specific characteristics of the scientific discourse, or to pragmatist, or empirical, philosophies, but to a way to evaluate and critically assess experience that characterizes practically any development of Western thought since Plato. He would have agreed with Merleau-Ponty, who wrote, "to say that there exists rationality is to say that perspectives blend, perceptions confirm each other, a meaning emerges" (xix).

Conceived in this way, as a central feature of that political mode of communication that I described as public sphere, rationality is the basic principle upon which the responsibility and the ethical attitude that characterize the institution of documentary are built. In this sense, responsibility is not a consequence of the fact that documentary deals with real issues: plenty of fiction movies tell real stories, and this does not prevent them from being "irresponsible" with regard to historical accuracy, even though they may be effective with regard to a sympathetic presentation of the political issues at stake; for a documentary, instead, responsibility is a consequence of a rational choice: that of making a public statement about the common good of

society, in the tradition of those institutions, like the liberal journals of the 18th century, that inaugurated the public space where irrational habits could be challenged. To see documentary as an effective constituent of the public sphere, means to envisage its role as a symbolic practice with political consequences, along with other philosophical, jurisdictional, literary enterprises inspired by rational principles. Documentary is fundamentally a representational art, and thus is not only about rationality, but I argue that one of its characteristics as an institution is the ethical attitude towards reality of its practitioners, which is not a stylistic feature, or a rhetorical trope, as it is the case in other representational arts, but a consequence of its place in the public sphere, from where, together with other secular institutions, fights for more rational ideas to be implemented in society. It is the memory of the radical revolutions of the 18th and 19th century that still bolsters the flame of this institutional feature: because of their success, the principles that guided these revolutions and some of the actions needed to accomplish them, like the creation of a public sphere for public debate, became routinized aspects of institutions devoted to preserve their achievements: constitutions, law, political parties, but also journalism, and eventually documentary are all institutions devoted to preserve those ideals of rationality in the public domain that changed the history of modern Western societies in the 18th century.

The link between media and public sphere has been explored since the beginning of the 20th century. In the mid 1920's, two American intellectuals, John Dewey and Walter Lippmann, argued about whether and to what extent a true public, which is the fundamental addressee of any public sphere, could exist in 20th century society. The former was convinced that it was still possible to form a true public, rooted in the ideas and values of the local community, while the latter thought that only a "phantom public" existed in modern and complex societies and that a "governing class" of experts and specialists was needed in order to guide people and shield them

from the threats of modernity (Lippmann 248). Lippmann suggested the creation of what he called “intelligence work,” teams of intellectuals that in his view had to mediate between the complex and obscure domain of politics and economics and the people. This debate is significant to a theory of the documentary insofar as Jonathan Kahana’s book *Intelligence Work* attempts to reshape the concept of “public” and adapt it to the documentary practice, highlighting the documentary’s pivotal role in the public debates about the common good that define contemporary societies.

Kahana demonstrates that Lippmann had been an influential figure for John Grierson, the father of the Anglo-American social documentary, who stated that the idea of the documentary form came to him from the exposure to the works of the Political Science School at the University of Chicago, where Lippmann’s ideas first had taken roots – Grierson even credited Lippmann with inspiring his career choice of being a filmmaker (11). Following Lippmann’s intuition and Grierson’s example, Kahana models a theory of documentary as a way of disseminating intelligence, with some interesting twists: “intelligent work is not only embodied in individuals who perform a specialized labor function – thinking – [...] but can be enacted intersubjectively, through a cultural technology like cinema” (14).

Even though his first example is Al Gore, whom he describes as a “philosopher king” and whose documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), is, to him, a model of Lippmannian confidence on the right of an intellectual to present himself as the guide of the people, Kahana specifies his discourse when he addresses the political effects of the documentary form:

> The political force of documentary [...] depends upon its ability to make an experience available for interpretation by an array of institutions and organizations [...] documentary is an essentially transitional medium: it carries

> fragments of social reality from one place or one group or one time to another, and in transporting them, translates them from a local dialect to a lingua franca. (2)

Put it in this way, this translational aspect of the documentary form echoes Don Ihde's idea of a technologically expanded lifeworld, according to which a technology, in this case the technology of documentary, allows us to expand the range of our perceptions and reach for other places and times.[39] All forms of cinema and other media can do it as well, but, according to Kahana, "none engages the concept of publicness on all levels - condition of production, textual structures, spaces and practices of circulation, contexts of reception - so thoroughly, or in such a fraught and complex way, as the documentary" (3). Here Kahana establishes a direct link between documentary and public sphere through the notion of "publicness," which, according to him, has always been at the very center of the idea of documentary, as it is evident looking at the history of the genre: in fact, already John Grierson and Paul Rotha in the mid 1930's were stressing the idea of the public importance of documentary and of its role as a "message destined for a community" (4). I argue that this notion of publicness is very close to the concept of public sphere as outlined by Jürgen Habermas. In fact, according to Kahana, the publicness includes the fact that documentaries have audiences, but also the fact that these audiences "recognize themselves as temporary and partial representatives of a larger entity whose extent is both material and not yet known" (21). As I already mentioned, Habermas locates in a similar characteristic of the first bourgeois public sphere, namely the fact that its audience was more abstract than a simple assembly of people, the source of its political authority.

In the end, for Kahana, documentary is an "apparatus of knowledge" (33) and its goal is to make anyone a critical intellectual. In his examples, he analyses documentaries that seek to

realign distorted political situations, like a series of films made after the recall election to replace California Governor in 2003 (the one that saw Arnold Schwarzenegger victorious) that "have sought to bring transparency to the electoral process" (270). It is with the sorts of "political" interventions that Kahana brilliantly analysed that documentary finds a place as a critical element of the public sphere of Western societies: compared to other institutions, like television, or fiction cinema, documentary is a bottom-up, democratic, popular technology of representation and communication, and a means of exploration and diffusion of social practises and personal, situated perspectives.

Kahana is not alone in the identification of the political nature of documentary. Another scholar that links the notion of public sphere to cinema is Scott MacKenzie in his book *Screening Quebec*. His effort is geared not only toward the contextualization of documentary within the public sphere, but also toward a characterization of documentary public sphere as a shaper of national identity and a fosterer of alternative perspectives on society. For this purpose, he defines four sets of relations that allow us to better comprehend the relationship between moving images, national identity, and the public sphere (2). His thesis is that Quebecois cinema provided spaces for the viewers to "re-imagine themselves and their culture" (2), especially in a moment, the 1960s, when the Quebecois identity was under threat. He focuses on three different discourses on individuality, community, and collectivity that are linked to three different models of Quebecois identity (7). These three discourses are fundamental for a general understanding of Quebecois society, and all have found their way into cinema.

In his view, the added-value provided by the concept of the public sphere is:

> [...] the ability to postulate that at times, however briefly, political action or intervention potentially can emerge from the cinema through the discursive spaces

> that open out of the imaginary feeling of community that can arise during the spectatorial experience. [...] By positioning the cinema as a site of a potential alternative public sphere, film becomes one of many contested and contesting cultural artefacts. Where film differs from other media is in its ability to provide a localized site for these contestations to occur; the screening space, at times, becomes an active part of the cultural and political experience. (34)

Here MacKenzie clearly cites, even without explicitly acknowledging it, the theories of Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in their well-known article on Cuban journal "Cinecubano" in 1969, particularly the ideas that the film is just a detonator of social movements, and that the "free space" of the theatre, where people express their concerns becomes an active part of the political action (283). MacKenzie's important contribution is the understanding that the concept of public sphere provides a site where the political effect of cinema can be measured and identified. Particularly, he thinks that cinema is a favourite space for: "what Miriam Hansen has called the 'alternative public sphere.' [...] The rise of alternative public spheres necessarily implies that questions that went previously unasked now gain a public forum" (35). In this passage we can hear echoes of Fraser's analysis, which is also MacKenzie's main referent for a critique of Habermas's appeal to rationality in general (38-44).

I have already explained why I think that Habermas's labelling of the bourgeois public sphere as "rational" has to be considered a defining trait of his model: for the bourgeois public sphere to be working, there had to be a criterion that guided the public discussion of free men and women in their fights against the established authority, which was based on "irrational" criteria, such as superstition and blood lineage. However, I have no qualms about acknowledging that such a principle evolved in a different kind of rationality, which means in a different way to

evaluate experience, in contemporary society, where the objectives of the public spheres are numerous: fighting against residual irrational powers, allowing a broader access to information and a broader variety of contents to be distributed, verifying the thoroughness of public information, and so on. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that recurring to the public sphere model in order to explain some characteristics of the contemporary society is possible only if we consider that the public sphere is not a place of actual discussion, but a model of communication: in this sense rationality becomes a specific feature of the technologies through which a peculiar institution survives, and a specific kind of communication among individuals is enabled.

Kahana and MacKenzie define the public sphere as a cultural category: a space where identities and critical perspectives are negotiated and represented, for example, in the form of a documentary. This idea is compelling, but needs to be specified. The fact that the documentary takes part in the critical elaboration of culture in contemporary societies is true, but is only one of the aspects of the institution of documentary that the concept of public sphere helps us circumscribe. From an anthropological point of view, the rise of the public sphere is part of the history of the empowerment of a restricted group, the urban bourgeoisie, within the European society of the 14th to 19th century. This rise was favoured by the invention of a new technology, the press, because politics was the issue preventing the urban bourgeoisie to expand its economic power, and the creation of the press facilitated new and more democratic approaches to the political debate. What Habermas's account truly teaches us is that the institution of the modern arena for rational and civic debate, based on democratic principles and technologies for mass distribution, is indissolubly linked to a battle for more economic power inaugurated by a restricted elite of "Big Men."[40] The urban bourgeoisie was probably the societal group best suited to prosper in the bustling environment of the 18th century, an environment characterized

by demographic explosion, political and industrial revolutions, and dramatic cultural turns. However, what really gave this restricted group an edge over the rest of society, and assured that its cultural model became hegemonic, was the invention of a new form of communication among individuals. Documentary inherits the most fundamental feature of this form of communication: a commitment to showing a public all that is irrational, unfair, or dangerous in a given society, and the desire to convince as large an audience as possible that a different, more rational, more just, more democratic system is necessary. Documentary, in its ethical institutional role, is not meant primarily to entertain, but to let people know about relevant facts. Like journalism, it finds its roots in the historical process that made modern democratic societies possible in the first place, namely the definition of the basic principles of traditional societies as unjust and irrational.

In sum, a fundamental commitment defines the essence of the ethical aspect of the institution of documentary. I call it ethical because it is an intervention in a discussion about desirable ends or values for a given community, but if the genealogy I propose is correct, its purposes are political, rather than generally moral: the ethical commitment of a documentarist is best defined as an effort to delineate critical values, and a recommendation to implement them collectively. This definition of the ethical aspects of the documentary institution is not exhaustive; there are other dimensions to the documentary practice, namely the cognitive potential that presides over its collection of relevant facts and the style that characterizes its aesthetic dimension, and I will explore them in sections 2 and 3 of the dissertation. Nevertheless, the ethical dimension is a prominent feature of many contemporary professional documentary productions and, even when pushed in the background, can never be completely evacuated. The ethical commitment should not be mistaken for political engagement. Some documentaries are clearly politically engaged, but not all ethically committed documentaries are. In the following

pages, I specify and exemplify, through the analysis of Francesca Comencini's *Carlo Giuliani, ragazzo* (2002), an Italian documentary film that tries to shed light on a recent dramatic moment of Italian history, how the principle of ethical commitment that I have defined in this chapter can inspire and shape a documentary narrative, without confining the documentary to a biased politically engaged position.

2.1.3 Documentary and Political Turmoil

I consider the principle of ethical commitment as one of the core elements of the institution of documentary. Of course, not every scholar agrees with this perspective, or even considers the ethical commitment as a defining feature of the documentary form. In a persuasive essay for the *Oxford Handbook of Film and Media Studies,* Frances Guerin argues that the most important feature of the political image today, documentary included, is its accessibility (151). Aesthetic experimentalism, which characterized until very recently the efforts of filmmakers and documentarists whose main intent was to stimulate the spectators to political action, is now seen as "a symptom of artistic elitism and alienation from the masses" and has been appropriated by the mainstream for entertainment purposes. On the other hand, there is a new faith in the power of the "authentic image," which does not mean a "true" image, but one that bears the inscription of its veracity (Guerin 120). This radical shift became evident, according to Guerin, between 1989 and 2004, when thousands of images published in national and international websites played a key role in the fall of the dictatorships of Nicolae Ceausescu in Romania, Slobodan Milosevic in Yugoslavia and Viktor Yanukovych in Ukraine; peoples in those countries started to create and broadcast their own, authentic, videos, realizing Dziga Vertov's dream of a political revolution through images.

Guerin's idea that democratic circulation of news and images of abuses and murders made a major contribution to the overthrow of Eastern European regimes is compelling, but what happened in Italy between 19 and 22 July 2001, when huge rallies against the G8 summit in Genoa resulted in several clashes between protesters and police, as well as in the death of Carlo Giuliani, one of the marchers, might well show that Guerin's optimism about the political impact of accessibility to "authentic" images needs to be severely qualified, at least in the case of Western countries, in which democratic institutions and ubiquitous mass media create a much more complicated environment for the articulation of the public sphere.

As Guerin writes (150), what sparked the protest in Kiev was the leaking of audiotapes linking Leonid Kuchma to the murder of the journalist Georgiy Gongadze. The images of Carlo Giuliani's death ignited a similar massive protest in Genoa and all around Italy and prompted the opposition parties to ask for the resignation of Internal Affairs Minister Claudio Scajola. However, unlike in Kiev, protests and public outcries could do nothing to change the political structure of the Italian government, because the Minister refused to step down and was fully supported by his party. In Genoa, after the death of Carlo Giuliani, dominant and alternative interpretations of the tragic facts were forced to face each other; one reason why nothing changed, in political terms, is that the government was able to establish its version of the facts as "true," or at least "more reliable," challenging and upturning the meaning given by anti-governmental activists to the images of abuses and violence shot in "objective" fashion by the hundreds of independent camcorders that were attending the demonstrations.

In my opinion, Francesca Comencini's documentary *Carlo Giuliani, ragazzo*, which contributed to the politically relevant debate about the legitimacy of Carlo Giuliani's killing by reconstructing his last day from the point of view of Carlo's mother, shows that the most

important feature of today's political images is not their accessibility, since the images of Carlo's death, despite their accessibility, were used by political parties and advocates of civil rights to maintain opposite positions on the circumstances of his decease, but the fact that, even when they fail to contribute to a rational understanding of an event, or to deliver a precise political message, they can still convey a distinctive and remarkable ethical commitment to some fundamental values of a given society.

Carlo Giuliani, ragazzo is only one of several documentaries that were made in the last ten years about the no-global protests in general and specifically about the anti-G8 rallies in Genoa. Most of them, like *This is What Democracy Looks Like* (2000) on the Seattle protest, and *Bella ciao* (2002) on the Genoa protest, are examples of a trend in some recent documentary productions characterized by a shift in the role of the director from "witness" to "activist." As Bill Nichols suggests, directors of these kinds of documentaries position themselves on a blurry line between activists and filmmakers, betraying a fundamental documentary dogma, which is "the perpetuation of a distance" (*Representing Reality* 186). Normally, documentarists behave as witnesses and "retain a measure of remove, no matter how compassionate or dedicated they may be" (*Representing Reality* 187), because their objective is to provide the audience with a thorough context. Engaged documentarists behave like activists and are more interested in presenting a specific and more focused point of view on the political issue they choose to represent. Both are ethically committed, but the former type of documentarists privilege the cognitive moment (thus the importance of the larger framework which makes the events graspable) while the latter privilege the political implications (thus the need to zoom in on the crucial events). Francesca Comencini, on the other hand, was neither a witness nor an activist. She was not among the hundreds of cameramen that followed the protest against the G8 in

Genoa, and she was not interested in acting as a spokesperson for a political movement. Her attitude, as a documentarist, was not defined by a cognitive effort to find a rational explanation for the events of the Genoa G8, or by an overtly political engagement with the protesters, or the establishment, but it was defined by the desire to answer an ethical question: can the killing of a 20-year-old boy who is protesting, however violently, for a better society be justified in today's Italy?

2.1.4 July 20, 2001

Carlo Giuliani, ragazzo was broadcasted for the first time by RAI, the Italian national public television, on June 12 2002. It was then screened out of competition at the 2002 Cannes Film Festival and distributed in DVD by Cecchi Gori Home Video, a mainstream distribution company, in 2006. The protest against the G8 in Genoa occurred just one year before the first screening of the movie, in the summer of 2001. One of the first sequences of the documentary shows the *Disobbedienti* while they are trying to build their base camp in the Carlini stadium, the place they were assigned to for gathering and sleeping on the evening of July 19, 2001.[41] They struggle to cope with the pouring rain: some of them are working on the pitch in the vain effort of building canals to prevent the water from flooding into the tent area; some are asking, in English, that the "comrades" cooperate instead of just watching the workers from their sleeping bags on the tiers of the stadium. They are some of the protagonists of one of the biggest and most controversial demonstrations in Italian history.

Between July 19 and 22, 2001, while prime ministers and delegations from the wealthiest and most powerful countries were received by Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi in the serene atmosphere of the Palazzo Ducale in Genoa, clashes between protesters and police escalated to a degree that had been unknown in Italy and Europe for sixty years (Neale 229).

Looking at the toll at the end of the summit, it is evident that something went utterly wrong: police fired six thousand and two hundred CS gas grenades[42] and twenty gun bullets. The damage to the city amounted to 25 million Euros. Two hundred and fifty people were arrested. One thousand and two hundred were injured; among them, two hundred and seventy-three were police officers (Lucarelli 53). One protester, Carlo Giuliani, was shot dead, killed by the auxiliary Carabiniere Mario Placanica, who claimed to have acted in self-defence.

Accusations from citizens and organizations to the management of the public order during the days of the G8 led to various and complex legal proceedings, many of them on-going. In 2003 all charges against Mario Placanica were dropped, but several other trials ended with the conviction of many police officers and functionaries. The day after Carlo Giuliani's death, the Diaz school, a base camp for activists and journalists, was attacked by the police looking for the notorious Black Block squads. Several unarmed people were severely injured but no evidence of criminal plans or weapons were found. As a consequence of this action, 28 police officers and high rank officials were charged with conspiracy to pervert the course of justice, use of excessive force and planting evidence. While in the first stage most of the officials were cleared from any accusations, in July 5, 2012, the judges of the final stage of the trial condemned the highest ranks of Italian police for their involvement in the Genoa events, a sentence that does not have any precedent in recent Italian history (Agnoletto and Guadagnucci 25).

The court is not the only field where this battle between public institutions and private citizens has been fought. Members of the conservative party started immediately to exploit the Italian media, especially private television channels and right-wing newspapers, in order to spread their version of the events. On the very day of Carlo's death, during the evening edition of a popular talk-show on the national broadcaster, the Vice Prime Minister Gianfranco Fini

affirmed that “the death of Carlo Giuliani was the result of an act of ‘legitimate self-defence’ and, referring to the no-global movement in terms of ‘terrorism,’ added that Giuliani might have been launching a gas bomb” (Gundle and Rinaldi 78). This was just the first of many public statements that firmly placed the government on the side of the police and that, echoed by the national and international media, established the portrait of Carlo Giuliani as an “anarchist,” an “outsider” or simply a “criminal” (Gundle and Rinaldi 79) .

Comencini’s documentary offers a different, and quite peculiar, perspective on Carlo Giuliani and his last day. The documentary narrates the events neither from the point of view of an activist, nor from that of a politician, or the police, or the public prosecutor, but from that of Haidi Giuliani, Carlo’s mother. She did not even march on the streets of Genoa during the G8 protest, and in the first months after Carlo’s death she did not speak in public and was completely unknown to the public opinion (Agnoletto and Guadagnucci 189). And yet, from the first sequence, a black and white semi-still shot, that portrays her together with her husband and her daughter, it appears evident that she is the protagonist of the documentary. After a brief reading of one of Carlo’s poems, performed by an actor over a sequence of still images of Carlo’s childhood, Haidi’s interview starts and goes on until the end of the documentary. She sits at the table of a lounge room, framed in a close-up, with a bookcase in the background, photographed in a natural, bluish light (Fig. 1). The voice of the interviewer is almost never heard. She describes the events of the day her son died in chronological order, starting from the preparation and the first moves of the march of the *Disobbedienti,* and her voice and image are alternated with original footage and original audio of the protest. Her voice is almost the only voice we hear during the whole movie.

Fig. 1. *Carlo Giuliani, ragazzo* (2002). Haidi Giuliani.

Since she was not an eyewitness, she has only indirect information about the movements of the protesters, so Comencini integrates her interview with footage shot by cameramen that followed closely the march of the *Disobbedienti*. Theirs was one of the initiatives coordinated by the GSF (Genoa Social Forum),[43] an umbrella organization for more than 700 associations and groups of various proveniences and even more various claims: it grouped Catholic associations, environmental activists, political parties, worker unions and any movement that was against globalization and corporativism (Neale 10). On July 20 the *Disobbedienti*'s was the biggest manifestation, and aimed at violating the Red Zone, a guarded and fenced perimeter surrounding Palazzo Ducale and the area where the G8 meeting was taking place, forbidden to all the protesters. The *Disobbendienti* were prepared to cope with some sort of confrontation with the police and were wearing shoulder protections and helmets and at the head of the parade were carrying a transparent plastic wall called *testuggine* ("Tortoise"), like the military formation of the Ancient Romans.

The documentary shows the preparation and the first movements of the *Disobbedienti*'s march from the Carlini stadium. We see the organizers addressing the activists with megaphones in order to explain how to protect from CS gas. They also explain the formation of the parade, particularly the importance of the *testuggine* and the necessity to march united. One of the organizers feels the need to be particularly explicit and says: "Tutto ciò funziona soltanto se siamo una moltitudine." It may seem a trivial line, and yet it is very important in order to understand a crucial point about Comencini's documentary: we are plunged at the centre of a political confrontation in which conflicting ideologies are struggling to gain the upper hand, not only at the physical level (occupying/preventing the occupation of certain physical spaces) but also at the level of the interpretation/characterization of the meaning and significance of these physical events. Comencini's documentary, then, begins by focusing on the ideology of the protesting group: "multitude" is a key concept developed by Antonio Negri, one of the main theorists of the anti/alter-globalization movement which took to the streets in Genoa. By highlighting Negri's language in the documentary, Comencini is then evoking a whole interpretation of the contemporary conjuncture, which it will be useful to summarize. Negri was the founder of *Potere Operaio* in 1969 and in the early 1970s was a leading member of *Autonomia Operaia*, a Marxist political movement opposed to the reformist actions of the Parliamentary left-wing party. Negri's thought is centred on the idea that a new form of Empire has led to the disappearance of the political institutions that were invented and formed after the French Revolution. The new structure of power is "decentred, [...] deterritorialized, [it] develops outside the frame of ethnic-national traditions and values [...] [and its] political and normative essence is cosmopolitan universalism" (Negri 15). The consequences of this premise are numerous: first, even global powers like the United States should not be seen as principally

responsible for the current political structure of the planet, because they are subject to economic and political forces which are largely out of their control. Second, globalization is not a bad factor per se: on the contrary, a first step towards an anthropological revolution *within* Empire (it cannot be against Empire, because there are no places outside of it) is the struggle for "the universal right to move, work and learn over the entire surface of the globe" (Negri 27). This revolution within Empire can be carried on by only one political subject, according to Negri, the "multitude," that is "a multiplicity of singularities which cannot in any sense find a representative unity" (27).

Negri is only one of the theorists who served as sources of inspiration for the activists of the new social movements, whose compositions and ideologies are extremely variegated. In the second volume of his well-known trilogy *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, Manuel Castells proposes a theory to explain how different ideologies can oppose the same entity. He analyzes five movements that oppose what he calls the "New Global Order," coming from different contexts and alimented by contrasting ideologies: the Zapatistas, the American militia, Aum Shinrikyo, al-Qaeda and the anti-globalization movement. His point is that "from an analytical perspective, there are no 'bad' and 'good' social movements. They are all symptoms of our societies and all impact on social structures, with variable intensities and outcomes" (73-74). The interest of the comparison is precisely that, even though these movements are completely different in their goals and ideology, they are similar in their challenge to the new global order on behalf of their constructed identities.

Negri's concept of multitude and Castells's idea of oppositional movements can well describe the social groups participating in the GSF, because one of the principal characteristics of the anti-globalization protest is that its ideology and theoretical sources are far from univocal:

it is possible to refer to it as a single entity because all the components of the movement share a common counter-hegemonic purpose and all want to change and modify the distinctive features of the hegemonic market-oriented New World Order, the global networks of economic power that risk disintegrating traditional, hierarchical mechanisms of social control and political representation, and yet the movement brings together anarchists and pacifists, left-wing and right-wing, from every corner of the world.

A documentary more focused on the political aspects of the Genoa protest would have been probably tempted to show all the different identities and ideologies of the marchers, but this is clearly not a movie whose main focus is political. After the first fifteen minutes, Comencini gradually abandons the left-wing slogans and banners of the *Disobbedienti*, as if they were enough to give an idea of what kind of people and ideas were demonstrating on the streets of Genoa, and starts focusing solely on Haidi Giuliani and her son's story. As a consequence, from the moment of the first police attack on the protesters, the images of the demonstration cease to be a separate tale and start to have an illustrative role, becoming a sort of visual manifestation of Haidi Giuliani's words: when she describes the attack of the police, she does so in terms that are unmistakably sympathetic with the protesters and foregrounds the cruelty of an assault that was carried out against wounded people in alleys and inside courtyards. A moment later, the documentary shows images of the chase and police officers in military gear beating wounded and unarmed people in alleys and courtyards. Then she explains the topography of the place, giving detailed information about names of the streets and characteristics of the area as the documentary shows those places in the exact same order. She says that via Tolemaide, where the first clash occurred, is protected by a high wall on one side and straggles in small alleys on the other. The

images show the charges of the police and the panic spreading among the protesters, who do not have a clear way of escape (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2. *Carlo Giuliani, ragazzo* (2002). Police charge.

Francesca Comencini's editing highlights the symmetry and perfect correspondences between Carlo's mother's words and the images presented, and I am suggesting that through this device Haidi Giuliani is not simply offering her point of view of the events, but that she is invested with the authorial prerogative of presenting *the* point of view of the documentary. Not only her voice directs the choice of the images, but often provides the viewer with the only commentary. This commentary does not come in the classic form of a voice over, because the videos are almost always presented with their original audio and she is normally framed in close-up when she speaks; nevertheless, the connection between her words and the images is so tight that they function as a single unit.

One of the outcomes of this particular kind of narrative is a reduction of the ambiguity of the images to the meaning offered in the commentary. An example is Haidi Giuliani's interpretation of one of the first images that the documentary shows of Carlo among the

protesters: he is at the head of the rally that was dismantled by the police few minutes earlier, already wearing the balaclava, directly facing the compact line of police officers in combat gear; he has a stick in his right hand, but he is immobile, when all around him people are throwing stones at the police. The fact that he wears the balaclava is an important detail, because it means that his face and the almost childish features that the viewer has become familiar with at the beginning of the documentary, when a series of pictures of his youth were presented, are hidden beneath a mask, and his persona has already acquired the immaterial traits of an effigy: the dangerous "man in the white singlet" that was in the front pages of all Italian newspapers the day after the protest (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. *Carlo Giuliani, ragazzo* (2002). Carlo among the protesters.

Carlo's mother says that the image is particularly dear to her, because it is consistent with Carlo's character: he was a guy who wanted to understand first. Apparently, with this remark she is referring to the fact that Carlo is not throwing stones, which she interprets as meaning that he wanted to understand things before taking any action. The fact that he is on the very frontline of the clashes does not imply, in her view, that he might have already made the decision of being

involved in some sort of confrontation, possibly even a violent one. A bit earlier, Haidi Giuliani stated that Carlo did not plan to join any group of protesters beforehand and that he decided to go with the *Disobbedienti* only after he saw the aftermath of the first unexpected charge of the police in via Tolemaide. This means, in her view, that he was compelled to act by a sense of justice, but this explanation does not explore the possibility that he may not have been too interested in the political dimension of the protest in the first place. This lack of ambiguity in Carlo's portrait is a confirmation that there is only one point of view telling this story, that of the mother who wants to defend the memory of her child. Comencini does not present her subjectivity as a separate perspective, but it seems like she intends to conceal it behind the humble role of carrier of someone else's point of view. In so doing, she voluntarily renounces the cognitive aspects of her filmmaking – she does not want to provide a more rational or objective explanation of Carlo's death, even though she does want to provide an account of his last day that is different from the dominant version – but she does not give up her ethical commitment, because the choice of telling the events of Genoa from the point of view of Haidi Giuliani reveals the intention of moving away from the political aspects of the confrontation and going back to the basic human fact that a boy, Haidi's son, was killed during a protest.

The final series of images included in the documentary were taken in piazza Alimonda, where the tragic events occurred. The police ran after the protesters in the narrow alleys that link via Tolemaide and piazza Alimonda and then retreated; in the manoeuvre, the last two off-road vehicles blocked each other and lost contact with the rest of the unit. Some of the protesters approached one of the vehicles and started to hit it with wooden boards, bars and stones. Carlo Giuliani was among them and several pictures and videos make it possible to reconstruct all his movements: first he leans down to pick up a fire extinguisher from the ground, while looking at

the officers beneath the rear window of the truck; then he raises the object and is about to throw it when the gun emerges from the back window and fires. As Haidi Giuliani points out, and one of the pictures proves clearly, he was at least four meters from the off-road vehicle in that moment, so he was not an immediate threat. However, the photo that was chosen to be on the front-page of all the main newspapers the day after the events was a Reuters picture taken with a telephoto lens that deformed the perspective (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4. *Carlo Giuliani, ragazzo* (2002). The gun.

This photo gives the impression that Carlo is very close to the truck and contributed greatly to endorse the dominant version of Carlo as a violent anarchist. The two photos are both "authentic images," in Guerin's words, but they tell two very different stories and were used to support two opposite versions of the facts.

There were not only photo cameras that day in Piazza Alimonda. One reporter shot a video of Carlo's death and the documentary shows it towards the end, as the climax of its tale. It has, clearly marked, the inscription of what Vivian Sobchack (*Carnal Thoughts* 249) would call a "human gaze:" the images show the left side of the off-road vehicle where Mario Placanica

was, and are trembling, because the cameraman is walking towards the square from an alley; when the gun fires, the camera shakes violently, then points to the ground and a loud cry is distinctly heard: “No! No!” Only four seconds pass from the gunshot to the moment when the cameraman regains his composure and points the camera back to Carlo, already lying on the ground. The vehicle has already disappeared and this probably means, according to Haidi Giuliani, that the engine was not off and therefore that the police officers were not in as great a danger as they declared during the trial.

According to Sobchack, the human gaze means that the ethical engagement of the cameraman is clearly inscribed in the images, because the footage shows a human reaction to the events that are happening in front of the camera. The fact that a human reaction is so clearly inscribed in the footage of Carlo’s death raises the problem of how and if Comencini’s ethical engagement transpires from the images, since she merely chose them, but did not shoot them. A short analysis of her previous work can give us a hint about her ethical and political commitment. She is the daughter of the venerable Luigi Comencini and her sister Cristina is a well-known director of fiction movies, but Francesca, at the time of this documentary, was not really a familiar name for the Italian audience. She directed her first fiction movie, *Pianoforte,* in 1984, the romance of a couple with a drug-addiction problem, and two documentaries in the 1990s, *Elsa Morante*, about the famous writer, and *Shakespeare a Palermo* about the staging of a Carlo Cecchi play, both of them focused on literary heritage and the translation of poetry in acts and images. In 2001 she directed a fiction movie, *Le parole di mio padre,* which is another literary adaptation, this time from Italo Svevo’s novel *La coscienza di Zeno*. It is evident that her works before *Carlo Giuliani, ragazzo* denoted a manifest interest in sophisticated artistic questions, but not really an engaged attitude towards social problems. After the documentary

about the Genoa events, though, the topics of her movies changed abruptly: she directed *Mi piace lavorare* (2003) about an episode of mobbing in a factory, *A casa nostra* (2006) about the moral corruption brought by money and power, and *In fabbrica* (2007), a history of factory workers and their struggles in Italy after the Second World War. If nowadays Francesca Comencini is a recognized voice among socially and politically engaged Italian directors,[44] it was not the same in 2001, so it is fair to assume that she did not have a strongly preconceived ideological position prior to the documentary about Genoa but rather that her interest in political cinema was born out of the experience of these events and the debates they originated. Like the protagonist of her documentary, Haidi Giuliani, Francesca Comencini did not address social injustice and social problems in public before. This is consistent with the stylistic choices previously noted: her moderate interest in the political aspects of the Genoa events is not surprising, given that she was not known for her political activism, but the hypothesis that she was drawn to Carlo's story by an ethical commitment is confirmed by her following works, which show a clear engagement in social and political issues.

In her phenomenological exploration of death's representation through cinema, Vivian Sobchack states that "documentary space is constituted and inscribed as ethical space: it stands as the objectively visible evidence of subjective visual responsiveness and responsibility toward a world shared with other human subjects" (*Carnal Thoughts* 248). With the use of indexical images always comes responsibility, no matter what the director's beliefs and intentions are; and even more so when the images of a documentary are somehow related to the death of a human being: death is such a taboo in our society that its indexical representation is always perceived as an ethical stance toward the actual event that is witnessed, directly or indirectly, by the director. Therefore, according to Sobchack, the representation of death is considered morally justifiable

only if the filmmaker's visual activity is inscribed in the images, as it happens with the trembling sequence of Carlo's last moments. Sobchack's categories, however, work when the director of the documentary is also the author of the shooting. What happens when he or she uses images from a different source? Evidently the inscription of the ethical engagement of the director has to be found somewhere else. In the case of *Carlo Giuliani, ragazzo*, I argue that the director's intervention can be seen in the delegation of all authorial prerogatives to Haidi Giuliani, judged as the carrier of the best point of view on the story. I would call the inscription of Francesca Comencini's ethical engagement in the documentary *entrusted gaze*, because the choice of Carlo's mother's point of view is obviously not inconsequential and clearly signals an ethical commitment to the values she represents: she is a cultivated person, proud of her son's sophisticated literary tastes, whose father fought as a *partigiano* at the end of the Second World War and who was personally involved in the protests of students and workers at the end of the 1960's and during the 1970's. She represents a history of dissent against repressive politics and her son was reared according to these values. She is also, however, a mother who lost her son during a protest, and this tragic event overcomes, in Comencini's view, the subjectivity of her personal political views, and elevates her story to a level of universal ethics. Some would argue against the motivations of the protesters, or their behaviours, but few would deny that freedom of expression should be guaranteed, and that a person should not die while expressing her dissent. Freedom of expression is a right sanctioned in the Italian constitution and one of the fundamental values upon which Italian society is based. Comencini's ethical commitment is squarely pointed at defending this value, which encompasses all the conflicting stances of more specific political positions.

The mode of representation chosen by the director for the interview with Haidi Giuliani is peculiar and can be defined, in Bill Nichols' terms, a "pseudomonologue," which is characterized by "the visible presence of the social actor as evidentiary witness and the visible absence of the filmmaker. [Using this mode,] the filmmaker achieves a suturing effect, placing the viewer in direct relation to the interviewee" (Nichols *Representing Reality* 54). According to Nichols, "the pseudomonologue makes the viewer the subject of cinematic address, erasing the very mediations of filmmaker/subject/viewer that the interactive mode accentuates" (*Representing Reality* 54). This effect is enhanced, in the case of *Carlo Giuliani, ragazzo*, by the fact that the interview with Carlo's mother is by far the main source of the documentary. No other interviews are presented and just three other sources are used: images of the march that are meant to give a visual version of Haidi's words, black and white semi-still shots of Carlo's family and friends, in staged settings, and black and white images of notebook pages, over which an actor's voice reads Carlo's poems.

According to Bill Nichols (*Representing Reality* 33-34), it is the relationship between filmmaker, subject and audience that determines the ethical choices of a documentary: reflexive documentaries question the value and form of the representation itself, highlighting the relationship between filmmaker and audience, while interactive ones are more interested in the relationship between filmmaker and subject. From this point of view *Carlo Giuliani, ragazzo* is clearly interactive, because it foregrounds the bond between the director and the subject of the documentary. Comencini is not interested in making a visually striking work of art that questions its role as a representation, but in showing the spectators a perspective that she clearly shares. Had the filmmaker just adopted the *Disobbedienti*'s point of view, instead of assigning an authorial role to Haidi Giuliani, she would have assumed a political stance and translated the

instances of the protesters, but perhaps, she would have overshadowed the ethical issues at stake. In choosing Haidi Giuliani, she highlights the personal side of a national problem, the moral values beneath a political issue.

Comencini's position is not, however, apolitical. Like Stuart Hall noted talking about Antonio Gramsci's description of the transition towards a state that renounces its coercive role, but exercises a moral leadership on its citizens, "such a concept of the state totally transforms, for example, much of the literature about the so-called 'post-colonial state,' which has often assumed a simple, dominative or instrumental model of state power" (Hall 299). Comencini seems aware of the fact that a political perspective on the Genoa events goes beyond politics and the confrontation with a dominative global power, and involves private, personal and cultural aspects of people's everyday life, a fact that is at the very core of Gramsci's definition of hegemony.[45] The director was certainly aware of the political debate surrounding the facts that she decided to document in her movie. However, she chose not to present a personal or politically biased point of view on the events, but rather to endorse the point of view of a woman with an emotional and tragic bond with the story. The result is quite an original documentary, which features an interactive mode of representation through an "entrusted gaze" on the events of the Genoa protest. Despite the fact that the documentary's narrative focuses on the personal values and issues of the main character, rather than social and political problems, I suggested that this peculiar documentary mode conveys the director's ethical commitment to the value of freedom of expression, which is a funding principle of Italian society. In the end, *Carlo Giuliani, ragazzo* demonstrates that even when political or cognitive aspects are partially put aside, a documentary can still be an ethically committed intervention in the public sphere of contemporary society.

2.2 The Technology of Documentary

2.2.1 A Heterodox Documentary: *La bocca del lupo*

The ethical commitment of the documentarist to the issues that are explored in her movie is one of the fundamental characteristics of the institution of documentary. It means that spectators are prone to recognize as one of the distinctive features of an audiovisual production labelled as "documentary" that of being engaged in the examination of some of the principles and values that define our society. In the previous section, I maintained that this feature has political consequences, even when the documentarist is not actively politically engaged, because the institution of documentary evolved as an offspring of older institutions, like the newspaper, that were primarily meant to create a public place for debating political issues and prepare political changes.

Ethical commitment, however, is not the only characteristic of the institution of documentary. Many documentaries are not defined mainly by their contribution to the discussion on values and principles of a society, but by their contribution to a better knowledge of the reality in which we live. A documentary about nature, for example, is supposed to show the viewer something she does not know about, for example, the lions' hunting habits in the African savannah. This second characteristic of the institution of documentary, which I call cognitive potential, brings forward the vastly debated problem of realism, because realism is the aesthetic category that has been traditionally used to assess and describe the relationship between representation and reality. In this section of the dissertation, I define the cognitive potential of the documentary analysing the relationship between the documentary and reality, which I believe can be better understood if one looks at the documentary not as a realist representation, but as an

instrument through which we can interface with reality, or, in other words, as a realist technology.

In order to untangle the problem of realism, one possibility is that of dividing the different forms of narrative in "fiction" and "non-fiction," and to postulate that this distinction entails a different relationship between representation and reality. Intuitively, non-fiction narratives should be defined by a more faithful representation of reality, whereas fiction narratives should be less close to reality, thus less interesting from a realist cognitive perspective. My assumption is that the categories of fiction and non-fiction have to be reformulated, and that the documentary does provide important knowledge about reality. This is the core aspect of what I called the second institutional characteristic of the documentary, or its cognitive potential. Such apparently straightforward assumption, however, needs to be refined, because, as we will see through the following chapters, the borders of the fiction category are difficult to trace and so is the role of the documentary within them. I will come to a different definition of fictional representations in section 2.3; until then, I will put the terms "fiction" and "non-fiction" between brackets, to signal the fact that their adoption and meaning within the present dissertation is provisional.

Dorritt Cohn begins her account of the history of the term "fiction" with a definition, borrowed from Paul Ricoeur (1: 64), that sounds beautifully simple: "[fiction is a] non-referential narrative" (9). For her, such a narrative is constituted by a "series of statements that deal with a causally related sequence of events that concern human (or human-like) beings" (12), and "creates the world to which it refers by referring to it" (13). Conceived in this manner, "fiction" has two main properties: "1) its references to the world outside the text are not bound to accuracy; and 2) it does not refer exclusively to the real world outside the text" (15). As a

consequence of this definition, it looks relatively easy to trace a distinction between "fiction" and "non-fiction," because, "referential narratives are verifiable and incomplete, whereas non-referential narratives are unverifiable and complete" (16).

Although Cohn's definition is in many respects compelling and remains very useful for an analysis of "fiction" and "non-fiction" narratives, my contention is that a narration made with moving images opens a wide array of new questions. Such questions emerge with special clarity in a discussion of the particular moving images narration that is the subject of this study: the documentary. Is documentary a verifiable referential narrative? Following common sense, we may be strongly inclined to answer affirmatively, but then, do we know what is that is verifiable in a documentary? Are we referring to some characteristics of the documentary image or to the sentences uttered by the filmed characters? Moreover, what do we mean with the term "verifiable?" Are we ready to grant a truth status to anything verifiable? But then, can we state without fear of naiveté that something like the truth of a fact exists? Poststructuralist epistemologies and relativist ontologies oppose such a conception and their conclusions are difficult to reject, to the point that relativism (which, to be sure, appears in a wide range of often conflicting forms) is, without a doubt, the current doxa in contemporary philosophy and aesthetics (Beaumont 2-3). And yet, as I mentioned earlier, a cognitive potential, thus the possibility to reveal true and verifiable facts about reality, may not only be a way to distinguish between "fiction" and documentary narratives, but a fundamental characteristic of the institution of documentary.

In order to make all these problems more immediately clear, I will narrate the twists and turns that accompanied the production of a recent heterodox Italian documentary, Pietro Marcello's *La bocca del lupo* (2009). The unusual character of this work is undoubtedly related

to the context of its making: the film was not the outcome of well-planned research, or of the personal acquaintance of the director with a particular problem or person; rather, it was made almost by chance and was the result of a combination of unusual circumstances. Marcello, a young and fairly unknown director at the time, was commissioned to make a movie by the San Marcellino Foundation, a Jesuit organization that helps the poor and the outcasts living in the old city centre of Genoa, in the North-west of Italy. The Foundation did not give Marcello strict guidelines and contented itself with general and unobtrusive indications, mainly that the film had to be about *Genova vista dal basso* (Gay 52). The idea behind the project was not to finance a movie about the work of the Foundation, but a movie about the invisible inhabitants of the city centre and their complicated, out-of-the-ordinary, and often amazing lives. The objective was to stimulate a debate about marginalization and the right of any person to be treated with dignity.

The project remained on paper until two Jesuits of the Foundation, Nicola Gay and Danilo De Luise, met Pietro Marcello in Rome. He was editing his first movie, *Il passaggio della linea* (2007), a documentary about the express trains that travel across Italy by night. This movie, which would eventually be awarded the Pasinetti prize at the Venice's *Mostra internazionale*, demonstrates an inclination towards excluded people, and the capacity to reveal the richness of the other, nocturnal, sombre side of Italian landscape. The Jesuits invited Marcello to screen the film for an event they were organizing, and then asked him to work on their project about Genoa. Since Marcello was born in Caserta, close to Naples, and had never been to Genoa, he accepted to live for more than one year in the Foundation headquarter, in the *caruggi* ("alleys") of the city centre, in proximity to the people that the Foundation helps and hosts.

It took Marcello a while to move with assurance in the city landscape, to understand the city and its people, to trust them and gain their confidence. At the beginning he was not even

certain whether to shoot a documentary or a "fiction" film and he even auditioned a few actors. The "fiction" might have been an easy shortcut, but he could not find faces and characters interesting enough to make up a credible story (Boille 63). After months of useless wandering, he stumbled by chance upon Enzo, the man who became the protagonist of the film. He saw him in front of a bakery, they started to talk and he showed him the scars on his legs, traces of a brawl with two policemen in the 1970's that cost him the first sentence and twenty years in jail. Marcello felt immediately that he was the right person:

> Oggi non è facile incontrare bravi attori, perché gli attori non hanno una storia. Credo che nel cinema un volto sia tutto. Ad esempio, un volto come quello di Enzo racconta una storia anche se resta in silenzio. […] I suoi silenzi sono altrettanto straordinari, anche se legati al fatto che è stato tanti anni in galera dove ha imparato a stare fermo, a controllare realmente il suo corpo […] A star tanto tempo in una cella apprendi a stare fermo.[46] (Boille 63)

The first meeting with Enzo left a deep impression on Marcello, who looked for him the day after, even though he did not remember his name and had to defy the reluctance of the people of the *caruggi*. Finally he and Sara Fgaier, the editor of the movie, found a man who knew him and accepted to arrange a meeting, so the next day they met again; Enzo was sporting a blue suit, and insisted that they keep a backpack with all his photographs and writings. They were struck by his strength and expressivity and by his intention to establish immediately a non-superficial communication, sharing with them his personal belongings (Fgaier 25).

The story took a fascinating turn when Marcello discovered Enzo's partner, the secretive and educated Mary, a transsexual who came to Genoa when she was seventeen years old, fleeing from a bourgeois family in Rome that did not accept her. In Genoa there was a community of

transsexuals where she found hospitality and compassion, although after a while she was arrested for drug-related problems. Even though in the Genoa prison where she was interned, there was a dedicated sector for transsexuals, Mary and Enzo happened to meet, and from that moment on, they became inseparable. Marcello and Fgaier came to know all these details piece by piece, particularly after that Enzo and Mary accepted to release a kind of confession-interview in which they recall their story. It was not planned, but that long confession became the backbone of the film.

If the encounter with Enzo and Mary was so important for the director, it would seem logical for Marcello to immediately place them as the protagonists of the narrative, but this is not the case. The documentary starts with images of Quarto dei Mille, the pier where Garibaldi's famous Expedition of the Thousand began, a place fraught with history (Italian unification and the emergence of modern Italy) and with the conflicting narratives that history has generated. But while the voice over alludes to the cultural significance of the place, the film lingers on the natural landscape: the immemorial sea and especially the caves in this section of the Ligurian coastline which, nowadays, provide temporary shelter to homeless and marginalized people. Enzo, in his blue suit, materializes among the rocks, and the camera follows him until he reaches the alleys of the old port. His face and movements are mixed with images of the current inhabitants of the city, and with old images filmed by amateur cameramen, in grainy sepia films. At minute ten, Mary's voice-over starts the tale of their love-story. The voice-over is a characteristic feature of the documentary form and in classic documentaries is, usually, an *acousmêtre*, a disembodied voice.[47] Marcello plays with this typical documentary feature in an interesting way: we do not know whom this voice belong to until minute forty-seven, when a

medium shot of Mary and Enzo seated in their couch, that lasts twelve minutes with no major cuts, reveals the origin of the voice.

Marcello deliberately wanted to begin by emphasizing the larger context which gives Enzo and Mary's story a much larger significance. The director, as well as the Jesuits of the San Marcellino Foundation, wanted this story to go beyond the private events of two individuals' lives and touch larger issues, particularly the existential condition of marginalized citizens in an enigmatic city. The Jesuits help every day hundreds of people in need of everything; people like Enzo and Mary, and even less fortunate ones, without a powerful sentiment to cling to. They are used to hear stories of marginalization and they know the richness of these people's lives; to them, Marcello's movie is not just about Enzo and Mary, but about all the persons they help daily. As Alberto Remondini, Jesuit and President of the San Marcellino Foundation writes: "La sera della proiezione al Torino Film Festival, quando Mary e Enzo si sono alzati per lo scroscio degli applausi, con loro, in piedi, c'erano tanti altri senza voce, persone con storie che le rendono assolutamente uniche e di assoluto valore" (16). [48]

The *acousmêtre* fits the purpose of stressing the larger context of the story, because its main function is to separate Mary as a character from Mary as a person, giving to Mary's voice a cinematic presence that is independent from her body. The *acousmêtre* also mirrors the circumstances in which the story emerged: at the beginning, Mary was shy and cautious, and did not want to be involved in the project, but when she finally started to trust Marcello and Fgaier, it became evident that her sensibility was the necessary complement to Enzo's brutal energy, and that she was the right person to narrate their lives (Fgaier 27). Her figure, during the months of shooting, and consequently throughout the film itself, became so fundamental that the concealment of her identity until the very end creates an inevitable sense of suspense. Moreover,

the disembodiment of her voice in the film parallels her fractured sexuality, and re-enacts the conflict that provoked her escape from the parental home. Enzo's body is very much present throughout the whole movie, but is often missing a voice, while her body is hidden for much of the film and yet her voice is a constant accompaniment to Enzo's wanderings, as it was for most of his life, thanks to the tapes that they were sharing while he was in prison.

The use of archival footage is another feature that is typically considered, by Italian critics in particular, one of the defining traits (indeed in certain cases, such as the historical genre, the key trait) of the documentary form. In *La bocca del lupo* archival media do have a prominent role but we should note from the start that their function, at least in the director's mind, was not so much to guarantee the reality and truth of the situation but rather, and interestingly, to bridge the gap from the particular story of two individuals to the larger portrait of a city:

> La genovesità è rappresentata all'interno del film dai materiali di repertorio dei cineamatori genovesi che hanno filmato Genova nel secolo scorso. L'intreccio fra i materiali filmici prodotti in tempi diversi vuole costruire una forma narrativa che rispetti gli sguardi interni al territorio liberandoli dai sedimenti, dai pregiudizi […] I repertori offrono la possibilità di disegnare un inventario delle trasformazioni urbane e delle loro conseguenze umane, riportando la fisicità di luoghi scomparsi ma rimasti vivi nella memoria della città e dei suoi abitanti.[49] (Marcello "Genova, una storia d'amore" 22)

The intertwining of footages produced in different periods does give the film an unusual richness. Contemporary images of Genoa are alternated with images of the city at the dawn of the century, to create striking contrasts or to reveal unimagined similarities. At the beginning of

the film, a past of industrial power and glamorous society is compared with today's abandonment and decadence: images of the Ansaldo factory, the biggest Italian steel industry until the 1930's, and of graceful swimmers plunging from the rocks of the bay area, are associated with contemporary images of the homeless old people at Quarto dei Mille and with long shots of rusty and dismissed industrial sites, which constitute the landscape of Enzo's walk from the port to the alleys of the city centre. The effect is that of adding a vast temporal dimension to the story, which extends far beyond the confines of Enzo's life, stretching over almost a century. The protagonist of this enlarged temporal dimension is neither Enzo nor Mary, but the city of Genoa, and, because of the historical importance of some of the city's landmarks and sites for the larger history of the nation, like the beach of Quarto dei Mille where the film begins, the destiny of the city is compared to that of Italy itself.

When Enzo becomes the fulcrum of the movie, images of the old Genoa suggest continuity, instead of rupture, as if Enzo was a relic of that forgotten past captured in private films of amateur cameramen. For example, when he climbs barefoot the hill to the sanctuary of Madonna della Guardia, with a huge candle in his arms, and enters the room where the ex-votos are posted on the walls, his moves and gestures are edited in combination with archival footage of that same room forty or fifty years before, and nothing seems to have changed meanwhile, not even the curtains at the window, or the door's frame. Another example is a curious montage of an old footage of a sophisticated horse-drawn carriage, running in one of the biggest avenues of Genoa, with images of Enzo pulling his hand-cart and placing it in the middle of the small square where he sells watermelons. Here the association seems to evoke both similarities and differences and to suggest that Enzo be considered a sort of derailed link between the city past, with its old-fashion and aristocratic habits, and the city present, modern, but perhaps less elegant,

in which non-mechanical means of transportation survived, but are degraded from horse-drawn leisure activity to human-drawn labour equipment.

The use of archival footage to illustrate the history of Genoa is paralleled, at level of the characters, by the use of personal media belonging to Enzo and Mary, like the audiotapes that they were sending each other while Enzo was in prison. They contain passionate, sometimes crude, love declarations and replace the more conventional love letters that Enzo could not write. They add another layer of authenticity to the story and testify the endurance of their feelings for each other. In some of them, Enzo expresses his love with tenderness and helpless sincerity, in others he promises furious revenge, in case Mary did not wait for him and betrayed him. Mary, on the other hand, sounds more calm and confident, and always reassures him that she will be there as soon as he leaves prison and then they will finally move to the little house in the countryside where they dream to live their old age together. Thanks to these tapes, and to the old photos of Enzo and Mary that punctuate the movie, this peculiar love-story gains a historical temporality that parallels that of the city of Genoa and justifies its exemplary role in the narration.

In the end, all archival media, from those about the city of Genoa[50] to Enzo and Mary's audiotapes, have one major function in the movie: they add a temporal dimension to the relationship between the director and the characters of the movie. Their encounter, as Marcello testified, left a deep impression, but it was the discovery of their personal audiotapes and photographic archive that disclosed the possibility of a two-tiered mediation: their life as they documented it and describe it (first tier) presented in a film that inevitably embodies also the director's response to their narrative (second tier). This strategy culminates in the long interview that concludes the film. In this sense, the movie is not the fruit of a preconceived and single-

minded project, but the expression of an unforeseen and non-programmed negotiation of a complex human relationship and social context, as Marcello himself admits: “Non siamo partiti da una sceneggiatura – non credo che sia sempre essenziale scrivere prima, specialmente in film di questo tipo – ma si è proceduto nella costruzione del racconto in sede di montaggio, giorno dopo giorno” (“Genova, una storia d'amore” 22-23).[51]

Despite the fact that archival images play such a prominent role in the movie, the detail that *La bocca del lupo* contains also re-enacted scenes created a serious problem of categorization for Italian critics. Most of the reviewers tried to find new categories to define the film, or simply stated that the movie does not belong to any known category. Goffredo Fofi, for example, wrote in the magazine “Lo Straniero” that the movie: “[…] non è a soggetto e non è documentario, ma piuttosto un poema visivo e sonoro rigoroso e ispirato […] un poema sul tempo che passa” (74).[52] Paola Casella, on the other hand, stated categorically in the magazine “Europa” that *La bocca del lupo* “[…] mescola narrazione documentaria a un intervento registico che trasforma il documentario in fiction” (81).[53] Even Jean A. Gili, founder of Festival of Italian Cinema in Annecy (the oldest festival of its kind in the world) and one of the most attentive critics of contemporary Italian film, is not able to fit the movie in an existing category: “Un film complesso, né documentario né finzione” (130).[54]

Of course, Marcello conceded that Enzo acted during the movie, so it is fair to deduce that his actions were planned and the images and sounds that recorded those actions were, in a way, staged. However, there is a fundamental difference between this preparedness and the preparedness of a usual “fiction” film: in the former, the details of the story, and in some cases the very existence of the main characters, is unforeseeable for the director when she first

conceives the film and starts her exploration of the pertinent environment.[55] I will make this statement more theoretically sound at the end of a thorough analysis of the problem of realism.

2.2.2 The Problem of Realism and the Documentary Form

As I have already mentioned at the beginning of the last chapter, most of the problems arising from the attempt to trace the differences between "fiction" and "non-fiction" narratives, and therefore of distinguishing between documentary and non-documentary films, have been addressed by scholars speculating on the problem of realism. Realism, as an epistemological category, has been questioned in recent years in many ways, ranging from post-structuralist and deconstructionist perspectives in the humanities to Kuhnian relativism and subjectivism in sciences.[56] On the other hand, some of the theorists who dismissed realism as a viable aesthetic category elaborated their attacks on the basis of ontological considerations. Some postmodern thinkers, for example, undermine the importance of the category of realism for its alleged allusion to an unmediated and unexamined relation with reality (Wheale 51). Even an engaged scholar like Linda Hutcheon, who is sensitive to the political aspects of postmodern art, considers realism as a form of representation that mirrors society, whereas postmodern art is able to reinterpret and reinvent society: "a [postmodern] study of representation becomes not a study of mimetic mirroring or subjective projecting, but an exploration of the way in which narratives and images structure how we see ourselves" (7).

From the standpoint of theoretical Marxism, Lacanian psychoanalysis and the works of Walter Benjamin and Berthold Brecht, the illusory effect of realism has been criticized for its ideological, as well as political, implications (L. Marcus 189). This position is not too far, in my opinion, from that of cognitivist North-American contemporary critics, like David Bordwell, according to whom realism is a set of conventions and rules, changing over time and subjected to

temporal disenchantment (Bordwell and Thompson 76), developed in order to simulate a transparent rendering of the real and culminating in classical Hollywood cinema (Stam 143).

Marxist philosophers, like Siegfried Kracauer and György Lukács, proposed a different conception of aesthetic realism. They believed:

> [...] that the individual was adversely affected by a deleterious existential and social condition [...] [and] that aesthetic formal attributes of film possessed the potential to exhibit and disclose that condition to the spectator and, in so doing, establish a foundation upon which the spectator could acquire a greater sense of 'authentic existence.'" (Aitken *Realist Film Theory and Cinema* 85)

Marxist realism, in this second acceptation, is grounded on a double assumption: one is the idea that a work of art, like a film, can mirror actual characteristics of the real world, the other is the inference that existential and social conditions are affected by ideology and therefore that philosophical and critical thought can inspire social changes. It is this explicit connection with ideology that made Marxist, and particularly Lukácsian, realism vulnerable to the critics of postmodernist and poststructuralist thinkers in recent years.[57]

And yet, if one considers realism as a technological feature that enables a distinctive representation of reality, as I will do in section 2.2.8, than an attempt to explain the peculiarity of documentary films has no other options than to rescue a strong notion of realism and try to redeem it, on the ontological as well as on the epistemological level, however undermined and neglected it is in the current theoretical climate. If "documentary" will continue to exist as a useful conceptual category and not only as a marketing label, it depends on the persistency of a non-relativistic notion of reality, capable of sustaining a productive distinction between subjectivity and objectivity, representation and object. Moreover, a sense of realism accounts for

the very possibility of documentary significance, because there is clearly no purpose in separating documentary from other representations if all representations are considered as wholly subjective and condemned to seek for partial, "weak," or relative truths.

A good way to have a clearer picture of the epistemological issues at stake when defining documentary realism is to focus on the differences between fake and real documentaries, as Alexandra Juhasz does in her pioneering essay *F is For Phony*. At the beginning of the essay, she cites an Albert Brooks's line from *Real Life*: "There is no law that says we can't start real and end fake. What are they going to do, put me in movie jail?" (1). The citation is particularly appropriate because she thinks that: "A fake documentary engages disingenuousness, humour and other formal devices to create critical or comic distance between itself and documentary's sobriety, truth and rationality […so that] fake documentary is simultaneously and definitively both parody and satire" (2).

This definition is a useful starting point for a critical analysis of the differences between what we can keep calling, in loose, but effective terms, fake and real documentaries. And yet it presents many problematic aspects: first, it differentiates fake documentaries and real documentaries on a formal level only. Second, it implies that real documentaries, because they are always about truth, sobriety and rationality, need a critical deconstruction that turn them up-side-down. Third, it is based on the presumption that both real and fake documentaries have "a link to the real" (2), without properly acknowledging the complexity of this link. There is no law that says we can't start real and end fake and certainly there is no movie jail, but the border between fake and real documentaries is a real one and I think it deserves an investigation.

We use the verb "to believe" when we want to define the properties of something that we, as humans, want to grasp in relation to the categories of truth and falseness, and I argue that

these are very important categories for a definition of documentary. The problem is that when we use the categories of truth and falseness, we immediately engage in a perennial debate that involves our most deep concerns and beliefs, so I would first need to be precise about what my epistemological premises are. My personal experience with documentaries is that they say something true: truly moving, truly effective, truly engaging, about the reality they choose to represent. An extremely idealistic point of view on the subject, would be to think that a moving picture is a form of discourse that the spectator contributes to creating and that does not provide information or insights about an external reality, because the external reality, if existing, is beyond our reach; it would follow that any general features that the spectator may abstract from the objects represented on the screen are not proprieties of the objects themselves, but subjective constructions made out of culturally relative codes. Therefore, a hard-core idealist would conclude that all documentaries are biased, subjective and cannot achieve what they strive for, which is saying something true about reality. I prefer a realist approach, which means that I side with those who think that the universe, the reality, the outside world, exist independently of our statements or beliefs about it. A consequence of this approach is that it allows us to sustain that not all representations are wholly subjective and condemned to seek for relative truths, and therefore that one genre, namely documentary, has to deal with some sort of truth in the way it represents reality, while the other one is relieved of any such obligation.

From this perspective, Juhasz's definition of fake documentaries is unsustainable. Her premise is that both fake and real documentaries have a link to reality. And yet, at least from a realist point of view, a distinction between fake and real documentaries must discriminate precisely along the border between reality and representation: real documentaries belong to a different category, therefore their mandate is to maintain a truthful link to reality, whereas fake

documentaries' optional link to reality does not have to be measured in terms of truth and falseness, but can be considered, as Juhasz notes, merely a formal device.

Theoretically then, the distinction between fake and real documentaries is relatively simple. Practically, however, things are a bit more complicated. How can we come to know that some moving pictures have a link to reality and some have not? In other words, how do we realize that a documentary is a fake? How do we stop *believing* in its truthfulness?

2.2.3 Believable and Credible Representations

Let's consider, as an example, the Belgian fake documentary *C'est arrivé près de chez vous*/*Man Bites Dog* (1992). This movie takes to some extreme consequences the idea of blurring "fiction" and documentary practices that could be traced back to early Italian examples such as *Mondo cane* (1962). In the Belgian movie, the life of the protagonist, a serial killer called Ben, is not filmed as in a staged "fiction" movie, but it is filmed as if he were a real person, caught in his real acts by a small troupe that follows him day and night. It could be argued that the choice of the character is instrumental in letting the spectators know that the movie is a fake documentary, insofar as his violent acts are too obscene for us to believe that this is a factual film. I will come back to this point later, but for the moment I will focus on the formal level only. If we consider only the style and the formal devices, the film appears consistently and thoroughly like a documentary, so that, being in fact a work of "fiction," the spectators' emotions and reactions to its sequences are tested in an unconventional way.

For example, in the initial scene, Ben is staring out of the window of a train coach, framed in a medium long shot. A moment later, a woman squeezes in the narrow space between him and the window to make her way through the corridor; as soon as she goes past, Ben grabs her and drags her in the closest compartment where he strangles her to death. The spectator

perceives this opening sequence as the beginning of a “fiction” movie, and yet, when the same character, in the following scene, speaks openly with the interviewer about the correct way to sink a corpse in the water, the spectator is puzzled. She acknowledges that this is a documentary about Ben, a serial killer, because the interview adheres to the norms of the documentary genre, but the topic is so outrageous that she cannot easily accept such an ascription, so she sticks to her previous classification of the movie as a “fiction.”

A defining moment of the film occurs after 35 minutes, when Patrick, one of the guys of the troupe that is following Ben, is killed during the chase of a rival bandit. Right before this event, a curious scene aims to renew the film’s claim to be a documentary: Ben lost a bracelet during the chase in an abandoned factory, so he asks every member of the troupe to abandon their filming tasks and help with the search. At some point, Ben starts speaking with André, the cameraman, but since Patrick, who is in charge of the microphone, is away, looking for the bracelet, the spectator hears nothing of Ben’s words until Patrick comes back and takes up his duties again. The next sequence starts with a violent cut on the sound of an exploding bullet and after few seconds the film goes mute again: the reason is evident as soon as André finds Patrick dead on the ground; he takes charge of the sound and the assistant goes behind the camera and with the zoom lens helps Ben to see where the bandit hides and kill him.

From a formal point of view, there are almost no elements in this scene that let us know that it is fictitious. This is a “fiction” movie that denies all the norms of a traditional direction and editing: trembling shots, rough lighting, approximate shot angles and types are combined with failures of instruments in sequences that aim to reproduce a truthful link to reality. Only a very sophisticated spectator would note that there is something excessive in this *mise en scéne*: even a rough documentarist would have cut the mute scene of Ben talking with André while the

mic-guy is looking for the bracelet, because it doesn't add anything to the movie. The only reason for the scene to be there is to highlight that this is a self-reflexive "fiction" film, which aims to subvert the rules of a "fiction" film, while adopting the look of a documentary.

Another reason for the wary spectator to deny the status of documentary to the movie is, as I already mentioned, its allegedly impossible connection to reality. Since we know that it is unlikely that anyone would be able to shoot a documentary about a serial killer or would want to show the death of a real man on camera, we do not believe in Ben's killings. In the case of *C'est arrivé près de chez vous* our guess is right; and yet, in some cases we could be wrong. Actually, there are documentaries about serial killers, like *El Sicario: Room 164* (2010), in which the interviewee is a real hit man who killed and tortured dozens of people, and there are documentaries in which real people die, like *The Bridge* (2006), in which several people committing suicide are filmed as they jump from the Golden Gate Bridge. We could notice some formal differences between these documentaries and the Belgian fiction movie: e.g. the protagonist of *El Sicario* hides his face under a hood during the interview, in order to protect his identity, and the director of *The Bridge* inscribes his visual activity in the images, justifying, through what Vivian Sobchack would call a "human gaze" (*Carnal Thoughts* 249) his moral engagement with the subject.[58] Still, this is not the point, because formal devices can be copied and parodied and, alone, they do not guarantee a truthful connection to reality. As a matter of fact, the point is that fake and real documentaries do not differ because of formal characteristics: they both adopt the "documentary style;"[59] they diverge because of their different ontological nexus with reality. Failing to recognize this would lead to confuse the *believability* of a documentary with its *credibility*.

In most Romance languages the words “believable” and “credible” come from the same root, the Latin verb “credĕre.” Although their meaning is certainly connected, an important nuance separates the two words. The 2011 edition of the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines credibility “the quality or power of inspiring belief,” while believable, according to the same dictionary, means “capable of being believed, especially as within the range of known possibility or probability.” The credibility of a moving picture is the power to inspire belief in the truthfulness of its statements, whereas the believability is, for example, a product of its formal devices, a consequence of its realistic indexical representation. A fake documentary like *C'est arrivé près de chez vous* is believable, because it looks like a faithful portrait of a serial killer, but it is not credible, because it does not inspire the spectator to sincerely engage with what is represented in terms of truth and falseness.

Without acknowledging such a distinction, it is easy to underestimate the differences between “fiction” and “non-fiction,” with consequences for the definition of the documentary genre that go beyond the theoretical debate within Media Studies. For example, Thalia R. Goldstein falls in this trap when she interprets the results of her extremely interesting experimental research on the psychological reactions to sadness in “fiction,” “non-fiction” and reality. The experiment consisted in showing four film clips, two presented as “fiction,” two as “nonfiction,” to a sample of fifty-nine young adults, who had to rate their sadness and anxiety levels in response to the clips and to the recollection of an actual sad event personally experienced (232). Unfortunately, the two sequences presented as “non-fiction” clips were from “fiction” movies based on actual events, which means they were certainly believable as realistic representations of plausible events, but definitely not credible as factual images with a true connection to reality.

Summarizing the results of the experiment, she recalls the famous case of James Frey, author of *A Million Little Pieces,* which was presented as a factual account of a drug addicted, and later unmasked as a piece of "fiction." Goldstein writes:

> When James Frey was exposed as a fraud, readers were upset enough to bring a lawsuit, and public outcry was loud enough that he was dropped by his publisher. Yet, readers should not have worried. Generalizing from the results of this study, that levels of sadness and anxiety were unaffected by whether the clip was believed to be fiction or nonfiction, would suggest that their experience in reading the book as fiction would have been no less powerful than reading the book as nonfiction. (236)

Goldstein can make such a rather bold statement because she compromised the results of her otherwise important and appealing research using only "fiction" films.[60] It comes with no surprise that she found similar levels of sadness and anxiety in her spectators, since, in fact, they were responding to the same stimuli. The upset readers of Frey, on the contrary, had plenty of reasons to worry, because they knew all too well the different experience they have when they are confronted with a true connection to reality. While I cannot refer to a formal scientific experiment supporting my view, I can safely evoke my own personal experience to maintain that there is an enormous difference between seeing a man killed in a "fiction" movie and seeing a real person actually committing suicide, as in the case of *The Bridge*. This difference is triggered by nothing less than a different status of documentary films: they may sometimes be unattractive, or biased, but they are certainly capable of inspiring belief in the truth of at least some of their statements, or, in other words, they are credible.

In the next chapter I will address a general theory of representation, and I will explain in more details which characteristics of the documentary image make it different from the "fictional" one, but for now it suffices to say that the credibility of the documentary film does not depend on formal characteristics of the single movies, but it is an intrinsic, ontological quality of the documentary technology and a defining feature of its institution. When a spectator watches a documentary knowing that is a documentary, she is inclined to invest the representation that she experiences with credibility, no matter the plausibility of the connection between its images and the reality they represent, because credibility is the effect of the documentary's institutional commitment to represent a meaningful interaction with reality. The re-enactment scenes of *The Thin Blue Line* (1988), a documentary about Randall Dale Adams, a man sentenced to death for a murder he did not commit, are clearly staged, with the purpose of reconstructing in a spectacular fashion the moment of the murder; and yet, the spectator takes for granted that they are built accurately, following as close as possible all witnesses' statements: such is the extent of documentary's credibility.

Credibility is, nonetheless, a volatile quality, because, like all attributes, is subject to changes and modifications. The last version of the Ofcom Broadcasting Code, the independent regulator and competition authority for the UK communications industries, that took effect on 28 February 2011, allows product placement [61] in UK television documentaries for the first time. Many European documentarists, like Klaus Stanjek, director and professor for documentary directing at the HFF Postdam-Babelsberg, interviewed by Bettina Rehmann for DOX, believe that "there is a risk of filmmakers sacrificing the critical distance they should keep to their protagonists as well as their subject matter" (10), and consequently that "the trustworthiness of documentary is at stake" (11). What is at stake, for Stanjek, is not the fact that we may doubt that

"the referent of the documentary sign may be considered as a piece of the world plucked from its everyday context rather than fabricated for the screen" (Renov, *Theorizing Documentary* 7), but the fact that we may start thinking that this "piece of the world" is manipulated for economic purposes. In other words, we may doubt the "integrity" of the documentarist, and this would affect the credibility of the documentary as a whole, weakening the mechanisms that warrant or guarantee that the claim to credibility is valid, and consequently the cognitive potential of the institution of documentary.

The distinction between credible and believable comes from the standpoint of a realist ontology. To accept such a distinction does not mean to endorse the use of formal techniques aiming at the indexical reproduction of reality, but to consider the documentary form of cinematic representation as a technology potentially able to provide cognitive or perceptive access to a historical reality. However, since the documentary's credibility is a consequence of its promise to represent a verifiable interaction with reality, we may come to understand more easily why a documentary is credible if we abandon these ontological distinctions and give a more detailed account of how the interaction between documentary and reality takes place.

In order to address the issue of verifiability it is useful to consider Bill Nichols's theory of documentary which runs into difficulty precisely on this issue. When Nichols published his book *Representing Reality*, in 1991, he could lament the absence of a substantial literature about what he called "documentary as *discourse about* the world" (*Representing Reality* x). Comparatively more acknowledged was, according to him, the status of "documentary as *evidence from* the world" (*Representing Reality* ix). This categorization accounts for two properties that are often associated with documentary: on the one hand, documentary is not supposed to simply mirror reality, but it is meant to add something new, and in this sense it may

be considered as a particular and specialized form of art. On the other hand, documentary is considered to have a somehow closer relationship to reality than other art forms, particularly "fiction" film.

Put it in this way, the ontological problem of the specificity of the documentary form seems to be just a matter of degree. Nichols assumes that reality and representation are two separate entities and that documentary is the form of representation which is closest to reality, at least in the domain of moving images. The problem, then, becomes how to draw the line and define the degree of reality closeness that separates documentary from fictional narratives. Nichols actually attempts such a drawing towards the end of his most recent book (*Introduction to Documentary* 145-46) (Fig. 5):

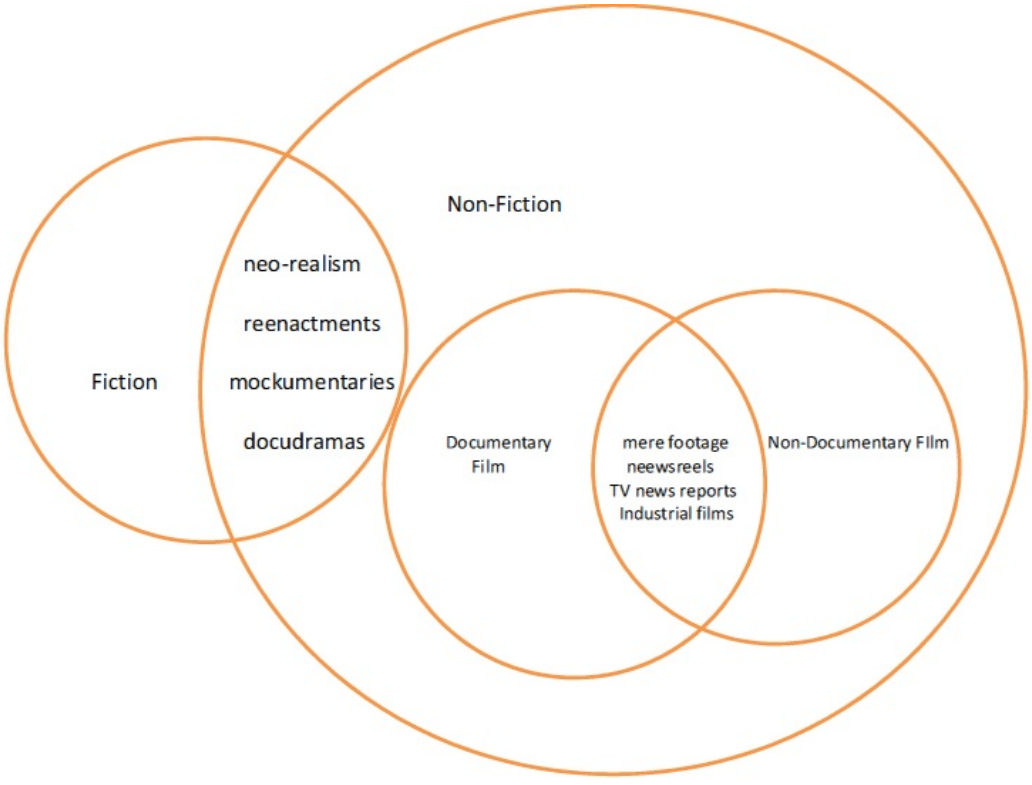

Fig. 5. Bill Nichols's theory of fiction.

Nichols's sketch is certainly useful and gives us an effective visual rendering of his documentary theory, which is based on the continuity of the representational domain and on its separateness from the domain of reality. In Nichol's own admission, however, it is impossible to provide a satisfactory definition of the difference between documentary and "fiction" films on these premises, unless one is ready to admit that at the border between "fiction" and "non-fiction" moving images there is a grey area where texts are neither exclusively "fiction" nor completely "non-fiction."

In other parts of the book, Nichols seems to acknowledge this unavoidable *cul-de-sac* as a problem for his theory and tries to give other, more precise, definitions. At the beginning of the book, he states that documentary films "speak about actual situations or events and honour known facts; they do not introduce new, unverifiable ones. They speak directly about the historical world rather than allegorically" (*Introduction to Documentary* 7). This definition echoes the already cited Cohn's statement, about the fact that referential narratives are verifiable, and it could definitely provide us with a clear-cut difference between "fiction" films and documentaries. In fact, if documentary statements must be about historical or verifiable facts, events and situations, it seems that they could be recognized as something different from any other kind of "fictional" narrative. And yet, Nichols does not push further in this direction and prefers to conclude his book with the more nuanced definition I illustrated.

The reasons for this retreat are sensible and have to do with the pernicious theoretical problems that such a theory would inevitably pose. Firstly, conceiving the property of verifiability as inherent to documentary statements would mean to apply to them a set of evaluating criteria which is typical of the scientific discourse, whereas documentary has always been considered as an art form.[62] Secondly, since this set of criteria is not universally accepted, it

would be necessary to engage in a fierce debate about the nature of the scientific discourse and the plausibility of a verificationist epistemology.[63] Mindful of these difficulties, in the following pages, I will explain how a phenomenological framework may allow verifiability to be considered a viable criterion of distinction between "fiction" and documentary moving images, and even give a fresh solution to one of the most contentious problems of film theory, that of cinematic realism.

2.2.4 The Problem of Verifiability

The assessment of a verifiable fact is indeed a crucial topic for a film theory. It was first touched upon, in the domain of "fiction" film theory, in the well-known Kuleshov experiments, in which the Russian director Lev Kuleshov edited the neutral expression of the actor Ivan Mozzhukhin in combination with different shots, like that of a plate of soup, or a little girl's coffin. The sequences were then shown to an audience, whose reactions were recorded, so as to verify, in Kuleshov's intentions, the assumption that film editing had the powerful psychological effect of inducing the audience to believe in the actor's ability to express human feelings, such as hunger or sadness. Therefore, one of the theoretical consequences of the experiment was, as André Bazin puts it, that "the final significance of the film was found to reside in the ordering of these elements [the various shots] much more than in their objective content" (1: 25).

The Russian director was interested in the verification of the power and efficacy of cinematic montage and the audience's willing to believe in the coherence of a basic cinematic sentence. As already realized by Bazin, this verification does not translate in any viable statement about reality *per se*. Even though the sequence represents identifiable objects, it does not specify or question properties of historical objects, but reveals qualities of non-referential objects and their patterns of signification within the fictitious world created for them.[64] As a

consequence, Kuleshov's verifiability claim is confined to some non-transitive properties of film representation. In other words, Kuleshov experiments show that cinema can make verifiable assertions about the coherency of its own fictional context, but do not show that cinema can make verifiable claims about reality, thus its outcomes cannot be used to trace a distinction between referential and non-referential narratives.

And yet, following Cohn and Nichols's intuition about verifiability as a property of non-fictional narrative, I am committed to demonstrating that one of the most important characteristics of the technology of documentary is that its statements are, at least partially, verifiable. Let us consider, then, the possibility of a verifiable assertion through a sequence shot, which is a sequence that avoids montage. In one of the first sequences of Paolo Pisanelli's documentary *Ju tarramutu* (2010) we see images of a silent, deserted, and ruined city. There is no caption or voice over specifying where and when the images were actually taken, but the spectator infers that the images were taken in the city of L'Aquila after April 6, 2009, when a devastating earthquake hit the Abruzzi region. In other words, what the spectators imply, and eventually create, is a missing tag: a label concerning the history of the images they are watching. The spectator needs this label in order to make the cinematic statement consistent with their expectations and with the rest of the movie. Is this a verifiable statement? Of course, in case there is a caption or a voice over no construction is necessary on the part of the audience, but does a voice over eliminate the need for verification? Since it is possible, theoretically, to verify if and when the director entered the restricted areas of L'Aquila,[65] we can say that the truth of this particular kind of cinematic statement is indeed verifiable because we could verify it. Obviously it is not always the case, because it is quite rare that permits are needed in order to enter an area.[66] What I am interested in highlighting here, however, is that the positive or

negative outcome of such verification depends neither on montage, nor on camera angles and movements, nor on film type choices, in brief on nothing intrinsic to the cinematic image itself. The verifiability of this kind of film statement depends exclusively on the possibility of demonstrating that the footage was actually shot when it claims to be shot, thus in something only *indirectly* related to the cinematic image.

Moreover, the most difficult part of the corroboration process might not be the verification itself, but the definition of what a documentary or film statement actually *says*. Taking again, as an example, the previously mentioned footage, I can assume that the documentary states that there was an earthquake, but does it say how calamitous? Does it say how many houses were eventually destroyed in the filmed street, how many people injured? What kind of information does a documentary statement provide? Can we legitimately say that it is possible to verify *all* the information of a documentary sequence?[67] The answer to these questions depends on understanding the nature of the documentary statement, to which I will now turn.

2.2.5 The Documentary Statement

In his essay *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, Christian Metz provided one of the most compelling analyses of cinema as a communication device, and I will start from his definition of cinematic narrative for my exploration of the characteristics of film statements. While breaking down the fundamental elements of film narrative, Metz writes that the image, which is the basic unit of film language, is not the equivalent of the word, or the *moneme*, but it corresponds to a complete statement. In the *langues* ("language-systems"), meaning is produced through a double articulation: there is a series of fixed and non-meaningful elements, and there is the series resulting from the combination of these elements to form more complex and

meaningful objects. Cinema, however, is not a language-system, but a *langage* ("language") (64). He motivates this assumption citing five characteristics of the film image: film images are not discrete units: they are infinite in number, like statements and unlike words; they are invented by the author of the utterance (which is not always a person) and not already available and ready-to-use, like words; they unleash an indeterminate quantity of information, while words have determinate meanings; they are actualized and not virtual units; images signify by themselves, they only partially assume their meaning in paradigmatic opposition (26).

We can assume that these characteristics are shared by both "fiction" and "non-fiction" films, even though it is already possible to make some distinctions. For example, the second point presumes that all images are "freshly" made for the purpose of the film, but what about library pictures or any kind of stock materials, which are normally used in documentary? Certainly they were originally made and shot with a purpose, but do they assume a new status when they are re-used, re-contextualized? And about the third point, one could assume that there is a quality difference in the kind of information which is conveyed by an image of a pre-existing object, rather than one built for the screen. The term "house" can refer to any kind of house, so it is, on the one hand, way more indeterminate than the image of a "house." The image of a house, on the other hand, delivers far more details, and, in the case of a documentary, details about a really existing house, which are, perhaps, of a different order.

In any case, Metz does not focus his analysis on the peculiarities of the documentary image, mostly because, in his view, documentary is a non-narrative form of cinema, less interesting from a semiotic perspective (194). I think this is an erroneous point, and one that leads him to overestimate the properties of what he calls narrative cinema, and to underestimate the ontological properties of cinema as a whole.[68] I will return to this topic later, but first I intend

to draw some preliminary consequences from Metz's analysis: if what he describes are ontological properties of the moving images, then it is fair to deduce that the basic semantic unit of both "fiction" and "non-fiction" films is the frame, and that the frame, since cinema does not have a double articulation, is already a meaningful statement. This is important because it means that film statements begin well before even the first word of an interview is spoken or the first character reveals her personality and even before the first editing cut.

According to Metz's semiotics, then, it seems difficult to ground the difference between "fiction" and "non-fiction" films on some basic properties of the film statement, as Bill Nichols seems to do when he writes: "Because documentaries address *the* world in which we live rather than *a* world imagined by the filmmaker they differ from the various genres of fictions (science fiction, horror, adventure, melodrama and so on) in significant ways" (*Introduction to Documentary* xi). This definition implies that any "non-fiction" statement is already connoted as an image of *the* world, which is inconsistent with the basic semiotic properties of film language. The basic film statement is *an image of a world*, which is not enough to clarify the kind of epistemology that will sustain its narrative.

To complicate the matter even more, sometimes a film does not contain images, but *sounds of a world*. The first sequence of *La voce Stratos* (2009), a documentary by Luciano D'Onofrio and Monica Affatato about avant-garde singer Demetrio Stratos, starts with a black screen and the voice of a talking man. Few seconds into the movie, while the voice continues to speak, an image surfaces (Fig. 6):

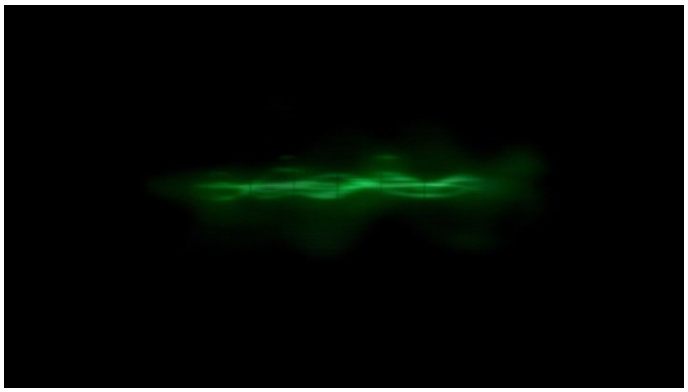

Fig. 6. *La voce Stratos* (2009). First sequence.

It is the moving picture of a spectrography that lasts until the voice stops. What kinds of images and sounds are those? Since this is the first scene of the movie, the spectators cannot recognize the voice as that of Demetrio Stratos,[69] and the visual part of the scene is obscure and enigmatic: the only thing that is possible to say about the visual statement of this scene is that the waves in the spectrography modulate according to the tonal variations of the voice. There are narrative and aesthetic reasons, of course, for the image to be there: further in the movie spectators realize that Stratos's voice was so remarkable that scientists tested it through electro-acoustic analyses, and observed its curves and levels in electronic diagrams like the one in Fig. 6. Moreover, since the documentary is mostly about a voice, and the sounds that produced, it makes sense to start the movie without images, and concentrate on the acoustic perceptions of the spectators. Yet, if we extrapolate the scene from the context of the movie, it is impossible to say that this is a documentary statement. Even if we assumed that Stratos's voice was unmistakable, this would not prevent the movie from becoming a "fiction" film about Stratos and his band: Taviani brothers' *Padre padrone* (1977) starts with a cameo of the actual Gavino Ledda, the protagonist of the story, but soon the film turns into a "fiction," and Gavino Ledda is replaced by his alter-ego, the actor Saverio Marconi. *I cento passi* (2000) ends with still images of Peppino

Impastato, a young activist who dared to denounce the illegal traffics of the criminal organizations in his Sicilian village, and was killed by mobsters in 1978. The film, however, is a "fiction," and Peppino Impastato's character is played by actor Luigi Lo Cascio. Looking at a random frame of a film, we do not know whether it belongs to a narrative whose elements are verifiable or non-verifiable, and yet a frame is not a fixed and non-meaningful element, but a complete sentence. Evidently, what a film says with its basic utterances is not something that helps us understand the distinction of "fiction."

As a consequence, the difference between documentary and "fiction" film statements has to be found somewhere else; maybe, one may suggest, in the way images are connected and statements assembled to form *discourses*. And yet, in polemics with cybernetics and structural science, Metz writes that:

> From the point of view of the means of expression, one can distinguish between the 'natural' meanings of things and beings (which is continuous, total, and without distinct signifiers: the expression of joy on the face of a child) and determinate signification. The latter would be inconceivable if we did not live in a world of meaning; it is conceivable only as a distinct organizational act by which meaning is reorganized. (37)

This is a very far-reaching idea, because it leads to the assumption that, if the "natural" meaning of things is so rich, the main task of an art based on the reproduction of things cannot be the reorganization of the reproduction, but the reproduction itself: the syntagmatic connotation that cinema achieves through the reorganization of images cannot be but far less significant, compared to the rich connotation that cinema is able to convey through its mere denotative power. This is why Metz agrees with Bazin, who fought against the tendency of pre-war cinema

to obey the rules of a cinematic pseudo-syntax, and particularly against the montage cinema of the Russian formalists (43).

Again, I tend to consider the reproductive power of cinema as an ontological characteristic of the moving images, pertaining to both "fiction" and "non-fiction" films, and perhaps one that gives documentary an edge over "fiction" cinema: since the reproductive power of moving images is so rich and meaningful, the form which best suits this feature seems to be the documentary form, in which, theoretically, reality is not pre-arranged in a determinate design. However, Metz thinks differently and seems ready to apply an aesthetics based on the reproductive power of moving images to narrative ("fictional") film only.

Metz speaks of narrative as one the most important anthropological forms of expression and after having defined it as "a closed discourse that proceeds by unrealizing a temporal sequence of events" (28), he describes its characteristics through an analysis of the Kuleshov experiments. According to Metz, "they simply demonstrate the existence of a 'logic of implication,' thanks to which the image becomes language, and which is inseparable from the film's narrativity" (47). And few lines later, "The cinema is language, *above* and *beyond any particular effect of montage*" (47). It seems clear to me, now, that Metz's definition of documentary as constitutively different from "fiction" film, because of its non-narrative form, is inconsistent with his own theory of cinema as a language, which is based on an ontological property of images pertaining to both "fiction" and "non-fiction" films: what he calls narrativity is the property of images to acquire meaning as soon as they are placed in a syntagmatic order, because of their "natural" significance, which is conveyed by the reproductive power of cinema, independently of any predetermined intention, and therefore independently of their place within a "fictional" or "non-fictional" film context. Metz's theory, then, suggests that reproductive

power is a fundamental semiotic characteristic of the technology of cinema: film statements, as soon as they are combined together to form discourses, acquire their meanings because of specific features of the cinematic language, like montage, but also, and even more significantly, acquire their meanings because of a semiotic process that derives from cinema's technology of image reproduction.[70]

Another powerful insight of Metz's semiotics helps us define a further specificity of film language. He asserts that, at the level of denotation, the motivation of signs, or, in other words, their arbitrariness or justification, is provided by analogy, defined as "the perceptual similarity between the signifier and the significate" (108). Since this property of analogy derives from previous technologies of mechanical reproduction, like phonograph and photography, he can say that "whenever analogy takes over filmic signification [...], there is a lack of specifically cinematographic codification" (111). This is why he believes that "filmic codes must be sought on other levels: the codes peculiar to connotation [...] or the codes of denotation-connotation related to the discursive organization of image-groups" (111). The connotative codes are usually arbitrary in linguistics, but when referring to cinematic connotative codes, Metz suggests calling them "symbolic," because they may be "partially motivated" (109). Some of the extra-cinematic codes are "cultural," meaning that they depend on culturally specific competences, like modalities of object representation, but within their particular culture of reference are easily understandable and do not require specific training; some are "specialized," because they concern peculiar and restricted activities and require specific trainings to be handled.

Here Metz is breaking down the rich articulation of what he calls the "film language" in all of its components, not only the linguistic structure culminating in the *Grand syntagmatique* (134), but also the non-filmic elements that contribute to the film perception. If his theory is

correct, underneath the first layer of semiotic significance in film discourse, operated by filmic-specific codes of narrativity, montage and so on, there is a second layer of significance, where visual and auditory elements are perceived analogically through extra-cinematic codes, and combined to form other statements. While filmic codes are "relatively easy ones" (113), in the sense that they refer exclusively to the internal universe of the film, or, in other words, they have only a limited denotative or connotative meaning, iconological, perceptual and all other kinds of extra-cinematic codes refer both to the film world and to the external world,[71] and therefore they have infinite denotative and connotative possibilities of signification. Hence, Metz is right to point out that film connotation does not operate despite or against its denotative meaning, but on top of it: "the connotative meaning *extends over* the denotative meaning, but without *contradicting* or *ignoring* it" (110), because even the most arbitrary of film connotations cannot efface the denotative meaning that film images naturally express.[72]

One paradoxical outcome of this theory is that filmic-specific codes, like montage, which are borrowed and adapted from rhetorical tropes typical of language-systems, are not truly representative of the specificity of film language: they work well in a language-system composed of a grammar and a rhetoric, but they result in a very simplistic and poor strategy in the domain of film, whose rhetoric, as Pier Paolo Pasolini pointed out (1: 1466), is also a grammar, because it organizes connotation and denotation at the same time. In other words, in film language, *how* is also, and inevitably, *what*; hence film aesthetics such those of the Russian formalists, focused exclusively on producing meaning through montage and filmic-specific codes, miss a fundamental point. It comes as no surprise, then, to discover that Metz's aesthetic principles are of a different sort (39-44). Aligning with André Bazin's defence of Neorealism, Metz sustains that the *cinema des auteurs* of the 1960s, promoted by French journal *Cahiers du cinéma*, which

he calls “modern cinema,” is much more subtle than “montage cinema,” because it explores the richness of filmic statements and reveals different layers of meanings in a way that is characteristic of film language. We could say that, in Metz’s perspective, the importance of a film like Michelangelo Antonioni’s *L’avventura* (1960) is not in its subject, the portrait of an existential malaise, but in the way it is filmed, giving priority to the perceptual, denotative qualities of the film technology, rather than to the connotative properties of film language.

Metz’s aesthetic choices and stances have certainly a historical importance and might have been influenced and guided by social and even political motivations, but I would like to point out that a coherent aesthetics stemming from his theory would almost inevitably give documentary preference over “fiction” film: a film theory that privileges denotative and reproductive powers over filmic-specific codes of connotation, and that favours a relatively open epistemology, one that implies a narrator who refuses to establish a firm control on each film frame and, instead, tries to capture the imponderability and richness of reality, may describe well few art movies of the 1960s, but it definitely sounds like a description of what documentary can do best.

Metz writes that cinema was not born to tell stories, it evolved as such, and when narrative cinema became prevalent, it shaped the later evolution of film as a language (93-4). And yet I believe that it is difficult to conceive the difference between “fiction” and “non-fiction” films in terms of narrativity. As Philip Rosen notes, “If there have been tendencies within the documentary tradition to avoid classical narrative form, this has not been true for all its sectors and, more importantly, has rarely committed documentarians to a definitional rejection of narrative per se” (76). The relevance and priority Metz gives to what he calls “narrative film” is motivated with historical and artistic considerations, but it should not prevent us from using

his theory to comprehend documentary statements and to sustain documentary's claims of aesthetic expressivity.

I started from the hypothesis that documentary statements have to be, at least partially, verifiable. Drawing on Metz's semiotics, I came to the conclusion that there is no difference in the way "fiction" and "non-fiction" films express their meanings, thus no difference between documentary and "fiction" statements. In fact, in semiotics terms, both "fictional" and "non-fictional" film statements consist of denotative frames of identical nature, which are subsequently assembled together to form discourses. Although there are potentially infinite ways of charging denotative frames with connotations, it does not seem possible to assign specific connotative codes to either fiction or non-fiction cinema, therefore documentary statements have to be considered potentially as verifiable as "fiction-film" statements, and the difference between "fiction" and "non-fiction" cinematic utterances must be sought after in causes external to the utterances themselves.

Following Cohn and Nichol's definitions of "non-fiction" narratives, I isolated the principle of verifiability as a way to link film utterances and reality, and thus as one potential external cause of distinction between "fiction" and "non-fiction." Metz writes that there is nothing similar to phonemes in cinema, because films do not need abstract and formalized elements to be assembled in order to compose correct sentences: cinema is always speech (*parole*), actualized utterance. This assumption leads us to consider film statements as lacking the conventionalized nature of other language statements, like, for example, that of mathematics, and thus to the impossibility of uttering, in purely cinematic terms, logic or verifiable statements, which must oblige, by definition, to some conventionalized rules and must have finite properties. This characteristic seems to exclude the possibility to characterize "fiction" and "non-fiction"

films on the basis of the verifiability of their statements. A way to exit from this *cul-de-sac* is to displace the question of verifiability from the endogenous level of texts to the exogenous level of cultures, where texts become social agents and interact with society. This move allows us to draw from the aforementioned reasoning two possibilities: a documentary can make *verbal* or *written* verifiable statements[73] based on a specialized language-system, using, therefore, a feature which is not characteristic of its own language, or it can make *direct or indirect* [74] visual statements about the verifiability of the correlation between real events and the events that are reproduced in its images. There are many ways of interfering with this correlation: both analog and digital images can be manipulated, adding traits, or changing colors and shapes of the objects represented, or the events represented in the images can be pre-determined, as in the case of staged fictional scene, or, finally, the events can be partially prepared, but their development not completely foreseen, or determined. What is characteristic of documentary is that, even in the case its images are manipulated, pre-determined or prepared, the viewer perceives them *as if* there were a verifiable cognitive relationship between them and reality, to the point that the documentary may be conceived as a technology for the juxtaposition of image, or image and sound, sequences that *claims*, *directly or indirectly*, the *external* verifiability of the non-manipulation, non-determination and unpreparedness of its images and sounds.[75] The italicized words of this definition are necessary because: (1) a fiction film can also claim the verifiability of its statements, but its claim has to be a mockery, otherwise the movie is a documentary; [76] (2) a documentary can refuse to claim verifiability for all of its statements and still be a documentary;[77] (3) documentary's truth claim does not concern the linguistic, internal, verifiability of its statements, but the empirical verifiability of their non-manipulation, non-

determination and unpreparedness. This knowledge is not provided by the movie, but is a consequence of the interaction between a particular film and a specific community.

Of course, not all documentaries deal with verifiable statements and unprepared realities, for the simple reason that nobody can stop a director from lying about the fictiveness of the images of her alleged documentary,[78] or a TV producer from labelling "historical documentary" a montage of CGI reconstructions of the purely hypothetical living conditions of people in ancient Rome. No definition should be prescriptive anyway. As nobody can restrain people from making, voluntarily or not, grammar mistakes, even though grammar definitions and rules are written in books and taught in schools, nobody should investigate if a film is a "real" documentary or not. My sole concern is the possibility of a purely theoretical ontological difference between "fiction" and documentary technology of image reproduction. Using the concepts emerged from Metz's analysis, but going beyond his application to "fiction" cinema, I argued that there is no semiotic difference between "fiction" and "non-fiction" film statements, and therefore no difference, potentially, in their means of reality representation; and that the verifiability of documentary statements does not depend on denotative or connotative semiotic elements, but is the product of a social, public discourse, which is activated by the movie, but is substantially independent of it.[79] It is the public agreement on the truth of the *ideal* documentary claim to represent a non-predetermined, non-manipulated and un-prepared reality that accounts for what I call the *credibility* of documentary statements, which is a commanding source of symbolic power for the institution of documentary, and one that defines it as a cultural practice *potentially* distinct from "fiction" cinema.

2.2.6 The Problem of Objectivity

The move that allowed me to understand the verifiability not as a semantic property of the documentary statement, but as a characteristic of the transformative interaction of the film with its environment, or, in other words, as a feature of the documentary technology, can be elaborated further within a phenomenological theory of the perceptive nature of knowledge. Phenomenology can be defined in general terms as a "philosophical movement that aims to analyze the relations between human beings and reality" (Verbeek 122) and it is therefore a sensible point of departure for a human practice like documentary that claims to be able to significantly intervene in the real world. However, in its classical Husserlian formulation, phenomenology is characterized by an ontological essentialism, which is not compatible, as I will explain in the next pages, with the realist epistemology that I have espoused thus far. So, in order to overcome this obstacle, I will consider a post-phenomenological approach: as Finn Olesen puts it, traditional phenomenology is concerned with establishing that humans and technologies are related. Post-phenomenology is more radical in asking how subjects and artefacts constitute each other in a praxis (Selinger 231). Since documentary, as I previously defined it, is primarily a discourse concerned with a verifiable engagement with a non-predetermined reality, a better understanding of precisely how referential moving images enable a peculiar perception of reality is fundamental to developing a coherent picture of the institution of documentary.

The main advantage of a phenomenological approach is that it makes possible to merge a realist ontology with a non-essentialist notion of objectivity. This is no small feat given that the possibility and degree of cinematic objectivity has always been a stumbling point for film theories interested in defining "non-fiction" film. A good, recent introduction to the problem of

objectivity, though not from a phenomenological perspective, is Noël Caroll's essay "From Reel to Real" which is included in the book *Theorizing the moving image*. Carroll's discussion is usefully systematic and therefore worth canvassing in some detail.

Noël Carroll starts his analysis of cinema objectivity discussing the *cinema-verité*, because he thinks that, in the history of cinema, this is the movement that made the most determined effort to achieve objectivity. According to Carroll, in more recent years the criterion of objectivity turned against cinema and now the prevalent opinion is well summarized by Eric Barnouw, who maintains that every communicator, with any medium, makes personal choices, and therefore inserts personal comments in his expressions, with the consequence that no communication is objective (226). The point that is usually made to support such scepticism against film objectivity is that every frame is subjective because it is affected by the personal point of view of the director. Before being a problem for contemporary film theories, this element was one of the pillars of those aesthetics concerned with the status of cinema as an art, for example that of Bela Balasz (Braudy and Cohen 305), who argued that the subjectivism of the frame is part of the artistic process involved in the production of a film and one of the characteristics that distinguishes cinema from a merely mechanical operation. According to Carroll though, this idea blurs two different meanings of the expression "point of view": one is that there is a point of view of the camera, the other one is condensed in the expression "mental attitude"; the two meanings are very different, and are comparable only in a metaphorical way (227). Moreover, even though it is theoretically possible to imagine a movie as a perfect expression of a single point of view (e.g., the director's), it is always possible to use the same frames and edit them in a way that completely changes the intended meanings, therefore it is

evident that what we use to call “point of view” is not something that inhabits the single frame, but the result of a successive construction.

Beneath the problem of the point of view, lies a more substantial issue, namely the notion of objectivity. In the critic’s view, there are three main meanings of the term “objective”: 1) true, 2) representative of all or the majority of the point of views, 3) without a point of view (230). These three meanings are obviously incompatible with each other; therefore a better definition of objectivity is needed. One way to consider the problem is to use objectivity as a defined set of criteria, as the one that informs, for example, scientific papers. Following this way of reasoning, Carroll states that a documentary is objective when “it abides by the norms of reasoning and standards of evidence of the areas about which it purports to impart information” (231).

Carroll goes on explaining that “different non-fiction films, of course, correlate to different sorts of non-fiction discourse – newspaper articles, newspaper editorials, human interest stories, science textbooks” (232). All of them have specific norms and standards, and their own requirements for what they consider objective. None of them prevents creative manipulation from being employed, as far as it does not compromise the accuracy of the reconstructed historical fact. In a “non-fiction” film about Pearl Harbour, for example, the director cannot invent a scene of a small boat in the middle of the ocean that intercepts the radio communications between Japanese aircrafts and tries to alert the American base, even though the scene would add a great deal of suspense to the film.

On the basis of the distinction that he draws, Carroll is led to the conclusion that: “Realism is not a simple relation between films and the world, but a relation of contrast between films that is interpreted in virtue of analogies to aspects of reality” (244). What the critic calls the simple relation between films and the world is, I am afraid, the core of the problem. It is

certainly possible, and maybe wise, to circumscribe the notion of realism to the more manageable dimension of aesthetics, and define it within the borders of a pragmatic theory of cinema, but this move seems to me more like a clever shortcut than a solution to the problem of defining the relationship between reality and representation. Carroll's theory falls into the mystification of defining realism as a set of formal characteristics, without recognizing a fundamental problem: the establishment of a link to reality as a potential source of knowledge is the epistemological necessity of any theory of realism, because it is the only way to clearly trace the border between works that exploit this connection and works that do not. A simple formal distinction, as I already demonstrated, is not sufficient, since works of "fiction" and works of "non-fiction" may look formally identical.

Verifiability is a better criterion to assess the link to reality than objectivity, because objectivity is a psychological category used to describe a status of the perceived object in relation to the perceiving subject, but it is not helpful when applied to social or historical circumstances: a historical event is neither objective nor subjective, it simply is. Carroll's theory is essentially subjectivist, grounded on a criterion that is applicable only to the expression of subjective meanings, and therefore cannot address the main issue confronting any realist theory, which is what lies outside human subjectivity. A documentary sequence that records an historical event is unquestionably subjective, being the product of the interaction between a human being and a technology, but its material proximity to the event should be verifiable. This proximity does not make the documentary sequence objective, but it does make it *credible*. A phenomenological and post-phenomenological approach can provide us with the tools we need to theorize precisely this proximity and its consequences.

2.2.7 Film Phenomenology

From a phenomenological point of view, the technology of documentary, like that of photography, and of cinema as a whole, is fundamentally a way to replace, translate, or enhance human perceptions. There are, to my knowledge, two major recent attempts to draw a film theory from phenomenology: Allan Casebier's *Film and Phenomenology* and Vivian Sobchack's *The Address of the Eye*. Casebier's theory is based on Edmund Husserl's philosophy, while Sobchack's moves from the existential development of phenomenology inaugurated by French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

At the beginning of his book, Casebier summarizes the basic concepts of Husserl's phenomenology, which, in his view, is primarily a realist theory of perceptions, that opposes nominalist and anti-realist theories (34). According to Husserl, the perception of an object can be of two kinds: I can perceive the "noemata," namely the figures (a horse, a boy), or the "hyletic data," which are lines, colors, sounds and so on. The faculty that perceives them is the "noesis" and can operate an "apperception," focusing on the noemata and abstracting the universals, or an "apprehension," focusing on the hyletic data and the particulars. The apperception establishes a relation between the perceived object and our personal previous experience (e.g., of other horses and boys) and this is what allows us to operate abstractions. All this process is guided by "intention," but intention is not a "construction" of the objects as the idealists maintain: I make sense out of an object because I perceive that object and I turn my intention towards it, but the object is there, independent of my will to perceive it.

The accuracy and complexity of the noemata depend on personal knowledge and previous experiences. For example, in front of Albrecht Dürer's engraving *Knight, Death and the Devil*, Husserl argues that, were I an art historian, I could understand which of the characters is

Death and why it is portrayed that way, while as a lay person I would have to content myself with considerably more indistinct noemata. And yet, however codetermined our noemata are, they guide us to the "flesh and blood reality" of what is represented (a "real" knight in the Middle Age) and not to our concept of reality (an idea of a knight in the Middle Age), as the idealists would maintain (Casebier 21).

An idealist concept of reality is what Casebier contests most fiercely. He insists particularly on David Bordwell's intuition about the intrinsic nature of the norms that guide our understanding of film narrative, and maintains that, from a phenomenological point of view, concepts such as norms can be better considered as the horizons of our perceptions, rather than formal characteristics of a text or subjective interpretations (Casebier 103). On the other hand, he is against all theories that equate the discovery of an object, which is a paramount characteristic of the documentary experience, with unmediated perception. Phenomenology provides a more sophisticated account of mediation: the perception of an object is always mediated and always incomplete. Given the incompleteness of perception, there is always an element of discovery in its unfolding and, as a consequence, Casebier can state that documentary perception "may be both a discovery and a mediated process" (138), and that the documentation of a referent is the proper aim of the genre (147).[80]

Casebier's "realist" interpretation of Husserlian phenomenology, however, is by no means universally accepted. For instance, in his book *Phenomenological epistemology*, Henry Pietersma stresses that there is a compatibility problem between Husserl's philosophy and realism. Pietersma argues that, in Husserl's view, after the cognitive subject has gained the knowledge of the object, the inquiry should be targeted towards the subject himself. This transcendental turn is needed in order to secure the knowledge form sceptical attacks, such as

those of the positivists, who think that all our beliefs have an ultimate cause in the physical world and therefore are subject to the well-known ambiguities and limitations of empirical knowledge. Any objective inquiry needs the transcendental turn, even mathematics:

> If in the last analysis we still see ourselves as being endowed with faculties of knowledge such as perception or reason [...] this is what Husserl calls the natural attitude, which is exploited in scientific naturalism or physicalism. In his reflective stance, the epistemologist should dissociate himself from that attitude. (51)

The transcendental move is a move towards some sort of anti-realism. Husserl does not contest realism openly, but, according to Pietersma, his realist ontology is within the bounds of a transcendental philosophy: "The ordinary realist's understanding of himself, according to Husserl, needs to be scrutinized within the wider framework of a transcendental vantage point. It turns out that the realist has gone wrong because he has forgotten the origins or roots of his realist framework" (59). Pietersma maintains that when Husserl says that we perceive an object "in the flesh," he means that we want to stress our cognitive achievement and our belief that the object really exists and presents itself to our consciousness on the mode of "self-givenness." From this point follows that "one is in touch with a spatiotemporal entity that is real in the sense of not being either an inference drawn from earlier beliefs or in some other way a product of a belief" (61), but this is not exactly the same as saying that the object exists independently of our intention to perceive it, which is the basic assumption of what we usually call a realist ontology (Joseph and Roberts 3).

The transcendental turn in Husserl's philosophy was aimed at restoring the possibility of sharing and comparing perceptions and beliefs about reality, which could be jeopardized by a too

narrow focus on personal experience and subjective relationship with objects. Initially, this move remains within the borders of a realist ontology, since, according to Pietersma: "as long as this structure of perceptual experience continues, the percipient is necessarily certain of the real existence of the world" (64), but this is, however, no more than an expression of the perceiving subject's point of view. The transcendental ego can see the possibility of a non-existing world and this is enough to consider Husserl's philosophy as ultimately open to the possibility of a non-realist ontology.

As a matter of fact, when Husserl takes the transcendental path, the realism he seems to embrace has to sacrifice the idea of the object's independence and is condemned to go back to a subject-object relation which is internal to the mind, as in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. As seen in this acceptation, realism is not an epistemological concept, but a cognitive stance that waits for a transcendental reinterpretation before coming to a proper understanding of itself. In Pietersma's understanding of Husserl, the transcendental turn has downgraded realism in phenomenology from an ontological assumption to an attitude allowable within certain parameters of thought. Pietersma's reasoning is compelling and poses a serious challenge to Casebier's theory.

In order to avoid the problems and pitfalls of Husserl's philosophy, Vivian Sobchack starts from a different approach to phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty's existentialism. According to Sobchack, phenomenology helps us read a film as a sensorial experience and not only a rational one; a film overcomes the filmmaker's intentions because it appeals to the senses of the spectators in order to be perceived and not only to their rational capacities of decoding signs: "Film experience is a system of communication based on bodily perception as vehicle of conscious expression" (*The Address of the Eye* 9). Moreover, in its spatio-temporal reproduction,

the film gains an independent consciousness: “the film transcends the filmmaker to constitute and locate its own address, its own perceptual and expressive experience of being and becoming” (9). What allows for the different experiences of the spectator, the film and the filmmaker to engage in a dialogue is the fact that they are all based on the same modalities of perception, which are the same that ground our consciousness of reality.

Sobchack goes as far as saying that “a film makes sense by virtue of its very ontology” (*The Address of the Eye* 12), meaning that a film comes into existence at the same time as an expression, a way of making sense, and as a perception, a way of sensing: “In a film, as in our direct and immediate experience, perception functions as a modality of expression and expression as a modality of perception” (*The Address of the Eye* 13). This concept is central to her theory, because “the reversibility of cinematic perception and expression is the enabling structure of cinematic communication” (*The Address of the Eye* 14).

On the contrary, classic film theory, usually identified with the two conflicting views of formalists and realists, separated expression from perception: the formalists reduce the brute referentiality of cinematic images to the artist’s expression, while the realists discover the world’s complexity and significance thanks solely to the medium’s capacity of perception. “Both formalist and realist arguments converge in their assumption that meaning is located in the text as a significant object” (*The Address of the Eye* 16). As a consequence, the formalists’ belief in film as expression-in-itself can be regarded as a transcendental idealism, whereas the realists’ faith in film as perception-in-itself should be considered a transcendental realism.

To the unexpected convergence of formalists and realists, Sobchack opposes the less surprising convergence between neo-Marxism and feminism, which together make the biggest slice of contemporary film theory and that in her view tend to collapse expression and

perception. These approaches emphasize the illusory and deceiving nature of the cinematic image, because they consider it as an intentional representation, with an arbitrary link to reality, and not as a combination of perception and expression. Neglecting the differences between these two different modalities, neo-Marxists and feminists can only have a deceptive and substitutive view of cinematic practices and it comes as no surprise that they bemoan the impossibility of the excluded and the subalterns to find a place from which to speak, to use Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's famous formulation (104). When applied to cinema, neo-Marxist and feminist theories are dominated by "transcendental determinism, based on the belief in the film object as mediation-in-itself" (*The Address of the Eye* 18).

Sobchack's most controversial idea is that filmmaker, film and spectator all use "the language of being" to express their own experience, and this suggests the possibility that a film may be considered not only a visible object, but a viewing subject, "one that manifests a competence of perceptive and expressive performance equivalent in structure and function to that same competence performed by filmmaker and spectator" (*The Address of the Eye* 21-22). In fact, the film manifests the ability to switch between the perception of the camera (experience of consciousness) and the expression of the projector (consciousness of experience). Understood as a viewing subject, the film literally comes to life and begins to possess sense by means of its own senses and to signify as a signifying subject that "can be understood in its objective status by others as sensible and intelligible" (*The Address of the Eye* 23). The emergence of the filmic objective status cannot happen but in a real world where perceptions are a viable source of knowledge, and this is why her theory is consistent with a realist ontology, one that guarantees a viable assessment of truth, and with an epistemology based on a realist theory of perceptions.

Sobchack's radical move, however, not only implies that our perceptions are a source of knowledge, but that the film's perceptions are equally relevant: in fact, whether a cartoon or a documentary, "all films present not only the seen but also the seeing. In so doing, it posits a lived, inhabitable, and intentional distance that structures and is structured by the act of vision, a distance that begins at and ends in a seer who is capable of seeing, who is embodied" (*The Address of the Eye* 134). This inhabited place of vision has its own organ of perception, which is the frame, that "accommodates several sensory fields (not only sight, but touch as noted, and also, significantly, sound), and it functions as 'that by means of which' the film has access to its world and the world exists for it (and for us)" (*The Address of the Eye* 134).

Film's subjective vision represents the act of viewing as experienced from within, exactly as the spectator's subjective vision does: in fact, a spectator is always aware of her vision and of her body as the instrument that allows and influences the act of viewing. However, the process of seeing and being seen is also remarkably different in the case of moving images and in that of human beings: when I see a person, I do not see her "vision," her "psyche," whereas, when I see a film, I see the vision, the "seen" and I recognize it as not belonging to myself, but I do not see the "body" that is responsible for that vision. The film's body, according to Sobchack, is similar to that of a cyborg, because it substitutes ours and gives us new and enhanced potentialities. The film's body is an instrument that becomes an extension of the spectator's being. However, in Sobchack's mind, the film does not become a substitute of the spectator's own "point of view," no matter how accurate and "realistic" is the reproduction of reality, because the spectator is never merely a point of view, she is always "situated," "embodied," and sight is only one of the senses through which she perceives.

In order to elaborate her views on the problem of mediation, Sobchack cites Don Ihde's theory of the symbiotic aspect of the man-machine relation: "the better the machine, the more 'transparency' there is" (*The Address of the Eye* 180).[81] The introduction of the notion of transparency in Sobchack's book comes after a long digression, borrowed form Ihde, on the properties of the chalk as an extension of our hand, which echoes some cinema theories of the 1940's and 1950's, like Cesare Zavattini's idea of cinema as a *penna* with which the filmmaker can actually write on reality, or Alexandre Astruc's theory of the *caméra-stylo*. According to Zavattini and Astruc, cinema is a technology that improves the transparency between art and reality, because it allows the director to express her creativity with a medium whose components are in an analogical, and not symbolic, relation to reality. Such theories of realism were based on the presupposition that the technology of cinema guarantees an unmediated access to reality, and were criticized by post-structuralist theorists. However, Ihde's example shows us a way to reconsider theories such as Zavattini and Astruc's from another, more solid perspective: like the chalk does not just deliver analogical feelings to the hand, but, in virtue of its material contact with both hand and chalkboard, and of its conduction property, has to be considered as a technology that extends the hand's sensibility more than one that analogically reproduces the surface of the chalkboard, so it is possible to consider the movie camera as an extension of the director's senses, which allows her, if not to "write with reality," at least to "see reality" in a different way.

Neither Sobchack nor Ihde provide a history of film criticism on this issue, but they both make the connection between realism and technologically enhanced capabilities. Ihde writes that more transparent relations between man and machine "genuinely extend intentionality into the world, and when they operate properly, the sense of a new realism in the phenomenon can be

retained" (*The Address of the Eye* 181). Sobchack, on the other hand, comes to the conclusion that:

> This sense of realism is not - as theorists like Baudry would contend - an illusion. It is also not a predication of the world as 'real' in some abstractly objective sense, some disembodied sense. That is, this sense of realism does not make a truth claim about *World*, but rather makes it about *perceptive experience* of the world. (*The Address of the Eye* 181)

The two categories of a "real" world and an "imagined" world, which are so important for Nichols's and Carroll's theories, are of vital importance for Sobchack's as well. Yet, what she states is something very different, because, from her point of view, the "real" world of the perceptive experience is the only world there is: the "World" is not a superior or more sophisticated expression of the "world," it is a disembodied and therefore non-existent idealization.

It should by now be clear that an important part of Sobchack's book is dedicated to the technology of cinema. However, she is very cautious on the topic and she points out on many occasions that "the film is a dynamic and synoptic gestalt that cannot be reduced to its mechanisms, much as a human perception and intentional conduct cannot be reduced to or explained in terms of its physiological and anatomical source" (*The Address of the Eye* 169). According to her, to discuss about the technology of cinema, about lenses and frames, special effects and dollies, would be like making an autopsy on a corpse: it would not give us any insight about our experience of cinema.

I personally disagree with this idea and I think that a better understanding of how cinema, as a technology, transforms, manipulates and maybe enhances our experience of reality should

be a high priority of a film phenomenology. Cinema has always been a matter of technology, since the very beginning of its history, and technology, during the more than centenary life of cinema, kept changing the texture and the rendering of the moving images. Today, what we keep stubbornly to call "film" has almost nothing to do with film and printing: it is more and more a digitalized process, in which technological developments take an ever growing important part. In order to mingle a phenomenological approach with a more focused attention to technology, I will now turn to a recent development in phenomenology, which has been labelled "post-phenomenology," and is a sophisticated move towards a phenomenologically inspired philosophy of technology.

2.2.8 Post-phenomenology

The inspirational figure of post-phenomenology is the already cited Don Ihde, an American philosopher of science who began his career studying continental philosophy, until he decided to "do phenomenology" during the 1970s and published a ground-breaking book called *Phenomenology of Sound*. Since then, his philosophy evolved within the larger field of the philosophy of science, eventually constituting, together with that of such scholars as Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway, a separate field called philosophy of technology. Inside this recently born field, Ihde brought his phenomenological approach, which, liberated from any residual essentialism, has been recently labelled post-phenomenology. In order to understand the contribution that Ihde can make to a theory of documentary, we need to outline the fundamental tenets of his approach.

In his book *Instrumental Realism*, Ihde traces the origins of a technologically oriented approach in the philosophy of science. According to him, it was Patrick Heelan who first grounded scientific realism on the dismissal of the presumed imperceptibility of scientific

theoretical entities, such as atoms, on the assumption that they can be perceived through the use of readable technologies (178). In this context, a scientific theory becomes a logical and mathematical deduction, based on observations made with instrumental embodiment and therefore on practices far removed from abstract speculations without a firm correspondence in reality. As Heelan, cited by Ihde (*Instrumental Realism* 81), eloquently puts it:

> Theoretical states and entities are or become directly perceivable [...] because the measuring process can be or become a 'readable technology,' a new form of embodiment for the scientific observer. In this view the term 'observation' no longer means unaided perception. It implies that theoretical states and entities are real and belong to [...] 'the furniture of the earth' because they are perceivable in the perceiver's new embodiment. (203)

Instrumental embodiment comprises perception and measurement. The instrumental response in fact is a measurement, a quantity, but it has also to be observed, perceived, read through the instrument. To Ihde, "Heelan's version of a 'measuring perception' is the specialized perception of a 'reading'" (*Instrumental Realism* 80) and therefore he draws from Heelan's account the idea that this kind of measuring perception is both hermeneutical and perceptual.

According to Ihde, there are two kinds of human-technology relations, "embodiment relations," which "extend and transform human bodily and perceptual intentionalities" (*Instrumental Realism* 74) (e.g., the telescope and microscope) and hermeneutic relations, like writing, which extend linguistic and interpretive capabilities. This distinction is very important, because it has serious implications for an analysis of cinema technology, and it leaves the door open for quite different ideas on whether cinema is an example of a human-technology relation in the hermeneutic or embodiment dimension.

A film scholar may be tempted to say that cinema is clearly an example of hermeneutic relation, since, like writing, it extends our interpretive capabilities. However, the fact that film is also an auditory and visual experience makes it an extension of our senses, and this means that cinema definitely has also an embodiment dimension. And yet Vivian Sobchack argues that Ihde's theory is only applicable in a limited way to cinema, due the limitations of film technology and cinema's double and reversible perceptual experience (191).

Sobchack maintains that the cinematic experience is phenomenologically different from a direct interaction with objects, and it will always be, even with future technologies, because cinema provides the spectator with a position in the world, but it is not a substitute for a completely real experience. In fact, even if cinema does enhance the viewer's capability for vision, it reduces other sensory experiences (e.g., auditory and tactile), to their realization through sight (184). As a result, Ihde's communication model should be doubled for cinema, to account both for instrument-mediated perceptions and instrument-mediated expressions. In order to illustrate her position, she adapts Ihde's diagram about human-technology relations to the case of film studies (194). The diagram becomes (Fig. 7):

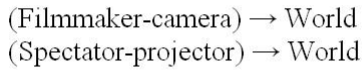

Fig. 7. Vivian Sobchack's film communication model.

Through the camera, the filmmaker has an embodiment perception of the world as it actually unfolds. The spectator, on the other hand, has an embodiment relation to the projector, which does not provide her with a direct perception of the world, but with one that is mediated through a text. In Ihde's term, the spectator has an embodiment perception of the film and a hermeneutic perception of the world.

In my opinion, Sobchack's interpretation overlooks two important factors: the first is the necessity, even when writing about general properties of the moving images, to draw a distinction between "footage" and "text" and between "fiction" and documentary films; the second is the difficulty to predict future technological developments. In relation to the first factor, it is difficult to underestimate the fact that a filmmaker has an embodiment relation only with the raw footage of the film, but she has a hermeneutic one with the film itself, which is not simply the result of the camera recording, but it needs postproduction work in order to become a film. Moreover, if the filmmaker is a "fiction" film director, she does not have, usually, the chance to have a direct relationship with the world as it unfolds, because the movie-set is already a hermeneutically charged reproduction of the world. In relation to the second factor, I think that Sobchack is right in highlighting the present-day differences between film experience and real-life experience, but I also think that the future of technology is hard to write, and it is not outrageous to imagine that upcoming technologies will enable aesthetic experiences involving the whole body and all senses.

To recognize the importance of technology in film and documentary studies means above all to understand the technological embodiment of cinema and to realize that film expression occurs through the instruments of film practice and is indissolubly tied with technological leaps and transformations. It is now a common doxa, for example, not only in film studies, but

generally in our society, to think that images are ambiguous and do not permit an easy assessment of truth (Renov, *Theorizing Documentary* 9). This was clearly demonstrated in the Rodney G. King's case, when the footage of his beating sparked riots and clashes in April 1992 in Los Angeles and yet failed to be believed as an act of violence by the jurors appointed to judge the police officers involved. However, it seems possible to imagine that, at some point in the future, even extemporary footages will be so visually and acoustically accurate that the interpretation of a fact like the beating of Rodney G. King will become much easier, because of an enhanced level of documentary credibility.

A film communication diagram inspired by Don Ihde's theory, then, becomes even more articulated (Fig. 8):

(Filmmaker-camera) ⟶ world (or "world" in case of fantastic settings)

Filmmaker ⟶ (film-world)

(Spectator-projector) ⟶ world (or "world" in case of fantastic settings)

Spectator ⟶ (film-world)

Fig. 8. A new film communication model.

Yet, this reconfiguration of the diagram does not imply that Ihde's theory cannot explain the cinematic experience, but only that the cinematic experience has to be considered, at least for the purposes of a phenomenological analysis, not as a single gestalt, but as a complex process that involves different steps and different technologies: image recording, audio recording, post-

production, and projection are separate moments, usually assigned to different people, and inevitably entailing different human-technology relations.

Sobchack's attempt to limit the application of Ihde's theory to a technologically mediated experience such as cinema is inconsistent with his own pronouncements. His phenomenology is precisely conceived to account for any situation in which our experience of the world is mediated through technology, no matter how complex this relation is. One of his most recent efforts, for example, is to link the invention of early modern epistemology with one of cinema's ancestors, the *camera obscura*.[82] In Ihde's view, the *camera obscura* model presents all the characteristics of early modern epistemology, namely: (1) a reading subject inside the box; (2) visual representations; (3) external objects that cause the representations; (4) a geometrical relation between the external objects and the internal representations; (5) an ideal observer that testifies the reliability of the correspondence ("Phenomenology and Imaging" 96). As Ihde suggests, this model was also Descartes's model of the mind, with God replacing the ideal observer, and consciousness, the mind, or the homunculus acting as the subject inside the box. If nowadays the *camera obscura* cannot be accepted as a metaphor of the mind, it is still illuminating to look at it as the first example of technologically mediated vision. Ihde does not cite cinema among its successors, because he is more interested in instruments as producers of scientific knowledge, but he maintains that "both scientific knowledge and artistic production [...] can develop practices using mediational devices" ("Phenomenology and Imaging" 103).

Science, through technological devices like X-Ray telescopes, can give us knowledge of things we could not know, like pulsar from the Crab Nebula. It does not do so in an abstract way, but using technologies that transform an array of data in images that are readable through our senses, so that we can *see* what the data mean. Even in its most extreme experiments, science

depends on embodiment perceptions. I argued that cinema as well depends on embodiment perceptions, and if Ihde is right in comparing art and science because they both use mediational devices, then I would say that their epistemologies, at least in the case of documentary cinema, which has to abide by a verifiability claim, can be comparable as well. For science, instruments are "the means by which we engage our world, seeking to produce the knowledges needed about that which we inquire into" ("Phenomenology and Imaging" 106). Documentary as well is a means by which we engage our world, seeking to produce hermeneutic and perceptive knowledge of a social environment.

One of the controversies that Ihde's philosophy of technology could help film critics to settle is the definition of cinematic realism. In film studies, as I recalled in the previous pages, realism is a contentious category that transforms in stylistic features of the cinematic utterance the ontological perceptual transparency of moving images. I propose, following Ihde, to consider realism as a practice which is "both technologically embodied in its necessary instrumentation and also institutionally embedded in the social structures of a technological society" (*Instrumental Realism* 63); and one that enhances our hermeneutic and perceptual capabilities, allowing us to extend, potentially, our perceptive capacities not on a fantastic "world," but on the real world where we live. If seen from this perspective, documentary realism is the fulfilment of a potentiality of the film medium: not a stylistic feature, but a cognitive instrument, capable of producing knowledge through the technologically mediated interaction between human intentionality and reality; and the credibility of the documentary statement, which is a critical source of symbolic power for the institution of documentary, is not merely an arbitrary attribute, but an epistemologically justified quality. Documentarists may refuse to exploit the cognitive potential that an embodiment relation with reality provides, and decide to re-enact or digitally re-

create some events that are crucial to their stories, but the credibility of the documentary institution is, at least for the time being, necessarily linked to this fundamental characteristic of the documentary image.

2.3 Documentary as a Representational Art

2.3.1 The Documentary Game

This section is devoted to consider and scrutinize the third characteristic of the institution of documentary, namely its peculiar style. I will discuss what makes the documentary a form of visual and representational art that is able to express in aesthetically meaningful terms the ethical commitment and the cognitive potential that I identified as the two other institutional characteristics of the documentary practice. The theorist that helps us make the transition between documentary as a technology of perception and documentary as an artistic expression is Kendall L. Walton, whose aesthetics takes as its starting point the link between the perceptual and imaginative dimensions of the experience of seeing a picture. Even if Walton does not admit any interest in phenomenology, his aesthetics seem to be the perfect complement for a theory of documentary as a technology of perception.

According to Walton, looking at a photograph, I imagine seeing the object that the picture represents, although what I actually see are just strands of colors on a flat surface. When he writes that both imagination and perception are required in order for the brain to associate what the senses perceive as a bidimensional pattern to a recognizable tridimensional shape (*Marvelous Images* 118), Walton is basically calling "perception" what for Ihde is an embodiment relation with the technology, in this case that of representational art, and "imagination" what Ihde calls hermeneutic relation with the technology; in the case of a bidimensional painting, or photograph, imagination, or the hermeneutic relation with the technology, allows the perceiver to use the object as an extension of her interpretive capabilities, and see the tridimensional shape that the object suggests, but does not reproduce. Thus, his theory is consistent with my previous analysis

of the technological characteristics of the institution of documentary, and I will use it as a theoretical framework for an inquiry upon the features of documentary as a representational art.

Since Walton's theory of art representation is very original, I should cite other theories that start from different presuppositions and lead to different directions, and explain why I prefer Walton's. According to Nelson Goodman's theory of the symbol system, the correlation between a picture and its subject is arbitrary and symbolic, because, as in the case of language systems, such correlation is the result of a process of denotation, which has to be learned (225-32). As an example, one can think of the stylized images of men and women hanging on public toilets' doors. Everybody recognizes them as "standing for" men and women respectively, but why? Some, using Charles Sanders Peirce's terminology, would say that they are icons, insofar they resemble men and women in some crucial traits. Does this mean that all women have a triangular skirt, and an impossibly round face? Or that all men have spaghetti-like torso and limbs? Goodman would say that they denote men and women not because they have some recognizable characteristics of the real subjects, but because we are accustomed to the convention that they represent men and women.

If the relation between a picture and its subject is symbolic, then what is to influence the process of denotation? Art historian John Tagg exposed some consequences of the adoption of a symbol system for photography and film studies, highlighting the fact that photography's status as evidence and record, as well as its status as art, had to be produced and negotiated in order to be established (6). Following a reasoning borrowed from Michel Foucault, Tagg argues that documentary could only attain the legitimacy of a discourse of truth once it is included into a "regime of truth": this is the corollary of the circular relation that truth has with power (94). For this reason, Tagg does not hesitate to say that the documentary mode "is already implicated in

the historically developed techniques of observation-domination" and therefore it is forever "imprisoned within an historical form of the regime of truth and sense" (102). This is a very dangerous statement for a documentary theory, because it risks diminishing the significance of documentary itself as a practice. It is a position that seems to preclude any positive development of a documentary theory and makes it difficult to take into account the ethical commitment and the cognitive potential of the documentary practice.

Impervious to Tagg's remarks, a respected tradition of documentary study unashamedly defends documentary's importance as evidence of the world. It is a line of thought well rooted in photography and film study, exemplified by Roland Barthes' theory of the "evidential force" of photography (76-87), and, more recently, by Jean Douchet's nostalgic idea of the digital turn as a threat to the world's pictorial patrimony.[83] Inevitably, this tradition is grounded in some sort of inflection of the theory of the indexical nature of the documentary image, which purports to establish that there is a concrete and traceable link between photographic image and reality. However, since digital media have changed the way we produce and share photographs and moving images, this idea, already challenged by poststructuralist stances, seems all the more untenable (Elsaesser 16).[84]

What are the options then? Should we accept that documentary images have a symbolic/arbitrary relation with their objects, and thus renounce to insist on a realist epistemology, or should we adopt the idea that documentary images have an indexical relation with their subjects, and so deal with all the thorny issues that this position raises? My position is that Walton's theory of representation can help us overcome this undesirable alternative.[85]

Walton's central insight is that all representational works of art are "props in games of make-believe" (*Mimesis* 51). Props are objects that, according to the rules of a particular game,

prompt determinate imaginings. The broomstick in a game of hobby-horses is a prop, because the game mandates that that object be imagined as a horse. Representations, according to Walton, are objects that have been designed to serve as props in complex games of make-believe. To be a prop, and therefore to represent, means for a work to specify which propositions about an object have to be made fictional (*Mimesis* 106). To represent does not mean just to make anything appear, it means to give something some specifications, according to which the thing is a representation. If I represent a red house, with a white roof and a green door, it means that three propositions through which I make the house fictional are that the house be red, have a white roof and a green door. These propositions are the fictional truths of the representation. One consequence of this theory, which is of particular interest for what documentary is concerned, is that, if all representations are props and use propositions to create fictional truths, they are all fictional. This may seem a shocking idea, especially after I devoted the previous chapters to explaining how the institution of documentary is different from that of "fiction" filmmaking. And yet I hope it will become clear in the next pages that in fact this idea does not contradict my previous assertions.

As I have already stated, following Walton, the experience of seeing a picture is imaginative and perceptual. Looking at a picture, I imagine, on the basis of the visual input I'm provided, seeing the object, so both my imagination and my perception are required. On observing Meindert Hobbema's *The Water Mill with the Great Red Roof*, what I actually see is a stratified layer of colours on a canvas, but I imagine myself seeing a watermill. I do that, because I willingly participate in the make-believe game of the painting, which uses those stains and colors as props that should guide me to imagine a mill, thanks to some propositions that I accept as fictional truths of the representation.

Fictional truths can be generated either directly or indirectly. Walton calls the directly generated ones "primary fictional truths" and the indirectly generated ones "implied" (*Mimesis* 140). He brings the example of a Goya painting in which guns point at prisoners, but the persons holding the guns are off the picture. The fact that there are soldiers wielding the guns is an indirect truth, generated by the primary truth of guns being there. What is implied can be by no means less important than what is primary, even though it is sometimes not easily relatable to direct fictional truths. Most importantly, it is not true that "pictures generate directly the fictionality of anything that is shown in them" (*Mimesis* 170). Walton provides, as an example, the dinner scene of Ingmar Bergman's *Hour of the Wolf* (1968), in which the characters are deformed, but the fictional truth generated by the representation is not that the characters look like this; it is fictional only that this is how they appear to Borg, the protagonist.

What I reported thus far of Walton's theory concerns all kinds of pictorial representations, from pre-modern frescos to abstract painting, because the purpose of all kinds of pictorial representations is to encourage vivid perceptual games of make-believe. The theory works well to distinguish between artistic and non-artistic representations, because it is easy to understand that the more complex, sophisticated, rich and unusual the game of make-believe, the more skilful, admirable, the artist. Yet, what I am interested in is a particular variety of representations, in the making of which authors may seem to display different kinds of skills. Does anything change when we stop talking about pictorial representations, and turn to photographic images? Walton did not write about documentary, but he wrote about photography; in his account, "photographs are special among pictures in that they are transparent: to look at a photograph is actually to see, indirectly but genuinely whatever it is a photograph of" (*Marvelous Images* 117).

I find this idea convincing and powerful and I believe it can be further specified in order to match the specific needs of a documentary theory. The property of transparency alone is not sufficient to draw a clear line between non-documentary and documentary images, because the latter adds to the transparency quality that all photographic images share, the crucial feature of being non-predetermined, that is non-manipulated not only in post-production, but in production as well.[86] Transparency is a term used by Ihde as well, as I recalled in the previous chapter, to motivate the fact that the combination of human senses and technology gives access to a genuine knowledge of the things perceived. If it is true that Walton calls imagination the hermeneutic relation with the technology of photography that allows the viewer to "see" the object photographed in a photo, then I feel entitled to use the term transparency only as long as there is a correspondence between the real object and its photographic representation. A computer-generated image of an imaginary environment, or a painting, need imagination, of course, to be perceived as representations, but they are not transparent, because the images they prompt the viewer to imagine do not have an exact correspondence in the real world.

Walton's example of the explorer coming back from a remote jungle is brilliant and clarifies the concept perfectly (*Marvelous Images* 98-99): if the explorer came back with a sketch of a dinosaur, it would be difficult to believe that he actually saw a dinosaur, but if he brought a photograph, it would be easier to believe him. What sketches show depends on what the artist thinks she sees, whereas in case of photographs, what they show does not depend on what the person sees but on what actually is in front of the camera, so we don't have to rely on her beliefs or perceptions. The example of the explorer is obviously a border case, because in the jungle there are no studios or post-production facilities where he could have manipulated the images of the dinosaur. In real life, one question would arise immediately: the problem of digital

photography. Walton acknowledges that digital photography can be "opaque," rather than transparent (*Marvelous Images* 115), because its dependence on reality cannot always be established. Since digital formats are now the worldwide standard of photographic images,[87] I think the problem must be addressed squarely.

As I explained in the previous chapter, the technology of documentary and that of photography are not reducible to a choice between the analog and the digital format of image reproduction, but participate in the whole process of realistic representation of expressions and perceptions. A non-manipulated digital photograph can be as credible as a (non-manipulated) analog photograph, provided that its link to reality be verifiable. As discussed in chapter 2.2.3, credibility is a characteristic of the institution of documentary, which means that it will continue to be a source of symbolic power for the institution until there will be a general belief in the fact that the rules and norms of documentary prevent filmmakers from manipulating images and inventing facts, and does not depend on the format, platform, or material through which the documentary is made and distributed. This perspective gives us an alternative way to elaborate the distinction between documentary representations and other kinds of artistic representations. On discussing realism and antirealism in chapter 2.2.5, I stated that "non-fiction" images cannot be distinguished from "fiction" images by the way they express their meanings, and that the only possible way of differentiating them is the public agreement on the truth of the ideal documentary claim to be the expression of an unprepared, non-determined and non-manipulated reality. I believe that Walton's insistence on the relational nature of art signification delivers similar conclusions. If the meaning of a picture depends on the game that viewers accept to play with it, it follows that the documentary is a fictional[88] representation that activates games in which, in order to participate, viewers accept to play according to the rules of the documentary

game. In a paradoxical vein, one could go so far as to say that, even if the images involved were identical, a documentary would be different from any other kind of fictional representation because of the distinctive character of the rules of the make-believe games that the documentary principle generates. Consequently, for a moving picture to be a documentary it is necessary, and sufficient, that its representations generate fictional truths according to the rules of the documentary game. On the basis of the arguments developed in section 2.2, it is reasonable to maintain that the documentary's claim to be the expression of an unprepared, non-determined and non-manipulated reality is the most relevant rule of the documentary game, the rule that generates most of the fictional truths that constitute documentary as a representational art. Considered in this way, the seemingly opposite ways of looking at the documentary as representation and as evidence are not contradictory anymore and a better definition of the documentary form appears within reach.

The fact that a constituent part of the institution of documentary, the one that concerns documentary as a representational art, forces us to define documentary statements as fictional truths in games of make-believe, should not prevent us from looking at the same statements as legitimate sources of knowledge, and the outcomes of an enhanced intentionality directed to the world. After all, this is not an uncommon practice: we use to look at Leonardo Da Vinci's drawings as works of art, but they were conceived as sketches for mechanical constructions. Architecture is another example of a complex institution that combines practical necessity and artistic *élan*. Even poetry can be regarded as an artistic achievement or as a testimony of social and even religious practices,[89] depending on what is the purpose of the inquiry one is dedicated to. The images of the Crab Nebula I mentioned before are representations, so, according to Walton's theory, scientists imagine seeing them. It is fictional that they actually see the Nebula

and the pulsar, but this does not prevent them from using those images for scientific purposes, because they are genuine extensions of their capacity of vision. The essential contribution of Walton's theory in this matter is that it clarifies the meaning of the word fiction, which ceases to be a synonym for fake, or an antonym for documentary, and becomes an attribute of any representation. The distinction between "fiction" and documentary images that I elaborated upon in the first part of the dissertation does not become irrelevant, however, because it defines two fundamentally distinct aesthetic experiences: documentary and non-documentary images are both forms of fictional representation, for what the viewer's perceptions are concerned, but one has, among its institutional features, that of being considered as transparent, the other can be opaque; one is supposed to have a verifiable link to reality, even though it is fictional that the viewer sees the documentary representation "as if" it was the reality, the other has not. It could be suggested that a different nomenclature for the two forms of representation might be necessary at this point, since fiction becomes a general term that refers to both documentary and non-documentary films, but I am concerned here with documentary images only, so I would prefer to leave this burden to others, if anyone deemed the task necessary.

2.3.2 A Particular Documentary Game: *La bocca del lupo*

Documentary images are transparent. It means that looking at the opening sequence of Pietro Marcello's *La bocca del lupo,* not only I imagine seeing two ragged persons looking for twigs and starting a fire on the beach of Quarto dei Mille, but I believe this is what had happened in front of the camera. It is fictional that I see those persons on the beach, but it is not fictional that those persons were there. This is the first make-believe game that I play with the movie, prompted by the images of the homeless men on the beach, that function as props in this particular game. Is this peculiar of a documentary? Of course not, because all photographic

images that are not manipulated in postproduction share this characteristic; but this is just the first direct fictional truth implied in this scene. If one believes that not only is this image transparent, but also that the action performed by the props is not staged, not predetermined, then the fictional truths generated by the game one plays with the images is of a particular kind. One attributes to the images, in virtue of a stylistic principle, the power to generate what I would call *semi-fictional* truths, which are fictional truths with a factual dependence on reality. My argument is that this stylistic principle is typical of the documentary image and can be formulated in this manner: a prop in the fictional world of the documentary always represents itself.

If we watch *La bocca del lupo* being conscious that is a documentary, we tend to follow this rule and imagine seeing the homeless persons not only as characters, but as existing people, who are not acting, but living their own life while they are filmed. If we play this game, a plethora of implied truths that we cannot instinctively accept emerge immediately: Were they there by chance? How did the director manage to film them? Did he know them before? It turns out then, that saying that a prop represents itself is not as straightforward a statement as it appears. And yet, even before one starts trying to answer these questions, a more substantial problem arises: a prop is something that stands for something else, so to say that it represents itself seems like a counterintuitive and contradictory statement. In a documentary, as in any other kind of photographic representation, the image of a chair is a prop in a game in which it represents a chair. Does this mean that in a documentary the image of a chair represents itself? Is Vincent Van Gogh's *Vincent's Chair* a prop in a game in which it represents a chair, or one in which it represents itself? What does "representing itself" mean in the first place? I believe we can answer these questions if we consider that transparent representations are those whose

images are props in games in which they are not props, but real objects. In these kinds of representations, props stand for objects that exist independently of any representation, and whose existence guarantees the very possibility of a factual dependency between representations and reality. Only in this sense, we can state that they represent themselves, because they represent objects that exist independently of any intentional representation of reality.[90]

This definition may provide us with a more precise idea of what constitutes a transparent image, but of course it is not conceived as a way to prevent ambiguity from being common currency in most photographic representations. In *Tatanka* (2011), boxer Clemente Russo, an Olympic silver medalist in the heavyweight category, interprets a character whose life is clearly inspired by his own: born in the same small village where Russo was born, Marcianise, close to Naples, the character has a difficult youth, but eventually fulfills his dream to become a world-class boxer. The film is not a biography, though, because the director chose to dramatize all kinds of aspects of Russo's life. As a consequence, the image of Clemente Russo is a prop in a game in which he represents Michele (this is the fictional name of the character) and not himself, and the movie is not a documentary.

La bocca del lupo is a different kind of movie. As I already mentioned, Pietro Marcello himself admitted that Enzo acted during the movie. However, I stated in chapter 2.2.1 that there is a fundamental difference between this preparedness and the preparedness of a fiction film: in the former, the details of the story, and in some cases the very existence of the main characters, is usually unforeseeable for the director when she first conceives the film and starts her exploration of the pertinent environment. Discussing Vivian Sobchack's phenomenology of moving images, the distinction between "footage" and "text" came to the fore: in fiction movies the text level precedes and determines the footage level, even though the degree of accuracy, or

preparedness, can vary considerably. This means that, in fiction filmmaking, a hermeneutic relation with technologies, mostly the technology of writing, but also that of drawing and even mathematics, which is instrumental in the financial assessment of the film budget, is the first fundamental step toward the creation of the final text. Consequently, an embodiment relation with the technology that gives the name to the discipline, the technology of film recording, is only an intermediate and ancillary moment between two hermeneutic steps, and more often than not, it is already hermeneutically charged, because most fiction movies are largely filmed in purposely built settings. Usually, the level of preparedness of a fiction film is very high, and some filmmakers claim to direct their films on paper, rather than with a movie-camera.[91] Of course this is not always the case, but it is undisputable that fiction films are more expensive and financially risky businesses, and require a high degree of preparation before the footage actually happens. Unpreparedness, in fiction filmmaking, is usually an unpleasant condition, which artistic crew and financial investors equally dislike.

Documentary, conversely, is defined by its openness to unpreparedness. The embodiment relation with the film or video-camera, being personal or someone else's, as in the case of archival images, precedes the hermeneutic relation with the text, which means that documentarists use the recording technology as an enhancer of perceptions, and only later they organize these perceptions in a text, which is conceived as a meaningful expression of perceptions. Since this embodiment relation is a source of knowledge, but is not always a source of good-quality images, it happens frequently that documentarists record their perceptions, and then write proper scripts, and stage recited scenes. As long as the credibility of the documentary institution is preserved, and as long as the directors use props that represent themselves, this procedure does not transform their movies in fiction films, and this means that the cognitive

potential of the documentary image does not concern necessarily the actual footage that constitutes the documentary film, but it concerns the embodiment relation that precedes the hermeneutic process that leads to the creation of the documentary as a text.

La bocca del lupo is a symptomatic example in this respect. In the Extras section of the DVD version of the movie,[92] there is the audiovisual recording of the first meeting with Enzo. It did not find a place in the final cut of the documentary, but is a precious document nonetheless, because it shows us what the raw material that Marcello shot in the first days with Enzo looked like. The place is recognizable as the small apartment where some of the scenes of the documentary take place, notably the final interview with Enzo and Mary, and the sequence of Enzo having dinner alone and talking aloud to an imagined Mary (Fig. 9).

Fig. 9. *La bocca del lupo* (2010). Enzo in the kitchen.

However, the room looks also significantly different. There is no professional lighting, and the only illumination comes from a spotlight that provides the room with stark contrasts and livid colors that seem to give equal importance to the character and to the myriad of banal objects that crowd the space, from the ashtray on the table to the images of saints on the wall (Fig. 10).

Fig. 10. *La bocca del lupo* (2010). DVD Extras.

The professional footage, in contrast, allows us to focus on Enzo as the protagonist of the space, because of its accurate lighting and composition, despite the fact that is a longer shot that includes in the frame more objects of the same room. In the Extras interview, Enzo talks about his years in prison, about the two policemen that he hurt, and about the fact that he was much respected in jail. Everything he says is also said in the documentary, with one difference: in the documentary, he is not the one who talks. The idea of having his story told by Mary is a consequence of another unprepared discovery, namely the testimony that Enzo and Mary decided to give after many months of acquaintance with the film crew. Thanks to this new document, the director had the chance to "play" with Enzo and place him in the bigger story of Genoa, before zooming in on his personal life.

The images of Enzo walking away from the containers of the port, and roaming the alleys of old Genoa, are all planned and acted as well. Nevertheless, Enzo did arrive in Genoa in a boat few years before, after the end of his last imprisonment, and the blue suit he wears in those scenes is the same blue suit that he wore the first time he met Marcello and Fgaier (Fgaier 25). Like physics experiments in a laboratory have to be controlled and prepared, in order to give

viable results, documentary sequences can be partially or totally planned in order reproduce non-predetermined mediated perceptions and transform their cognitive potential in actuality. Even if it may seem a paradox that a high level of preparation is necessary for something non-predetermined to happen, this process should not invalidate the fact that, before being the result of a hermeneutic relation with a text, a documentary is always the result of an embodiment relation with reality, enhanced by the technology of multimedia recording.

The quality of being the outcome of an embodiment relation with reality does not only imply a nominal or theoretical difference between fiction film and documentary, but a substantially different relation of the text with the environment. Documentaries make private spheres, and their local and personal perceptions, available in the public sphere. This characteristic alone may alter the public sphere, but it is certainly enough to radically transform the private spheres that are the object of the documentary expression:

> Mary lo ha accompagnato e guidato, accettando in silenzio le umiliazioni e le dicerie dei passanti maligni che, osservando Enzo recitare e bere davanti a un obiettivo che lo avrebbe raccontato, non mancavano di denigrarlo - e lei era lì, non lontano, silente nel ricevere l'ennesimo dolore. Questo è stato… umiliazioni fino a quando il film non ha preso forma ed è stato libero di partire dal ghetto di Croce Bianca verso il resto del mondo, donando consenso e riscatto a questa storia tra le storie.[93] (Marcello "Mary per sempre" 10-11)

When Mary accepted to become part of the movie, she knew that it would mean exposure and humiliation. She had spent most of her life, after she left her parents' place, hiding and working at night, so she developed a secretive personality. Enzo is less shy, and yet, having passed most of his life in prison, he, also, is not used to deal with people like Pietro Marcello.

They decided to trust the director of the documentary and they were finally filled with pride and emotion when they realized that their story was appreciated and understood for its exceptional significance, and their characters loved and respected. Mary even asked for a special plate to hang in her kitchen, as a souvenir of the experience, and the producer was happy to send it to her at the end of the post-production work (Marcello, "Mary per sempre" 11). Marcello was wholly aware of the consequences that the movie had in the lives of its two protagonists. He concludes his brief letter in memory of Mary, who died in 2010, with these words: "Cosa separa Croce Bianca dal resto del mondo? Mary lo sapeva bene: l'indifferenza, la paura dell'altro e di chi è diverso. Gli invisibili sono gli esclusi che nessuno vuole guardare o vedere. Il film aveva dato a Mary la speranza di veder riconosciuta la sua vita insieme a Enzo, non più esclusi tra gli esclusi" ("Mary per sempre" 11). [94]

Marcello's father was a seaman and embarked often from Quarto dei Mille, the location where the film begins ("Genova, una storia d'amore" 18). Marcello may have had a special connection with the city and its inhabitants, but what he certainly had was the sensibility that any documentarist should have for the lives of the persons he or she decides to film. A documentary is not a mere artwork, but an effort to understand and communicate real experiences, real unrepeatable tragedies, real unbearable shames. For this reason, it can be the most revealing of things, or the most intrusive of things. *La bocca del lupo* is, without a doubt, one of the former.

2.3.3 Other Rules of the Documentary Game

I will now come back to the questions that generated this detour: how do we react when we realize that Enzo is acting? How does this understanding affect our assumption that the movie we are watching is a documentary? What game are we playing? Which rules are we following?

La bocca del lupo is a documentary, because the performance of the director of the movie was typical of the documentary game: he met Enzo by chance; he let Enzo and Mary tell their story; when he decided to film fictional sequences, he did not recur to actors. He based all fictional sequences on actually happened events. Let's unpack this model with more precision: documentaries are transparent representations made of props that represent themselves. *La bocca del lupo*, for example, is an artistic audiovisual work whose representations generate fictional truths according to the rules of the documentary game. As any other documentary, it is a peculiar fictional representation: its images are props in games of make-believe, that lead the viewer to imagine seeing what they represent, but, contrary to what happens with other fictional representations, those images are constituted by props that represent themselves, like Enzo and Mary, and not fictional characters and places. The interaction of these transparent representations with other transparent, or opaque representations, generate fictional and semi-fictional truths that characterize the story of the documentary. Fictional truths are produced according to general and internal principles. The fact that Enzo walks and talks like a human being is a consequence of what Walton calls the Reality Principle: "the basic strategy which the Reality Principle attempts to codify is that of making fictional worlds as much like the real one as the core of primary fictional truths permits. It is because people in the real world have blood in their veins, births and backsides, that fictional characters are presumed to possess these attributes" (*Mimesis* 144). This is a principle that should codify any documentary statement, since I maintained that at the origin of the documentary credibility there is a verifiable link between representation and reality.

Another principle at work in artistic representations is what Walton calls the Mutual Belief Principle (*Mimesis* 150), which generates implied truths according not to the principles governing an absolute reality, but to those that are commonly believed in a culture or an epoch.

This definition is a bit more controversial. It is debatable how and if mutual beliefs and shared symbols are generalizable or pertain to specific cultures, and this problem has relevant repercussions for art criticism. According to Dominic Lopes, Ernst Gombrich was the first one to answer the question of "how can depiction have historical and cultural dimensions if pictures are perceptual and perception is ahistorical and universal across cultures?" (9) Gombrich argued that pictures are conceptual as well as perceptual, meaning that they are like language in positing an arbitrary design-subject correlation (9). He called these different design-subject correlations "schemata," a term with a long phenomenological tradition. Lopes contends that if schemata are arbitrary, then there is no explanation why a particular schemata is adopted other than saying that it is customary. Lopes' aim is not to refute Gombrich's theory, but to explain "how pictures can belong to different schemata, or styles or mode of representation and, second, how pictures in those schemata, styles or modes can be more or less suited to particular times and places" (11).

As I already mentioned, representations, according to Walton, are objects that have been designed to serve as props in complex games of make-believe, which direct those who appreciate them to imagine certain propositions. Lopes turns to Walton's make-believe theory as a theoretical account for pictures of non-existing objects, but refuses to accept that all pictures are fictions, because he maintains that his aspect-recognition theory provides the explanation for the recognition of existing objects (202). His theory is that "things are as they appear in pictures because pictures trigger recognitional abilities, as well as other abilities to identify objects on the basis of their appearance" (206), and this property accounts for the ability of pictures to convey information, which is what "demotic pictures," as he calls them, mainly do. To Lopes, a theory of depiction is a theory of sense, not use (89); it has to show what the intrinsic meaning of a picture, and not its contextual meaning, is. Lopes may have a point here, but I do not think that

his idea contradicts Walton's theory. Walton does not deny that one can recognize existing objects in a picture, or that a picture can provide meaningful information about a real object, but that before any use can be made of that information, one has to retrieve it, and in order to retrieve it, one has to engage in a make-believe game.

As I will explain in the following chapters, I think that symbolic systems are connected in meaningful ways to concrete social experiences. Human societies are organized in different ways, but many anthropologists believe that it is possible to discover symbolic systems as grounding principles of all, or most, human societies (Douglas *Natural Symbols* xxii); if this were true, it could easily be argued that playing with representations as games of make-believe is one vastly communicable way to connect symbolic systems to social experiences. Games of make-believe are the product of a culture, but they are not cultural-specific, in the sense that they can be engaged and understood in different cultures; accordingly, I would argue that representations are one of the most common and effective ways to express a culture, which is a specific symbolic system generated by a social configuration, through communicable artefacts. In a different social context, the game played with the same artifact may be less nuanced, but it is not lost, if the basic rules of the representational game are shared by the two contexts. Pictures do not trigger recognitional abilities because they are pictures; they do it only if one accepts to play a make-believe game with them; and they are understandable in different contexts only if the two contexts share the same rules for representational games of make-believe.

The Mutual Belief Principle can thus be considered as the principle generating cultural-specific truths within communicable games of make-believe. In the case of *La bocca del lupo*, I would consider under this category truths like these: people go to prison when they commit a crime; a criminal can be a passionate lover; a *macho* can love a transsexual; the old part of

Genoa is where marginal people live; two marginalized persons can live together and be happy. All these are principles generating the truths that the story needs in order to be told and appreciated. They do not aim at making the world of the story universally recognizable, but at making the world of the story similar to the specific society of which it is a representation.

Other principles are not general, but internal to the representation itself. These are the principles that define not only the original traits of the representation, like the kind of composition and lighting that is possible in a particular place with certain characters, but what is commonly referred to as its style. I will consider documentary as a style in the sense that Walton gives to the term (*Marvelous Images* 224) of pertaining to the actions that produced the work. In the previous chapters, I said that the fact that its images cannot be predetermined is an ontological property of the technology of documentary. In order to translate this property into a stylistic feature, we could say that documentary images are props in games in which they represent themselves. This is why we tend to interpret documentary images as non-predetermined even when they are not: we tend to expect some features of the documentary style, on top of the Reality Principles and Mutual Belief principles. As Walton writes, "it is how a work *appears* to have been made, what sort of action or actions it looks or sounds or seems as though the artist performed in creating it, which is crucial to the work's style" (*Marvelous Images* 228). Accordingly, it is how a documentary *appears* to be made that characterizes its style as typical of a documentary. This is also the reason why mockumentaries can appropriate the documentary style without being documentaries: the documentary style, being a stylistic property, is easily reproducible in a different institutional context.

The act of making a work of art is sometimes more important than the work itself, as in the case of Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades, or John Cage's music. The makings of those objects

are “ritualistic and symbolic affirmations” (*Marvelous Images* 225), exactly as the act of being spectators of those performances. The action of going to listen to such a concert or performance is a symbolic and significant act, like the one that produces it. This insistence on the ritualistic aspect of making art is, for Walton, a way to contradict what he calls the “cobbler” model of the institution of art (*Marvelous Images* 223), which is a way to consider art merely as an assemblage of products that have to be sold. On the contrary, the aesthetic pleasure of music, for example, is as much that of playing it as it is that of listening to it. A choir in Western tradition, but also music playing in the African tradition, are not meant to be for a public: their main purpose and aesthetic pleasure and value are in the playing itself; they do not yield products to be sold, nor do they deliver, if not accidentally, a public entertainment.

Besides contributing to this ritualistic aspect of art creation and appreciation, the act of making a work of art defines also its stylistic features. Adapting Walton’s definition, I would say that a characteristic performance on the part of the director is the essence of the documentary style of filmmaking. The director of a documentary knows that she has to make her work in a specific manner for the movie to be called a documentary. This manner is responsible for generating the fictional truths internal to the artwork. The rules specific to the documentary game are its stylistic features, because they influence the way documentaries are made; these features depend on one fundamental principle: documentary images are transparent. Expanding the meaning that Walton attributes to the term, I described as transparent those images that are props in games in which they represent themselves. This kind of images generates semi-fictional, as well as fictional, truths, because one of the institutional characteristic of the documentary is that it is a representational art that claims, and therefore *appears*, to be the result of a verifiable encounter with an unprepared, non-predetermined and non-manipulated reality.

In sum, I defined the documentary as a representational art, whose peculiar style is characterized by transparent representations made of props that represent themselves. I am conscious of the fact that no styles are immutable and exceptions to the rules are normal within any field of artistic representation. Any literary and pictorial tradition can count innumerable examples of artists contravening, yet not dismantling, the precepts of the style they choose to work with. Unlike scientific theories, which can be only confirmed or rejected, artistic styles evolve thanks to disruptions and exceptions; Thomas Kuhn used to say that there is no science outside the "paradigm" (35); in many respects, the work of an artist starts outside the confines of a style.[95]

The problem of the definition of the documentary style would not be so relevant, if it was not closely related to a more poignant one: if we do not recognize the specificity of the documentary form and we just ascribe the pinnacles of the documentary production, like *La bocca del lupo*, to fiction cinema, we risk overlooking an important strand of Italian cinema that, as I mentioned in section 1 of the dissertation, has been constantly growing in size and quality in the past twenty years. As I hope I demonstrated in this section though, the fact that most of the scenes of Pietro Marcello's movie are staged does not represent an exception to the rules of the documentary style, nor does it represent a challenge to its classification as a documentary. Beside the fact that the institutional context of *La bocca del lupo* is that of a documentary, being it an ethically committed attempt to give a voice to the poor and outcasts of Genoa, through a cognitively meaningful representation of two of them, there is no doubt that the film is shot in a documentary style, because the characters of the film, the streets of Genoa where they wander, the objects they use, are all props in a fictional game in which they are not props, but real

persons, the real streets of Genoa, the objects they really use every day, a game which is the working mechanism of a maybe mistreated, but certainly distinctive, representational art.

3. Sketching a Neo-Durkheimian Approach to Documentary Studies

3.1 The Theoretical Framework

In section 1, I provided a historical map of the Italian documentary production and reviewed the most important contributions of Italian scholars and directors to a theory and a history of the documentary form. In section 2, I defined the institutional characteristics of the documentary form, which are not specific to the Italian context. In this section, I will outline a theoretical framework and a methodology that should allow me to bridge the gap between the Italian context and the documentary theory, and finally connect types of documentary with their contexts of production.

There have been many attempts to endeavour a sociology of the arts that would connect art styles and the social configurations where the styles developed,[96] but none went as far as demonstrating a causal relationship between the former and the latter. The problem is not secondary, since the establishment of a causal link is the only way to make verifiable theoretical statements that can be accepted or rejected after careful data analysis, and therefore to support a theory that is explanatory and not merely descriptive.[97] I attempt this enterprise adapting a neo-Durkheimian theoretical framework to documentary studies, and for this purpose I identify four documentary types, characterized by the different weighting of a set of variables dependent on the three institutional features that I have classified in the previous chapters: (1) the power of being a voice of integrity and rationality in the mediated debate about the common good of citizens, a feature that I called ethical commitment; (2) the cognitive potential, which is the power of being a technology for the enhancement of embodiment and hermeneutic perceptions, and thus of showing a meaningful and credible, albeit mediated, interaction with the world that we all inhabit; (3) the documentary style, which means the power of being a representational art

with its own rules, and its own principles of aesthetic value. Successively, I match these types with the group/grid categories of the neo-Durkheimian model, and identify four contexts of production. In the next chapter, I shall verify, through the analysis of a recent Italian documentary, whether context of production and documentary type correspond or not.

In developing this neo-Durkheimian theoretical framework, I have mainly drawn on the work of British anthropologist Mary Douglas, who wrote her first major essays on the symbolic function of institutions in the 1960's. At that time, the general mood in the field of sociology was in favour of sweeping away rituals and institutions, but, as Douglas confesses in the introduction to the 1996 edition of *Natural Symbols*, "attacking rituals was attacking the surface. The real problem for everyone was to find better institutions" ("Natural Symbols" xii). Old institutional forms like the Church were losing appeal and she began her academic career asking how they got any meaning in the first place. Her main concern, though, was not the delegitimization of ancient institutions, but the search for new institutional forms more suited to contemporary societies. This enquiry brought her to develop a model of society that is able to relate social systems and power of symbols, and consequently to assess the importance of institutions, which are the carriers of symbols, in a given society.

As many of her fellow sociologists and anthropologists, Mary Douglas followed the path inaugurated by Émile Durkheim, who developed ideas from William Robertson Smith and others into a coherent theory that linked cultural phenomena, like the decline of superstition in Western societies, to social configurations, in his case the dissolution of closed communities ("Natural Symbols" xviii). According to Douglas's interpretation, he discovered that the more open a community, the less its members are influenced by common beliefs about dangers that protect the internally defined definitions of sin, or duty. As a consequence, processes like secularism,

which most scholars used to link to industrialization or technological development, become directly connected to a social factor, openness. Douglas accepted these premises, and yet, since her goal was not only to explain past configurations, but to tackle the problem of religion without biases, and explain the crisis of institutions of the 1960's, she proceeded to create a more abstract model of society.

In the 1982 edition of *Natural Symbols,*[98] she summarizes her endeavour in this way:

> The nature of society is such that certain common social experiences take the same symbolic forms, recognisable across historical and cultural diversity. What is needed is a method for revealing the social articulation of symbolic systems which regularly use the body's expressive resources in the same way to symbolise the same types of social contexts. (*Natural Symbols* xx)

This project is a radical change from the established context of research in the late 1960's in social sciences, which was "thoroughly committed to the model of the individual rational agent systematically shorn of sociality. [...] In this, if history or habits affect mental processes they are treated as distractions or impediments to individual rational thought" (*Natural Symbols* xxv). What she tries to do, instead, is to ponder the role of institutions and to explain their deepest functions in social contexts; she maintains that the institutional factor accounts for people's thought styles, and explain them as meeting a broader standard of rationality than reason-based actions based on intelligent inferences.

As a first step in this direction, she defends a non-biased use of the term "ritual," which had come to signify, because of sociology's commitment to rationality, a void acceptance of sclerotized forms of belief, leaving an anthropologist who was studying the positive aspects of

the phenomenon, like herself, with no terms to designate an unprejudiced adoption of rituals. From Colin Turnbull's study on the pygmies, and her observation of the Navaho of North America, she derives the thesis that "the most important determinant of ritualism is the experience of closed social groups. The man who has that experience associates boundaries with power and danger […] If the social groups are weakly structured and their membership weak and fluctuating, then I would expect low value to be set on symbolic performance" (*Natural Symbols* 14).

The pygmies are the extreme case of a people with almost no rituals. They live in close proximity to another group, the Bantu, who developed, instead, a complex religion with strict rituals. From the point of view of the Bantu, pygmies are ignorant and irreligious. In reality, their religion is one of internal feelings, like that of the Navaho, not external signs of devotion. A proof of what Douglas considers a fundamental causal link between social and symbolic systems is the fact that the social configurations of the two groups are also extremely different: pygmies' social grouping is fluid and fluctuating; if a quarrel arises, they just move away, they have no fear of social exclusion, whereas the Bantu are geographically stable and they regulate and prize land possession (*Natural Symbols* 16). One consequence that Douglas draws from this analysis is that all extreme forms of anti-ritualism are to be condemned; in fact, her anthropological research demonstrates that the need to ritualize is inherent in any coherent system of expression, and to abolish ritualism means to abolish communication. According to the anthropologist, rituals are essential to the transmission of a culture and the more a culture is stable and complex, the more it needs rituals and institutions in order to be preserved and develop.

Together with Durkheim, the key figure to comprehend Douglas's reasoning is Basil Bernstein. In the first volume of his work *Class, Codes and Control*, he showed that language

transforms and channels the experience of people, and that values are transmitted through communication (122). In the same way, Douglas argues, rituals are transmitters of culture and constrain, in a sense, the social behaviour of a community. Bernstein studied how children were educated in London, and especially how different social groups elaborated their speech. He discovered that working class families tended to have a more fluent talking, but a less varied vocabulary, and that middle class groups took more time to build sentences, but their phrases were less predictable. He outlined this difference in terms of "restricted" and "elaborated" codes, which are, basically, principles of linguistic selection and combination: "In the case of an elaborated code, the speaker will select from a relatively extensive range of alternatives and the probability of predicting the organizing elements is considerably reduced. In the case of a restricted code the number of these alternatives is often severely limited and the probability of predicting the elements is greatly increased" (125).

Bernstein called the two social contexts in which elaborated or restricted linguistic choices were made "person-oriented" and "positional" respectively. These terms are sufficiently abstract to make it evident that the relation between social contexts and codes is not meant to be considered as an intrinsic characteristic of a particular class culture. As Paul Atkinson explains clearly, "the differential distribution of 'codes' is not to be thought of as the outcome of more or less fortuitous distributions of class-related cultures, or of cultural lag on the part of the working class when it comes to the regulation of their children. It is related directly to the social distribution of knowledge and power in accordance with the social division of labour" (75). In other words, the class system has influenced the distribution of knowledge, which, consequently, has affected the linguistic choices of social groups, but this dynamic is fluid and reversible.

According to Douglas's interpretation of Bernstein, any structured group "will develop its special form of restricted codes which shortens the process of communication by condensing units into pre-arranged coded forms. The code enables a given pattern of values to be enforced and allows members to internalize the structure of the group and its norms in the very process of interaction" (*Natural Symbols* 54). Douglas will famously transform Bernstein's diagram in one determined by two variables that affect personal relations: group and grid. Group measures the level of association in which the individual lives, from loose to close, grid measures the control exerted on the individual by roles, which are independent from the group, like sex, age, and so on. Near zero in the diagram is a non-anthropomorphic cosmos, within which people feel that they are affected by things, like drought, more than fellow humans; it is the cosmology of isolated groups in the middle of Central African forests, but it can also inspire comforting, or escapist thoughts, and explain dropout choices, like alcoholism and drug addiction, in Western contemporary societies. The different levels of social integration and social regulation define four types of society: hierarchy, enclave, isolate and individualism (Fig. 11).

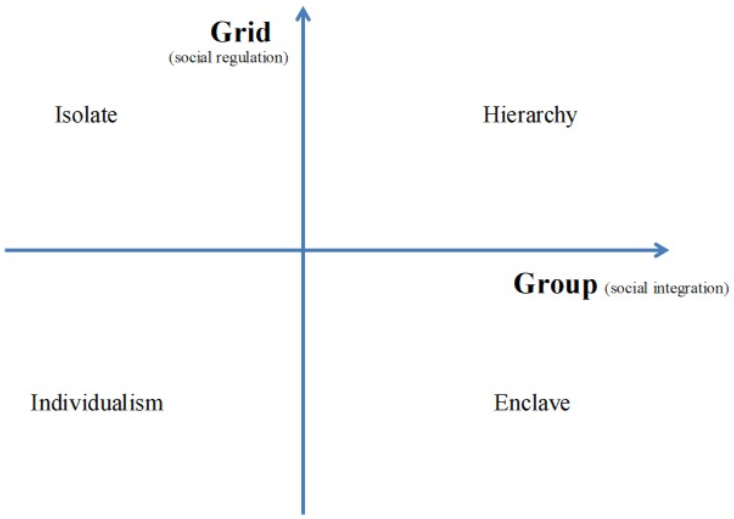

Fig. 11. Mary Douglas's group/grid diagram.

This reconfiguration of Bernstein's concepts, shifting the focus of the theory from the linguistic aspects of the communication to the social constraints at play, allows Douglas to tackle the problems that she put at the very center of her investigation: the meaning of symbols and the role of institutions. She thinks that symbols and rituals that are tenaciously adhered to are never meaningless. Faithfulness to Friday abstinence would not be linked to Calvary and Redemption for contemporary Irishmen, but if they still observe it, it is because it means something, for example allegiance to their homeland, and it does give them a sense of belonging if they are abroad and mistreated (*Natural Symbols* 37). A ritual is more than a sclerotized formality; it is a complex medium that is impossible to simply ignore, and very difficult to replace:

> We all know the seminar chairman who takes a different seat every week so that no symbols of authority or precedence can invest the spatial relations of the group. […] These very people, who prefer unstructured intimacy in their social relations, defeat their wish for communication without words. For only a ritual structure makes possible a wordless channel of communication that is not entirely incoherent. (*Natural Symbols* 51)

In this sense, a ritual is always a code, because it is needed for the internal communication of a group and reinforces its structure. Rituals can be the result of a process of concentration of verbal and non-verbal communication signs within a close group, and therefore be *restricted*, in Bernstein's terms, but they can also be much *elaborated* forms of quotidian interaction between people that operate under quite different social configurations within the same society. For example, in *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*, Durkheim argues that signing contracts in business is a ritual affair (193-95), and one that allows people who classify each other as dissimilar from each other to get along in a civilised fashion.

I will summarize this concept saying that restricted codes express values, whereas elaborated codes translate values. I am here using the term ritual to account not only for grand formal public ceremonies, but also for habits of quotidian interaction that pattern human behaviour in predictable institutional routines. The term "code" stands for selection criterion, as in Bernstein, and I provisionally give the term "value" a more general meaning than Douglas does, to the point that in this acceptation the term signifies "dependent variable within a specific social context." Cohesive communities use restricted codes to manifest, convey, create, and express values, and use elaborated codes for the traffic of goods and commodities, and to translate values when they need to communicate with others. Values are so deeply entrenched in a specific culture that they may seem impenetrable to other cultures; yet, the translation of values is essentially the enterprise of making values as comprehensible as possible, which means rationally, emotionally or economically appealing. Complex societies in which all four institutional forms are interacting, use both restricted and elaborated codes in their internal communications. For example, communities that endure a period of crisis can recur to elaborated codes to create new social configurations and institutions invested with renovated symbolic powers. The transition between hierarchical and market-oriented societies discussed in chapter two, for example, favoured by the emergence of a public sphere for the debate of questions of common interest, can be seen as a conflict between restricted and elaborated codes: the highly symbolic rituals for the transmission of aristocratic power were restricted codes originated in a society that was very different from that of France or England at the end of the 18th century, and one in which aristocratic power was an effective way to control and reproduce the social system; those rituals were more or less gradually abolished, because they had lost their capacity to control society, and replaced by other rituals, like democratic elections, that made the social

systems somewhat less hierarchical, but above all substituted a symbolic transmission of power with a rational set of criteria for the appropriation of power, which is, evidently, an elaborated code.

Another example, closer to the subject matter of this study, could help clarify this concept. In 1981 a group of Inuit started the IBC (Inuit Broadcasting Corporation), the first broadcaster in North America made by and for indigenous people. The idea behind the project was that "knowing the history of how they were represented by whites and understanding the image-making processes themselves will serve to empower their own communities" (Rony 124). This experiment encouraged a new generation of Inuit videomakers to use video as a communication tool. Not surprisingly, one of their first models and, at the same time, one of their first targets of critique, was Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922), the internationally acclaimed documentary shot in the Inuit territory that portrayed the life of an Inuit hunter, Nanook (whose real name was Allakariallak), in the savage north. As Fatimah Tobing Rony has pointed out, the inaccuracies of the movie have always been a source of disappointment for the Inuit community (123). Responding to *Nanook of the North*, the young Inuit videomaker, Zacharias Kunuk, decided to shoot a documentary in the true spirit of his community. In his work, called *Nunaqpa/Going Inland* (1991), hunters use guns, like they were doing at the time of Flaherty, and not spears, as in *Nanook*. Also, and most importantly, there is no attempt to hide the fact that Inuit people have already met white men at the beginning of the 20th century. This is the main complaint Kunuk and his community have against *Nanook*: in fact, they believe that Flaherty had intentionally distorted history to make the movie more sensationalistic and appealing to Western audiences, depicting a tribe of "noble savages" with no previous contact with civilization (126). In reconstructing, with the participation of the whole community, the life

of his people before the Second World War, Kunuk thinks he is helping them remember the past in a more accurate fashion (125).

The conceptual apparatus developed so far makes it possible to see Flaherty's work in a different light. A man caught between two different cultures, Flaherty had no other option but to translate what he knew about Inuit people for a Western audience. It is similarly not surprising that Inuit people, as soon as they learned how to use the new media, felt the necessity to produce a different version of the famous documentary, one that gave up most of the elaborated codes necessary for the inter-cultural communication. Only an ideological mind-set can lead to interpret these two documentaries as being one more "realistic" than the other. They are both representational works of art, even though they do happen to convey values peculiar to the Inuit tradition in two fundamentally different ways: Kunuk's is more keen to adhere to the restricted codes internal to the group, and therefore should be understood as an expression of Inuit values, even though its appeal may be limited to those familiar with the culture, whereas Flaherty's, with its overt imposition of elaborated codes, like a narrative that conforms to the traditional Western *topos* of the "noble savage," is more easily understandable as a translation of Inuit values for a vaster audience.

Documentary possesses a vast array of restricted and elaborated codes to express and translate values, some inherited from other arts, some distinctive. One feature that makes documentary a peculiar art form and communication tool is the fact that its images are props in games in which they represent themselves. Thanks to this feature, body language and communication between individuals can be part of the representation without the mediation of most linguistically elaborated codes, which normally intervenes to translate values into rationally communicable elements. This does not mean that the documentary itself cannot be re-organized

by, or integrated with highly elaborated codes,[99] but it means that, as a representational style, documentary has the possibility to preserve valuable elements that normally would be "lost in translation."

For Douglas's theory helps us determine the dependence of symbolic systems to economic and historical factors, a difference in the expression or translation of values may signal not only the emergence of a particular style, but major shifts in the composition of the social context in which the style emerged. John Hendry, for example, used Douglas's categories to understand changes in business organizations in an important article for the journal *Human Relations* in 1999. His idea is that, even though contemporary societies are very complex, "a pluralist society can be represented as a combination of groupings occupying different regions of the grid-group space and linked together by a greater or lesser degree of classificatory consistency" (565). In contemporary society, one can "adopt the social and ethical norms of the market at work, while retaining the traditional values of a hierarchical culture at home and in her private life, [but] at some point people may need to choose between the alternative legitimation logics with which they are presented" (566). Other scholars embarked on the enterprise of describing, using Douglas's framework, cognitive styles in different disciplines, from mathematics to geology (Douglas *Essays in the Sociology of Perception*). A much more interesting turn, however, has been given to the theory by a group of sociologists and political scientists in recent years, who insist firmly on the causal relationship between social configurations and styles of thought.[100] The neo-Durkheimian framework is a term that refers specifically to their works, and the following pages are particularly inspired by the methodology proposed by political scientist Perri 6[101] in his *Explaining Political Judgement* (53-99).

According to Perri 6, "the central neo-Durkheimian argument is that the four elementary forms of institution ritually cultivate distinct roles of rationality, each with its own standards of reasonable appetite for risk, ways of handling anomalies and connecting issues" (87). Since there is a vast literature devoted to categorize and classify roles of rationality and styles of thought,[102] compiled starting from empirical anthropological studies, it is possible for him to outline a very detailed set of dependent variables related to political judgement, which is the object of his inquiry. One difficulty that immediately emerges when one tries to use this methodology in order to outline a set of variables that defines documentary types is that not only human behaviours, like learning styles or cultural biases, have to be taken into account, but also variables specifically related to the representational style of the documentary. In a documentary people act, talk, behave, but the way they are pictured doing it depends as much on their singularity as on the style of the documentary. Enzo, the protagonist of Pietro Marcello's *La bocca del lupo*, has certainly a very peculiar way of talking and thinking, yet the type of the documentary is not influenced only by Enzo's style of talking and thinking, but also by the way Enzo's behaviour is portrayed. For this reason, I shall go back to the institutional characteristics of documentary that I analysed in the previous chapters, and to Bernstein's intuition that social constraints are visible in the linguistic codes that regulate communications among individuals, before being able to properly adapt the neo-Durkheimian framework.

Bernstein distinguishes between language and speech: "speech is a message, language is a code" (123). The code is a property of language and it is invented by linguists in order to explain certain regularities in the occurrence of speech events. The code is an abstraction that Bernstein needs in order to link the concrete instances of speech events to the more general level of the social structures; this inductive move is motivated by the following assumption: "language

is a set of rules to [*sic*] which all speech codes must comply, but which speech codes are generated is a function of the system of social relation" (123). My problem is to adapt this idea to film studies, so firstly I have to realize what is speech and what is language in cinema, and secondly, since movies are not an inter-personal form of communication, I have to understand in which kind of social context this public, medium-dependent communication occurs.

Bernstein's interest in speech and language as the most relevant elements of verbal communication avoids the intricacies of more sophisticated semiotic analysis, like Metz's, that not only divide the actualized and the structural level of communication, but, within the structural level, recognize the two sub-levels of a language and a language-system.[103] Since cinema is not a language-system, but a language, Bernstein's theory is adequate to provide a semiotic groundwork for film analysis. The actualized level of cinema communication is obviously the movie, the final product of a complex, mediated and collective work that enters the public sphere tagged with an origin (the geographical place where the utterance was originally conceived and financed) and a series of persons responsible, in various degrees, for the utterance. The structural level of cinema communication is related, for what my analysis is concerned, to what I have called, in the previous chapter, the institutional characteristics of documentary, which can be inflected in a set of dependent variables. If the comparison between verbal and visual languages is meaningful, we should be able to say that a movie allows utterances in both restricted and elaborated codes. Now, the interesting thing that derives from looking at cinema language from the point of view of sociolinguistics is that we are not just left with a set of rules with which all movies should comply, but we have a way to link style and social configurations, because, according to Bernstein's theory, which codes are generated in a style is a function of the system of social relation.

Since cinema is not an inter-personal communication, I relied on Douglas's interpretation of the theory, which is more apt to investigate the vast social implications of any communication. I used her intuition that rituals define the values of a community, to build a hypothesis about the connection between codes and values, which I articulated it in this way: restricted codes express values, whereas elaborated codes translate values. In this general formulation the notion of value is still vague, but it must be immediately noted that such a notion is always linked to the social configuration in which the utterance has been generated. Now I can try to define more specifically what the terms expression and translation of values mean in regards to the institution of documentary. I will refer to my previous analysis, which helped me identify three characteristics of the documentary institution:[104] its ethical, cognitive, and stylistic dimension. From these characteristics, I can extract three sets of variables, dependent on: (1) the devotion to, and willingness to fight for common principles such as justice and democracy; (2) the level of embodiment and hermeneutic relation with the technologies of perception; (3) the level of predictability of make-believe games. If we substitute these variables to the more general terms of the previous definition, we obtain a more specific relationship between the values of a particular institution and the social context where the institution develops, and more precisely four categories that represent the four documentary types.

I emphasized in chapter 2.1 how the 19th century public sphere can be seen as the prototype of all institutions devoted to the preservation and enhancement of a democratic discussion about the common good in modern societies. Documentary is one of many contemporary institutions devoted to leaving a space open for the debate about the common good between private citizens that see each other as part of the same public. Even though not all documentaries have high levels of ethical commitment, this is a defining characteristic of many

documentary films. The cognitive dimension of the documentary, which is closely related to what I called the "credibility" of the documentary institution, depends on different levels of hermeneutic or embodiment relations. An embodiment relation with the technology can be associated with a restricted code, because it extends one's perceptual intentionality without the need for a complex interpretive code. In this sense it is an instinctual, very fast, very simple, principle of element selection. As I already mentioned, the notion of restricted code does not have to be taken as diminutive: the embodiment relation with the external world is a characteristic that positively defines many documentaries as enhancements of the individual's perception of her own environment, and should not be taken as a negative characteristic. Another measure of distinction is the predictability of make-believe games, which is a feature of the stylistic aspect of the documentary institution. A predictable game of make-believe is one in which props represent themselves, and generate fictional and semi-fictional truths according to which they are part of a more or less non-predetermined reality. It is a predictable game because it is based on shared generic assumptions on how things, or persons, look like and behave. Unpredictable games of make-believe are those in which props can represent whatever the imagination of the author fancies. A David Lynch movie, in which women carry logs in their arms as if they were babies, and there exists an otherworld where midgets dance and they are neither gods, nor demons, is characterized by unpredictable games of make-believe. Some documentaries are pretty low on the vertical axis of the stylistic dimension, but this, again, should not be considered a demerit, but just a characteristic of the documentary institution.

The features I just listed have now to be related to the styles of thought of the four basic institutional contexts. As I said, there are several studies that can serve as authoritative

references, so I will not indulge in a detailed description of each style, but I will merely discuss some exemplary characteristics.

- Hierarchical contexts tend to adjust, integrate and accommodate anomalies and exceptions, to cultivate the memory of the community's long history and to assume continuity over time, and therefore to plan for the future. Regarding risk, hierarchical institutions will cultivate risk neutrality within "activities regarded as being amenable to regulation" (6 93) and risk aversion for the rest; their ideal of fairness is that of equality before the law.
- Individualistic contexts tend to exploit exceptions and anomalies as opportunities for furthering goals. In individualistic settings, everything is conceived for the medium term, since motivation is sustained by short memory and foreshortened future; finally, they will cultivate risk-loving behaviour in the domain of gains and losses.
- Enclave contexts tend to bar exceptions, set boundaries and refuse to accept anomalies. Enclave institutions cultivate long but Manichean historical memory, and extremes of risk behaviours, because the constant testing of borders and limits is fundamental to their cohesion.
- Isolate institutions tend to accept anomalies as facts of life, but they do not try to integrate them. They cultivate opportunistic history and risk behaviours only in the domain of losses; it means that in isolate institutions a danger is more likely to trigger bold actions than the prospect of a reward, because prosperity is considered as intrinsically fragile and not worth taking risks.

When it comes to integrate the set of variables I enumerated with the documentary features previously mentioned, two sets of problems become manifest: first it has to be

considered whether the distinction between restricted and elaborated codes, on which I grounded my classification of documentary features, reflects the group/grid category or it is independent; second, it has to be determined if all documentary features are affected by all the different styles of thought or whether it is possible to couple dependent variables that are expected to be reciprocally influenced.

For what the first problem is concerned, I assume that restricted and elaborated codes are subcategories that can be found in each basic institutional form and do not belong to any in particular. This suggestion has to be taken as just one of many possible interpretations of a very contentious issue in the literature concerned with this topic.[105] The reason I have to propose such a reading is that Basil Bernstein did not propose a categorization of basic institutional forms, but only a definition of the specific relationship between linguistic choices and social contexts, which is a perfect fit for interpreting any linguistic choice, for example those specific to documentary, but does not pretend to be a cosmological explanation. Mary Douglas reproduced Bernstein's diagram, but on a much larger scale, so that the same equation could now explain all kinds of institutional contexts. For this reason, I feel entitled to say that linguistic choices depend on institutional contexts, but do not reflect the group/grid classification, and therefore that it is possible to associate restricted codes to high grid institutions and vice versa.

Regarding the second problem, I choose to associate each feature to only one definition of style of thought. The reason here is merely practical. I cannot exclude that all features affect all characteristics of style of thought, but the empirical verification of this hypothesis would be enormously complicated. Moreover, I do not think that such level of precision is even necessary, because the point here is to verify the causal relationship between social contexts of production and documentary types, not to dissect the link between types and styles of thought. For the

purposes of my analysis, it will suffice to establish one connection, because even the failure of just one connection would be enough to falsify the theory and dismiss the idea of a causal relationship. I shall associate, then, what I called the ethical attitude of documentary to the sense of history and tradition, since the commitment, or lack of it, to shared defining values is certainly one way to reproduce, or contest, the memory of a community; the credibility of documentary is most likely to affect the categorization and classification of anomalies, since an embodiment relation with the technology is evidently a less effective way to convey highly elaborated classifications and to motivate rejections and separations; the predictability or unpredictability of games of make-believe is a symptom of the type of risk perception and risk management strategy, because predictable games of make-believe confirm well-established communication paths and are a way to avoid risk in communication strategies. The integration so described produces the following results, which define the four types of documentary:

- The hierarchical documentary is characterized by high commitment to shared values in order to cultivate the memory of the community's long history and to assume continuity over time; a complex interplay between embodiment and hermeneutic relation with the technology facilitates its tendency to adjust, integrate and accommodate anomalies and exceptions; games of make-believe are fairly predictable, because the attitude towards risk, in this case the risk of being misunderstood, or misinterpreted, is that of neutrality.
- The individualistic type features an opportunistic commitment to shared values, driven by short memory and foreshortened future; the relation with the technology is hermeneutic, because the objective is to exploit exceptions and anomalies as opportunities for furthering goals; games of make-believe are generally unpredictable and driven by risk-loving behaviour.

- The enclave type is characterized by low commitment to shared values and high commitment to particular values, which are those that distinguish and typify the enclave, because the need is to cultivate a Manichean historical memory that glorifies the values of the enclave and condemns the values of the bigger community; the relationship with the technology is hermeneutic, in order to bar exceptions, set boundaries and refuse to accept anomalies; games of make-believe are fairly unpredictable, driven by extremes of risk behaviours.
- Finally, the isolate type features low commitment to shared values, driven by short collective memory and foreshortened future horizons, embodiment relation with the technology, driven by a tendency to accept anomalies as facts of life, and a relative variety of games of make-believe: unpredictable games are to be expected only when losses are at stake, but predictable games of make-believe are more likely to be the standard.

It remains now to define the social context of documentary production at the level of social integration, and in this case business organization. I would argue that it should be defined in relation to three criteria: source of financing, size of the budget and role of the director within the group of people working on the film. For what the first criterion is concerned, a documentary can be independent or subsidized. With independent I mean that its sources of financing come from private companies or individuals, which participate in the production as a financially risky activity. With subsidized I mean that its source of financing come from public entities that can afford to participate in the production renouncing the return of their investment, or knowing that the possibility of a return is very improbable. In relation to the second criterion, a documentary can have a relatively high or relatively low budget, which has to be weighed against the average

budget of media production in a particular context. The combined use of these criteria should reduce the risk of distortions. In fact, if one used the size of the budget as the only variable, this would say close to nothing about the kind of social integration of an audiovisual production, because a high budget independent production could be the investment of a single person, while a small subsidized production could involve a large social organization; another criterion could be the number of viewers, but I think this would be a problematic variable, because it may say very little about the context of production of a documentary: a small-budget, independent documentary could become a hit and be seen by millions of viewers, but this would not change the fact that its social context of production was low in the axis of social integration. On the contrary, the decision to subsidize a film that is seen by very few tells a lot about the expectations that the ruling cultural and political institutions have on a cultural artifact, which is a reminder of the fact that the social context of production is not just a matter of financial figures. The role of the director is a crucial factor that affects sources of financing and business plan of the production; an *auteur* movie, for example, has access to financial sources, usually public funds, that are not available to productions whose directors did not achieve that status. The four categories are therefore characterized as follows:

- The hierarchical context of documentary production is characterized by being substantially subsidized by hegemonic institutions, which is consistent with its neutral attitude towards risk, and by a relatively medium budget, since the goal of its communication strategy is to reach as many viewers as possible and to integrate them in the hegemonic view of the history of the community, but not to generate profits. In this context, the role of the director is that of the “excellent artist,” who can deliver art movies that are screened at festivals and that are well-reviewed by critics.

- An individualistic context of production means that financial resources come almost exclusively from independent producers; however, the opportunistic attitude and the risk-loving behaviour cultivated in this context imply that budget is generally relatively high, in order to guarantee maximum profit. In this case, the role of the director is that of the "reliable professional," who can deliver state-of-the art products without the ambition to bestow a personal signature.
- The enclave context of production is characterized by medium-to-low budget and substantially subsidized financial resources, which come, however, from a non-hegemonic institution that is committed to promoting the values of the enclave. An example is the already cited Inuit movie *Going Inland*, produced by the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation. The director's role in this context is that of the "humble comrade," whose main quality is that of being as faithful as possible to the values of the community.
- The isolate context of production features an almost completely independent production and a low budget, which is consistent with the conservative risk strategy in the domain of gains cultivated in this social context. The director's role in isolate contexts is that of the *artiste maudit*, or the "misunderstood genius," who has a great personal confidence in his own merits, but is in an argumentative relationship with the established institutions.

In the next chapters, I will analyse separately type and context of production of a recent Italian documentary, Michelangelo Frammartino's *Le quattro volte*. The goal is to test, provisionally and partially, consistency and explanatory power of the neo-Durkheimian framework that I tentatively outlined in relation to documentary studies. The next pages have

then to be considered merely as a preliminary sketch of a theory that will require much elaboration and refinement in future studies.

3.2 *Le quattro volte* - A Documentary about a Goatherd, a Goat, and a Log

3.2.1 Context of Production

Michelangelo Frammartino's documentary *Le quattro volte* was one of the most successful Italian movies of 2011, at least in terms of the awards and critical acclaim it received. It won awards at the Annecy Cinema Festival, Bratislava International Film Festival and Cannes Film Festival, and an award from the San Diego Film Critics Society. In terms of audience response, it is one of the 10-15 "auteur documentaries" that are produced every year within the Italian national borders, each grossing an average of 250,000 spectators (*Rapporto 2010* 122). The international market is potentially bigger, and Frammartino's film enjoyed a serious interest from international buyers and was sold to more than fifty countries.[106] Despite enthusiastic critical reception, however, it finally grossed only $255,000 worldwide.[107]

Le quattro volte is the story of a natural cycle. The movie begins with the image of a charcoal-burner caring for his kiln, already ignited and fuming. The sequence lasts a few seconds, than we are introduced to another character, an old goatherd, who is sick and eventually dies the day that he loses his usual medicine, which is the dust collected from the local church's pavement; the day he dies, one of his goats has a baby, that, as soon as is able to move, follows the flock to the pasture. One day the goat gets lost and finds shelter for the night under a tall pine tree. Winter comes, and covers the pasture in snow; when spring returns, that very tree is cut down, dragged to the village, and erected in front of a church, where the people of the village gather to celebrate a festivity. After the celebration, the tree is chopped to pieces and transported to the charcoal-burners' place, where the kiln is built again and the cycle can start over.

The beautiful soundtrack is made of nothing but ambient sound. Almost no words are spoken throughout the whole movie, even when the protagonists are human. In Frammartino's

intention, the story is a kind of fable, inspired by the animistic and pre-Christian philosophy of ancient Calabria; yet, the metempsychosis motive is just the narrative thread that joins three autonomous parts, which do not even share the same location: the goatherd's story and that of the baby goat take place in Caulonia, the village where the director's family comes from. The episode of the pine tree does not occur in the nearby grasslands, but in Alessandria del Carretto, the same place where Vittorio De Seta filmed *I dimenticati*, 300 kilometres of tortuous roads away. Finally, the charcoal-burners' place is located in Serra San Bruno, which is another 230 kilometres from Alessandria del Carretto.

In an interview[108] for *Via Emilia* documentary festival, Frammartino said that it took him five years to shoot the documentary. Citing Gilles Deleuze, he affirms that his objective was to film the connection between man and world, animal and physical, and do it using a fairy-tale-kind of narrative:

> Volevo in qualche modo mettere in difficoltà il mio occhio e non permettere al mio occhio, al mio ruolo di regista di controllare il reale. Questo confronto con il reale, questa piccola battaglia, c'era la volontà di perderla. E quindi, nonostante una struttura narrativa anche meticolosa, una composizione accurata, abbiamo continuato a scegliere programmaticamente elementi non controllabili, elementi che dettavano i tempi, non li ricevevano e quindi degli animali, un intero paese, che durante una processione trascina un albero […] o il processo del carbone. […] Abbiamo cercato di abbandonare quell'arroganza dell'uomo, dell'occhio, che pretende di impadronirsi del reale che va a filmare […], di fare in modo che il confine tra fiction e documentario, tra controllato e non controllato, questo confine potesse diventare un po' più labile.[109]

These are very interesting words indeed, and the most revealing bits of conversation, for what I am concerned, are the idea of filming animals, and a whole village, *because* they are incontrollable, and the definition of the relationship between director and reality as a battle that has to be lost, in order to be productive. I think it is useful to read these remarks together with the comment that he made in an interview for the Bellaria Film Festival, namely that, even though he loves documentaries and thinks that all the best and newest things that have been made in recent Italian cinema come from documentarists, he does not consider himself a documentarist.[110] Behind the professed modesty of these lines, it lurks the model of the *auteur,* which so much did already to undermine the reputation of documentary in Italy. Even though Frammartino's own explanation of his filming procedure is the perfect description of how a documentary should be, and generally is, directed, he pretends to make fiction films nonetheless, because this is where the critical acclaim goes.

In order for his documentary sensibility and justifiable auteur ambitions to be satisfied at the same time, he theorizes his own filmmaking process as a battle between reality and the auteur, a battle that *he*, the auteur, feigns to lose in advance, conscious of the fact that a complete control (which is what the auteur is accustomed to) is impossible to realize, but confident on the fact that this move will lead him to final victory. In his scheme, he seems to give an advantage to reality, narrowing his interest to incontrollable items, but finally he condemns it to a pyrrhic victory: being animals not controllable by definition, his evident "control" and "mastery" of the animals makes his "auteurship" even more palpable. This intention is blatant in the signature sequence of the movie, a long take of a dog that, removing a brick from beneath a truck's wheel, causes the truck to move, and destroy a fence that corrals a herd of goats; the animals, free to

move around the village, eventually climb the stairs of their goatherd's place and find his deathbed.

Most of the reviewers of the film agreed with Frammartino's point of view and did not call the movie a documentary. Laurent Aknin wrote, in *Avant-scene*, that the movie "appartient à la catégorie périlleuse des essays cinematographiques poétiques" (96);[111] Joachim Lepastier affirms, in *Cahiers du Cinema*, that *Le quattro volte* is a "objet inclassable mais acueillant" (34);[112] Jonathan Romney defines it "utterly unclassifiable" (44), and Peter Bradshaw, in an online review for *The Guardian*, as "a gem of art cinema and a miracle of animal-wrangling." My opinion is that, despite some clearly staged narrative sequences like the one I just described, the movie is pure documentary. Of course, *Le quattro volte* is different from classic documentaries about nature, even from the most contemplative ones, like Franco Piavoli's *Il pianeta azzurro* (1982), whose storyline is exclusively the result of an editing process, not of a calibrated pre-production, but I maintain that its diversity does not relegate it to the ranks of fiction filmmaking, for the simple reason that its characters, the villages in which they move, its animals, are props in a fairly complex and magisterially orchestrated game in which they do not represent fictional characters, things and animals, but really existing ones.

As far as the business model is concerned, *Le quattro volte* is the quintessential product of a hierarchical context of production. The entirety of the working budget, around €600,000,[113] was financed with the support of public funding: €400,000 came from the *Direzione Generale Cinema* of the *Ministero per i Beni e per le Attività Culturali*,[114] €150,000 from TorinoFilmLab, a publicly funded organization that finances young directors at their first or second film,[115] and the rest from Eurimages, a public fund for European co-productions, Medienboard Berlin, a German public institution, and Calabria Film Commission. The final operational budget was

around €1,000,000,[116] which is average for an Italian documentary project; finally, as it is evident from interviews and public interventions, the director considers himself an *auteur* engaged in a rewarding battle with reality, and not a humble documentarist who merely observes reality, and this act of self-positioning is mirrored by the praises of the hegemonic institutions dedicated to select and finance film projects under the criterion of the artistic excellence.

If the context of production is hierarchical, the theoretical framework previously assessed suggests that the documentary type should be hierarchical as well, and therefore be characterized by high commitment to shared values to cultivate the memory of the community's long history, by mildly hermeneutic relation with the technology, aimed at adjusting, integrating and accommodating anomalies and exceptions, and by fairly predictable games of make-believe, symptoms of a conservative risk management strategy. We shall see in the next chapter if these statements are correct, starting from the way the documentary cultivates the memory of the community it refers to.

3.2.2 Documentary Type

Le quattro volte was shot in three remote villages of Southern Calabria: Caulonia, Alessandria del Carretto, and Serra San Bruno. One of these villages, Caulonia, has a clear prominence in the narrative: it is the place where two of the stories have their setting (the one of the goatherd and that of the goat), and it is the place where the coalmen return at the end of the movie to sell their products. Caulonia is also the place where Michelangelo Frammartino's parents come from and where he has shot his previous feature-length movie, *Il dono* (2003),[117] with his grandfather as a protagonist. Even though they are different, both films testify the director's intention of dealing with a part of his past and of his family's history that he finds precious and worth telling. He is the son of a working-class family, and was born and raised in

Milan, where he attended university and was trained as an architect. Unlike most of the urban upper-class Milanese colleagues of his, he has been returning to Calabria almost every summer, to reinvigorate the family ties and visit the places where he spent his youth, listening to the sounds of nature and in close proximity with all sorts of animals.

In Caulonia his family has a reputation, linked to a famous event of the recent past, the *Repubblica rossa di Caulonia*. Nicola Frammartino was one of the leaders of this communist revolt that for a few days toppled the government of the village and put, in 1945, the first Italian Republic into power, several months before the official one was established.[118] Michelangelo's parents, however, did not benefit from the change of government and emigrated to the prosperous Northern regions in the 1960's, where they gave birth to Michelangelo in 1968. They were part of a massive wave of migration triggered by the high demand of workforce in the factories of Turin, Milan and Genoa, which was only the last of a series of migration waves that plagued the region since the beginning of the 18th century, when peasants from Calabria were forced to leave because of the abnormalities of the agricultural labour market in their region (Villari 8). At that time, barons used to keep the salaries low to balance their inefficiencies as landowners, so the agriculture remained underdeveloped and ceased to attract peasants from other regions. Barons' lands have been dismembered at the time of Italy's unification, in 1861, and replaced by small farms and family lots, but until the mid-1950's Caulonia's rural areas were still occupied mainly by small farmers, and this underdevelopment caused social conflicts to become endemic. Even small farm-owners, in fact, in the context of general poverty of the region, were locally prominent and could exercise a relative power. Peasants, on the other hand, especially after the Second World War, could join their forces under the umbrella of parties and

unions, which gave them more political power; as a result, social conflicts, mainly for the improvement of working conditions, were numerous and sometimes violent.

This social instability, coupled with the chronic poverty of the region, and with more general problems, like the crisis of Italian agriculture, in a period of rapid urbanization and industrialization of the country, led to a massive increase of emigration. At the beginning, the exodus of jobless and unproductive people was considered beneficial for the region, because it was meant to lower the number of poor and hungry residents. Affluent citizens went as far as seeing the promise of a new life abroad as a way to artificially control social tensions; as a matter of fact, through their political connections, they could decide how many and to whom visas and work permits were granted. In the long term, however, emigration deprived Caulonia of its youngest and most industrious workforce, and it is undoubtedly one of the main causes of the current underdevelopment of the region. Two of these young Caulonia's workers who left the village, and settled in more promising lands were Michelangelo Frammartino's parents. It is therefore not by chance that the director feels such a strong bond with Caulonia and such a deep interest in understanding and depicting its poverty and its beauty: he is part of Caulonia's history, and his life has been certainly affected by the historical circumstances that led his parents to leave Caulonia and its region.

Michelangelo Frammartino's personal history does not only guarantee his affective bond with Calabria, but provides him with a deep knowledge of its inhabitants' culture and habits. One of the clearest examples of his familiarity with Southern Italy's costumes is the first part of *Le quattro volte*, the story of the old goatherd who drinks the dust of the church. Although the whole episode is staged, the idea of drinking the dust coming from the pavement of a sacred place not only is not an invention, but it is deeply rooted in Southern culture.

The most authoritative expert on Southern Italy's ancient traditions and habits is the already mentioned anthropologist Ernesto De Martino. He studied the commingling practices of orthodox religion and paganism, and concluded that they were favoured even by Roman Catholic priests in a recent past:

> Il clero, alla cui influenza diretta o indiretta sono dovute queste manifestazioni di sincretismo e di riadattamento, intuì la funzione pedagogica di raccordo che, nelle condizioni date, veniva a stabilirsi, anche se soltanto su un piano elementare: lasciò quindi che gli scongiuri pagani fossero, a imitazione degli esorcismi cristiani, aperti o coronati da segni di croce e da preghiere, sostituì alle *historiolae* pagane quelle cristiane e si provò persino a sostituire alle *historiolae* veri e propri espedienti mnemonici per meglio fermare nelle menti i temi della religione cristiana.[119] (119)

According to De Martino, the Christianization of Southern Italy did not involve a complete change of mind-set, but it was limited to the application of superficial Christian gestures over a well-rooted bulk of pagan rituals. Frammartino is fully aware of the present survival of this mentality, at least in the elderly peasants, as he demonstrates in an interview for *Cinecittà News*:

> È una tradizione antica radicata nel sud Italia: originariamente doveva essere la spazzatura del tempio, poi è diventata la spazzatura della chiesa, che si considera la parte essenziale del sacro e detentrice di virtù terapeutiche. Sempre secondo i pitagorici la polvere è il confine del visibile: questa polvere passa prima nel corpo del pastore, che ne è solo un involucro, poi in tutti gli altri, fino a diventare minerale, carbone, per poi ricominciare il ciclo.[120] (Greco)

Frammartino knows that the dust of the church has been used for centuries for its alleged therapeutic virtues, and he knows that there are still people who believe in this practice. A confirmation of the fact that the tradition is still alive is the research of the anthropologist Alfonso M. Di Nola:

> Nella ben nota festa di san Domenico di Cocullo, celebrata nell'omonimo paese abruzzese nel primo giovedì di maggio, anche quest'anno i fedeli, dopo aver visitato il santo, hanno raccolto la polvere ammassata dietro l'altare e, procedendo avanti, hanno suonato, presso l'altare, una campanella afferrando la fune con i denti. La polvere, che sostituisce la spazzatura del pavimento della chiesa, usata, allo stesso scopo, fino ad epoca recente, è, in molti casi, diluita in acqua e ingerita da chi soffre di febbri, mentre i fedeli che hanno suonato la campana con i denti si ritengono liberati da odontalgie per l'intero anno, fino alla nuova festa di san Domenico.[121] (12)

In fact, the floor of the church is associated, in rural areas, with all sorts of healing properties. Particularly in Calabria, shepherds still bring sterile sheep to the church and rub their bellies on the floor to cure their infertility (Angarano 235). Generally speaking, it is fair to say that magic and prejudice are still largely entrenched with religious practices in Calabria (Angarano 145).

It is highly debatable whether ritualistic practices in magic and religion should be compared and considered similar.[122] I do not want to suggest that all magic practices of Southern Calabria are ritualistic, or that they have to be linked to religious rituals; my aim is only to stress that this is a territory where ritualistic practices and old community values are still very much part of the everyday life of most individuals. Frammartino committed himself to these values and

practices directing an enigmatic, intense documentary that expresses them without almost any attempt to translate, interpret, or make them more accessible. We are not told what the dust of the church means, or why people are climbing a tree in the middle of the village, we simply assist to a transparent representation in which objects, plants, animals and humans happen to live in a sort of symbiosis.

Of course Frammartino is a talented and sophisticated director, who spent most of his life in Milan, exposed to cultural and social stimuli alien to those characteristic of Calabria. As a consequence, it is fair to assume that his connection with Caulonia and its community, albeit strong, constitutes only a partial element of his personal background, whose ambivalence is clearly reflected in the style of the movie, as even a quick analysis can confirm: the landscapes are not retouched, but the beautiful way in which they are photographed denotes the broad and refined visual culture of the director. In terms of ethical commitment, clearly this is not a political documentary in an obvious sense, since it does not address squarely a matter of common good for a nation of citizens. However, if we realize that the community the film refers to is a very isolated fringe, than it becomes clear that the questions the film poses, which are about the survival of the community itself, and the place of its values within a modern world, are deeply ethical, and do not pertain only to local, but to national politics. The film opens a debate about how it is possible, if and why it does matter, to protect and integrate the dying communities of Southern Calabria and their values. I have defined these kinds of problems as belonging to what I have called the ethical attitude of a film, and I have maintained that an inclusive behaviour such as that of *Le quattro volte* is typical of a hierarchical type.

There are other elements that confirm this conclusion. The circular plot and the metempsychosis theme can be seen as a way to claim the universality of the values and practices

represented in the movie, since they link these traditions to ancient Greek philosophy, a foundational element of Italian and European culture. Metempsychosis, in Western philosophy, comes from ancient Greek, and is based on the idea that the soul is imprisoned in the body as in a tomb, and that, as George Foot Moore states, "from this bondage the soul is freed by death only to pass into another body of a man, or beast, or plant" (26). This cycle is not endless, though, because it is the result of a punishment, and as soon as the guilt is expiated, the soul can return to its original estate. To favour this expiation, ancient religions "demanded physical or magical purifications. Such purifications formed an important part in the ritual of the Orphic and Pythagorean sects (29). Moore admits that Pythagoras himself "founded in Southern Italy a religious order, which for a time flourished greatly" (31).

This dissertation, of course, is not the place for tracing the complex ties between ancient Greece and Southern Calabria, but I wish to recall that in Southern Calabria, until Catanzaro (Caulonia is between Reggio, which is at the extreme Southern point, and Catanzaro), ancient Greek language was commonly used until the end of the 15th century, and all notary acts were written in Greek until the 14th century (Rohlfs 35). Rural parts of Southern Calabria still use nowadays a dialect which is largely influenced by Greek (Rohlfs 36-49). Again, it is a very complicated matter and very far from my concerns here, but I brought it up to suggest that the use of a narrative structure inspired by such a typically Greek concept as metempsychosis is a way to implicate a common cultural bond between Europe and what now seems to be its most isolated and backward region.

The metempsychosis theme is also important from another point of view: most of the images of the documentary are clearly the outcome of an embodiment relation with technology, but the superimposition of a circular narrative to them is also the sign of a mild hermeneutic

intentionality. In fact, the metempsychosis theme implies a circular narrative, which means that every object and every action represented in the images of the documentary are part of a finite set of events that keeps recurring. This kind of structure aims at providing every image of the documentary with far greater historical importance than in a linear narrative, because a circular narrative implies that any event is not just an isolate occurrence that can be easily forgotten as soon as it ends, but it is a meaningful episode that has been guaranteed a place in a limited set of historical incidents that will return cyclically to reinstate their significance. This is consistent with the tendency of the hierarchical type of representation to cultivate the memory of the community's long history and to assume continuity over time.

Understanding the narrative of the movie as the result of a partially hermeneutic relationship with the technology of documentary allows us to appreciate some of its most original choices, like the inclusion of long sequences in which apparently nothing happens, because no human beings are active participant. It is the case of the second episode, the one with the baby goat as a protagonist. In the long sequence inside the barn, we see the goat "playing" with the other animals in a series of funny interactions: first they make a broom fall on the floor, then they jump on a base and push each other out until just one remains standing. The sequence is the result of an editing process, since the narrative of the goats' games is built juxtaposing events that did not occur necessarily in a sequential order, but I doubt that it is also the result of a predetermined staging. Frammartino himself, who refuses to be called a documentarist, admits in many interviews that there was no predetermined action involving the goats.[123] As a consequence, it is fair to say that this sequence is the expression of what the director and the camera perceived observing the animals in their most intimate behaviours. I defined the documentary technology as a sense-enhancer of embodiment perceptions, and this sequence

represents a sense enhancement in two ways: first, because it produces a sharper version of what a human being could perceive observing the animals from an adequate and not intrusive distance, since zoom lenses allow the visual rendering of the animals to be more defined and detailed, and microphones allow even minor noises to be heard; second, because, unlike human perceptions, camera perceptions are a *reproducible* multisensory knowledge of a real-life situation. Yet, spectators understand these images, which are the result of extremely refined embodiment perceptions, as part of a hermeneutic design (i.e., the director intended this footage to elicit from the spectator a reflection on the larger cultural, social and even political issues), and therefore not as a way to teach, or communicate a better knowledge of rural life, or goat habits, like in a documentary about nature, but as images (however exceptional or anomalous) of a rural land that should be accommodated in the general path of European culture.

This way of including exceptional natural events in the narrative, instead of human actions, and to see human interventions as similar to natural phenomena, because of their roots in millennial traditions, is also a mode to efface, or present as always predictable, the make-believe games involved in the representation. It is a soothing experience to watch this film, mostly because one can always rely, as in real life, on her own perceptions: in one of the last sequences of the movie, we see the charcoal-burners remove some curtains in front of their kiln. The camera is positioned in front of the curtains, so we do not *see* what the workers are doing, until all the barriers are removed, and yet we do *know* what they are doing because we hear the noise that their forks make collecting and piling up the charcoal: we know it is charcoal already because that noise is not the firm, echoing rumble of an iron fork against a piece of wood, but the scratching crackle of light charcoal.

It is certainly a conservative strategy, but in the case of Frammartino's movie is a very rewarding one nonetheless, because the predictability of the representation is somehow dampened by the fact that the narrative of the film, being inspired by values and traditions of a remote rural community, is so distant from the mindset of the majority of the viewers targeted by the hierarchical production context of the movie that, even if it never goes against the Reality Principle, or the Mutual Belief principle of the people of Caulonia, it happens to be refreshing for the rest of the spectators. To see goats playing like kids may be normal for goatherds, but it is quite mesmerizing for people not accustomed to spending hours in a barn.

The analysis of Michelangelo Frammartino's *Le quattro volte* shows, then, that the director was undoubtedly committed to the shared values of the community that he portrays, to which he is linked by a family bond and a personal acquaintance; he frames these values within the larger context of European history, an intention that betrays a typical hierarchical design; indeed, through a peculiarly hermeneutical use of images borne out of embodiment perceptions, the director places representations of exceptional natural events within a cyclic history that comprises human beings, animals and things alike. Although the games of make-believe that characterize the documentary's representations are sometimes odd, because of the exoticism of the community whose values are portrayed, they are mostly predictable, and therefore denote a neutral-to-low risk strategy.

The tentative analysis I developed in the last pages confirmed, then, what the definition of the context of production has provisionally revealed, which is the hierarchical character of the movie. Though more thorough and comprehensive studies are needed before a full endorsement of the theoretical framework proposed in the previous chapter can be proposed, I hope this analysis can persuade film and documentary scholars that a methodology inspired by a neo-

Durkheimian theoretical framework may help better understand the relationship between contexts of production and documentary types and how the documentary functions as an institution.

Conclusion

I started this research with the desire to vindicate a better consideration for the Italian documentary history, a sentiment that was born in me after I watched some recent exceptional works in the summer of 2009 in Italy. I began collecting materials on the major directors and movements from the end of the Second World War to the present, and writing a literature review of the main scholarly contributions, not only historical, but theoretical ones as well, and even monographic studies about directors, genres, movements and periods. Not surprisingly, I found out that the literature in English about this topic is practically non-existent, but, more importantly, I was amazed to learn that there is very little in Italian as well. This discovery prompted me to investigate the theoretical significance of the documentary form in general – after all, before engaging in any historical research, we should know how to select and classify the items we want to write history about – to the point that I started to envision a theoretical examination of the subject as the preliminary step of my project, and the current lack of it, especially in Italian, as one of the possible reasons for the insufficient development of a serious scholarship on the documentary as an art form.

The first problem I faced, quite obviously, was that of realism. In the history of Italian filmmaking, this is a paramount issue, because of the enduring legacy of Neorealism in all kinds of cinematic genres and formats. However, I quickly realized that the topic of documentary realism was quite controversial and strongly debated in North-America as well, since many postmodernist American film theorists, who wrote their influential essays in the 1990's, were engaged in the difficult task of justifying a film practice, that of documentary, which seemed to defy the typical postmodern diffidence towards the "Reality." It is evident that if one has no faith

in the existence of an independent, objective reality, she struggles to differentiate between a film practice that is completely "fictional" and one that should not.

Since I was, and still am, convinced that a difference between documentary and non-documentary film practices should be upheld, my first answer to this dilemma was to rely on a realist epistemology. Phenomenology seemed to be a perfect candidate for this task, because its main purpose is to justify the objective and sharable assumptions that we can make out of our subjective perceptions, and Don Ihde's version in particular, with its emphasis on the technological aspects of the interactions between our senses and the world, fits perfectly the needs of a documentary epistemology. However, I realized that the epistemological foundations were just one aspect of the equation, and more had to be investigated in order to truly grasp the significance of a complex medium like the documentary in a peculiar society like contemporary Italy.

I hypothesized that at least two other "functions" had to be accounted for the presence and importance of the documentary in a society: the fact that the documentary clearly has a political role as a means of disseminating civic battles and inquires, and the fact that it is also considered as a work of art and a form of entertaining that people are willing to pay to watch and praise in aesthetic terms. I theorized that, as in the case of journalism and other instruments of civic and political activism, one of the features of the institution of documentary was the ethical commitment of the documentarist, which I linked to the creation of the social space for public debate that Jürgen Habermas called the public sphere. Following this reasoning, I provided safe ground for the hypothesis that the documentary inherits the most fundamental characteristic of the public sphere as a form of communication: the willingness to show a public all that is irrational, unfair, or dangerous in a given society, and the desire to convince as large an audience

as possible that a different, more rational system is necessary. Then I considered documentary as a representational art, and defined it using concepts derived from Kendall L. Walton's theory of art objects as props in games of make-believe. Following this assumption, documentary becomes a peculiar fictional representation, whose images are props in games of make-believe that lead the viewer to imagine seeing what they represent; contrary to what happens with other fictional representations, documentary images are those in which the object "photographed" and the object "pictured" are the same, or, in other words, they are constituted by props that represent themselves.

These three pillars – a public sphere theory that explains the role of documentary in shaping political opinions and informing about civic matters, a phenomenological epistemology that justifies the documentary's cognitive potential, and an aesthetics that validates the documentary style within the domain of the arts – are the elements upon which my theory of the documentary as an institution stands. Still, I was not satisfied, because I needed something more concrete in order to make the final step from a descriptive theory to one that would allow me to make projections and give explanations about the place and function of the documentary in a given society. It occurred to me that the neo-Durkheimian theoretical framework developed by Perri 6 in political sciences could provide the perfect methodology for this purpose, since it is consistent with my aim to place our perceptive body at the center of a theoretical analysis of the documentary: it is the physiological similarity of our bodies that guarantees the universality of our perceptions for Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Vivian Sobchack, and Don Ihde; and it is the biological similarity of our bodies that guarantees that types of community life are not infinitely varied for Mary Douglas and Perri 6. It did not seem incoherent, then, to identify four documentary types, characterized by the different weighting of a set of variables dependent on

the institutional features that I have classified in the first two sections of the dissertation. After having matched these types with the group/grid categories of the neo-Durkheimian model, I tentatively verified, through the analysis of a recent Italian documentary, Michelangelo Frammartino's *Le quattro volte*, whether context of production and documentary type corresponded, and therefore if the theory, at least in the case examined, was correct, and deserved further consideration.

Is this research an answer to the questions that I posed at the beginning? Does it vindicate a better consideration for the Italian documentary history? Since the approach and methodology of my inquiry adventured in fairly uncharted territory, for a comprehensive answer I would need more extensive analyses of single documentaries, and eventually even quantitative studies of the Italian documentary production, to test and appreciate all the consequences of my premises. As of now, I analyzed just three Italian documentaries, and only one with the proper aim to show how a methodology inspired by a neo-Durkheimian theoretical framework can help recognize the characteristics of the documentary institution and the causal link between the social contexts of documentary production and the development of documentary types. Much more work is needed before any conclusion about the viability of the theory proposed in the last part of the dissertation can be drawn.

Admittedly, I enlarged quite considerably the initial purpose of the research. Yet, I hope it can be said that I have been faithful to the core of the initial project. In my opinion, the lack of interest in Italian documentary is not motivated by the poor quality of the documentaries produced in Italy, but by the poor consideration in which the documentary form has been held from the end of the Second World War onwards. In order to redeem the Italian documentary, a

historical survey was not enough, it was necessary to demonstrate in a more general fashion the importance of the documentary form in the context of the Italian society.

An even broader thread of research, to follow when concepts, categories and methodology are sufficiently assessed, could be to enlarge the application field of the theory; in fact, I am convinced that it should be possible to generalize the outcomes of this research so as to include the whole domain of film and media studies and to find specific connections with social configurations for different types of visual artworks. Ultimately, if it succeeded in proving that certain social configurations demand specific art types, this kind of research would lead to a better understanding of the process of artistic creation and could help artists and producers find the most receptive audiences for their contents, and assist institutions, from NGO to governmental offices, in planning and implementing the best strategies for their investments in arts and education. But this, of course, is a life-long project that I barely started to broach with this doctoral dissertation.

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Notes

[1] A proper history of documentary theory has not been written yet, to my knowledge. A concise and effective, if polemical, summary of the main problems and positions is in Bruzzi 2-10.

[2] Other scholars have already defined documentary as an institution, notably Bill Nichols (see *Representing Reality* 15-17). As it will be clearer in the following pages, contrary to Nichols's, my definition will be less concerned with modes of documentary production and more interested in the causal relationship between documentary representations and social contexts.

[3] For example, Paola Bonifazio showed how the Christian Democratic Party used documentaries to spread and support its hegemonic political strategy. See Bonifazio 47-62.

[4] For a thorough discussion of this topic, see particularly Forgacs and Gundle 27-62.

[5] For example, Pier Paolo Pasolini, one of the most important post-war Italian writers and intellectuals, wrote the scripts for Mangini's *Ignoti alla città* (1958), *Stendalì (suonano ancora)* (1960), and *La canta delle Marane* (1963).

[6] Both movies show the ceremony of the pine tree in the village of Alessandria del Carretto, Calabria.

[7] For a detailed analysis of this trend, see Brunetta 506-24. A contemporary example of this fierce divide is the oppositional relationship between independent documentary producers and the public national broadcaster, as it clearly emerges from the survey commissioned by Doc/it, the Italian Documentarists' Association in 2006. See Teodosi 28-29.

[8] Pietro Valpreda was an Italian anarchist, sentenced to prison on charges of being responsible for the 1969 Piazza Fontana massacre, before being cleared of all accusations sixteen years later.

[9] The channel did not live long, though, and was shut down in 2003, when Rupert Murdoch's *Sky Network* entered the Italian market.

[10] The source is the online article *Un sistema inventato da un italiano*.

[11] See Locke.

[12] As of today, July 11, 2012, the project is still on development. More information at this web address: http://www.produzionidalbasso.com/pdb_534.html.

[13] As of July 11, 2012, the project was still on development. More information at this web address: http://www.produzionidalbasso.com/pdb_1022.html.

[14] For example, it would be of particular interest to look at the documentary through the theoretical perspective offered in the introduction to Millicent Marcus 3-29.

[15] Regarding Deleuze's interpretation of Bazin, see Rodowick 40-45. Vivian Sobchack, on the other hand, cites explicitly Bazin in her essay about the unrepresentability of death; see Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts* 240-48.

[16] Until very recently, RAI and Mediaset were the only competitors in the Italian TV scenario. For further analyses on this issue, see Ardizzoni and Ferrari.

[17] The definition of this practice emerged in private conversations between me, Stefano Tealdi and Claudio Papalia, on June 2011. A partial description is in Tealdi 283-90.

[18] "A tear-jerking genre that serves as a call for the erotic appetite of old Central European ladies." (Translation is mine).

[19] "And also in these cases - school and factory - we are talking about a cinema-moment, which serves as analysis of a particular instant of the fight and of the information, of a cinema which is, more than ever, horizontally structured, permeated by naturalistic redundancies and, for

the contingent spaces that it needs, by the antinomy - non dialectic - of two realities." (Translation is mine).

[20] "Cinema of the real." (Translation is mine).

[21] "The attempts to classify the documentary thematically – e.g. artistic, touristic, industrial, scientific - leave it in a curious semantic vagueness. They do not help us define it if not as a reproducer of the world and scrap of the 'real cinema.' It is easy, then, to inaugurate constantly new genres, and produce a taxonomic hyperbole that hides an obsession to control, in a systematic way, the TV schedules to fill." (Translation is mine).

[22] "The documentary idea is now aware that it is working on 'images of reality' rather than reliable 'realities.'" (Translation is mine).

[23] "[…] the neo-illuminist illusion that there is always something unknown to find that can help us understand our own destiny." (Translation is mine).

[24] "[...] novels of a particular kind, [and also] for our director [Quilici], a documentary without a touch of imagination is tasteless. From this follows the bold idea of disguising as novels his inquiries." (Translation is mine).

[25] "Many of his movies contain 'islands' of documentary-like representations, and many of his documentaries present, in scattered form, typical elements of fiction movies: narrative cores, symbolic editing, creative photography [...]." (Translation is mine).

[26] "[…] the tendency towards a narrative that, more effectively than in strictly documentary fashion, manages to describe with accuracy a human and environmental truth." (Translation is mine).

[27] "[…] in blocks of sequences, which had a starting point, an end, and a specific order; these blocks put together formed a certain trajectory that gave documentary its unity." (Translation is mine).

[28] The first time Antonioni had to direct a scene, it was in an asylum. He placed all the crew and the equipment without the slightest problem, but when the lights turned on, the patients went so scary that they started to cry and to move around as if something terrible was about to happen.

[29] "[…] not a document that represents the 'other' reality for a Western audience, but a meditation on the subject of the observation (the Other, the Otherness) and on the film apparatus." (Translation is mine).

[30] Roberto Rossellini's theoretical essays are published in many editions. Among the publications in English, I recommend Rossellini and Aprà.

[31] Volume 5, issue 2-3.

[32] Even though Derrida's quote may seem quite radical, in its denial of truth as the goal of the research, Renov uses it in a relatively mild manner. He refuses, for example, to draw from it a drastic anti-realist ontology *à la* Baudrillard, or a relativist epistemology that equates truth with justification. See Norris 85-87; Rorty 281-82. On Baudrillard's philosophy, and especially on his theory of simulacra, see Baudrillard. On the relativist epistemology, which maintains that knowledge is always relative to a reference frame and gives no access to the underlying world of things, see Krausz 13.

[33] The fact that neither Nichols nor Renov dwell in an exhaustive manner on this crucial passage of their epistemologies is the reason why I would call their theories "weak realisms."

[34] I will elaborate further on the notion of aesthetic appreciation discussing Kendall L. Walton's theory of art in Section 2.3.

[35] The problem of the verifiability of the documentary image is dealt with in Section 2.2.4.

[36] Several scholars are cautious about the historical existence and genealogy of Habermas's definition of public sphere. See, for example Schudson.

[37] In this respect, it may be useful to think of Habermas's theory as "revolutionary." I borrow here the thesis of some historians, like Adam Timmins, who try to adapt the influential analysis of Thomas Kuhn to historiography, dividing history in "revolutionary" and "normal." See Timmins 1-25.

[38] The concept of public sphere has been developed in various directions ever since, some of which are radically divergent. Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, for example, fused the notions of social movements and public sphere, proposing the optimistic idea that public sphere be any democratic forum. See Cohen and Arato. On the other hand, Habermas himself proclaimed the end of the public sphere in contemporary societies. See Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*. Some, like Alan McKee, diluted the term to a very general meaning as a 'well-developed concept for thinking about how democratic culture should work.' See McKee vii. Others focus on what role media have in today's public sphere and what kind of public sphere they contribute to create. See Butsch 3.

[39] Ihde gives many examples of technologically expanded lifeworlds in Ihde, *Technology and the Lifeworld*. I will elaborate on Ihde's contribution to the understanding of the institution of documentary in chapter 2.2.8.

[40] This is the term that Mary Douglas uses to describe a specific society oriented toward market activities, but also the leaders of those societies. See Douglas, *Natural Symbols* 128.

[41] The *Disobbedienti* ("Disobedients"), also called *Tute Bianche* ("White Overalls"), were a group of militant activists to which Carlo apparently was affiliated. The *Tute Bianche* inherited the tactics of Guy Debord and the Situationist International, with their exuberance and theatricality, and had already distinguished themselves in previous protests, especially those in Prague and Göteborg in 2000 and 2001, before changing their name to *Disobbedienti* before the G8 summit. For further references, see Lindholm and Zúquete 86-87.

[42] CS gas is a powerful tear gas, prohibited for military use by the Chemical Weapons Convention of 1995, but no civil agreement prevents the police from use it. See Agnoletto and Guadagnucci 195.

[43] The GSF was formed with the ambitious goal of imposing the cancellation of the G8, but after the refusal of the political institutions, it became the link between the movements and the institutions and was appointed with the responsibility of managing the protest during the G8. Spokespersons for the GSF were Vittorio Agnoletto, a doctor and President of LILA, an association fighting against AIDS, and Luca Casarini, activist and leader of the *Tute Bianche*. The GSF organized several meetings between the representatives of the movements, who, however, failed to reach an agreement over the form of the protest. As a result, the different movements were grouped in *Piazze tematiche* ("Thematic Squares"), free to organize separate marches.

[44] For example, she is among the founders of an association called *Se non ora quando?* which operates in defense of women's rights.

[45] Gramsci provides numerous definitions of hegemony in his writings, at the point that it is not possible to define the concept in univocal terms. A recent attempt to unravel the linguistic and philosophical aspects of the term is in Ives.

[46] "Today is not easy to find good actors, because actors do not have a story. I believe that the face is everything in the movies. For example, a face like Enzo's tells a story even when he is silent. [...] His silences are truly extraordinary, even though they are linked to the fact that he spent so many years in prison, where he learned how to stand still, how to control his body. [...] If you stay long in jail you learn how to stand still." (Translation is mine).

[47] In fiction films the *acousmêtre* is used for different purposes and quite often allows a movie to enter the realm of the fantastic through the violation of a dubbing rule, which usually aims to preserve the realism of a scene: it can be the transgression of a synchronization technique, which allows us, by reading a speaker's lips, to verify whether the articulation of the words heard accords with the movement of the mouth, or the more striking violation of the rule that imposes to outfit a body with an appropriate voice. See Chion 128-32. Usually, the purpose of these infringements is to underline and foreground the ambiguous co-existence of a body and a voice on the screen. A classic example of *acousmêtre* is *Psycho* (1960), but other films play with this notion of "disembodiment" of the voice in equally effective ways: the main character of *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991) is a body with two voices, the story of *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) is narrated by the voice of a dead man, *Persona* (1966) is all about a body that doesn't want to utter her voice, while the voice of the protagonist of *Memento* (2000) is nailed to a body that has to be deciphered after any wake-up in order to be embodied.

[48] "The evening of the première at the Torino Film Festival, when Mary and Enzo stood up to receive a warm applause, with them, standing in the theatre, there were many others,

without a voice, people with stories that make them totally unique and valuable" (Translation is mine).

[49] "The idea of belonging to Genoa is represented, in this movie, by the archival material filmed by the amateur Genoese cameramen of the last century. The intertwining between footages shot in different periods aims at building a narrative form that respects the perspectives stemming from the territory and frees them from residues and prejudices. [...] The archival material offers the possibility to draw an inventory of all urban transformations and their human consequences, regaining the physicality of disappeared places, which are still present in people's minds and in the memory of the territory." (Translation is mine).

[50] The archival footage used in the film comes from different sources, from amateur archives to the Film Library of the Ansaldo Foundation, which conserves more than 4500 audiovisual documents about the Liguria region. See Burlando 47.

[51] "We did not start from a script - I do not believe that it is always essential to write before, especially in these kinds of films - but we proceeded in building the narration while editing, day after day." (Translation is mine).

[52] "[...] it is not fiction and it is not documentary, but instead an audiovisual poem, rigorous and inspired, [...] a poem on the passing of time." (Translation is mine).

[53] "[…] mixes documentary narrative with a strong director's intervention that transforms the documentary in a fiction film." (Translation is mine).

[54] "A complex film, neither documentary nor fiction." (Translation is mine).

[55] Bill Nichols makes a similar point when he compares Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* with Robert Flaherty's *Louisiana Story*. See Nichols, *Representing Reality* 182-83.

[56] For a thorough examination of mainly postmodernist attacks to realism, see Beaumont.

[57] Even though some scholars, like Ian Aitken, are willing to defend this type of realism. In Aitken's view, Lukácsian realism is crucial in the project of modernity, because it inherits the legacy of the rationalist Enlightenment, as well as the critique of rationality of the Romanticism. See Aitken, *Realist Film Theory and Cinema* 195.

[58] I explained Vivian Sobchack's theory of the human gaze in chapter 2.1.4.

[59] I will talk about the documentary style in section 2.3.

[60] If she used "fiction" films that pretended to be documentary, the case would be more complicated, but she actually used well-known "fiction" films like *Love Story* (1970) and *Kramer vs. Kramer* (1979). See Goldstein 234.

[61] "Product placement" is the intentional and lucrative use of branded objects in moving pictures.

[62] Even though, in most cases, documentary has been considered as the simplest of the cinematic art forms, as in Bordwell and Thompson 47.

[63] Verificationism is usually considered as a positivist epistemology and it encountered considerable criticism in the second half of the 20th century, especially after Karl Popper's well-known definition of falsifiability as the preferable criterion for demarcating science. See Popper 39.

[64] I refer here to Dorritt Cohn's theory as I have summarized it in chapter 2.2.1.

[65] In the first months after the earthquake, special permits were needed in order to access the damaged parts of the city.

[66] In fact, this looks like the kind of reasoning that pushes Michael Dummett to admit that the past poses serious questions to an anti-realist as well as to a realist position, because it forces

us to acknowledge either that verification is not always a valid argument, or that the mere possibility of verification is a sufficient condition for the truth of a statement. See Dummett 46.

[67] This problem does not pertain to the realm of aesthetics only. One could argue that measurements and data upon which science bases its assumptions are no less rich than documentary images and only partially verifiable. As an example, we can consider the images that Hubble is sending from space since 1990. Scientists use those images to verify or falsify their hypothesis and thus are engaged in a strenuous effort of reading and decoding them. However, they would not say that the images themselves are verifiable. They would say that images are not statements, but objects, data, or maybe evidences, that scientists use to build their scientific discourses, support their verifiable statements, or falsify their theories. Documentarists, on the contrary, do not simply use images to support their discourses, because images, to them, are neither merely objects nor only evidences that have to be checked and collected; they are fundamental constituents of their own statements.

[68] Metz acknowledges that a semiotics of the nonnarrative genres would be probably not too different from that of narrative cinema (see Metz 94), but he seems to consider the issue not worth investigating. My guess is that his definition of narrativity as the category that is responsible for the syntagmatic order of film sequences (Metz 101) would be compromised by the inclusion of the documentary in the group of objects under investigation, because he considers the documentary as a nonnarrative genre.

[69] Unless they are fans with a good memory: the singer did not give many interviews and died in 1979.

[70] More recent theories of film narrativity seem to confirm that any film statement is intrinsically narrative. For André Gaudreault, for example, there are two levels of narrativity (the

micro-narrative of the single shot and the combination of shots that form the main narrative sequences of the film). Even though Gaudreault does not talk about documentaries, I assume that his analysis is valid for both "fiction" and "non-fiction" films. See Gaudreault 26-37.

[71] This is the reason why Metz distinguishes also between prefilmic connotation of objects (iconography) and denotation of objects (iconology). See Metz 114.

[72] I will come back to these problems in section 2.3.1.

[73] In this case the word "statement" is used in a looser sense: it remains true that cinematic statements are different from linguistic statements in that they are not reducible to discrete element (see Metz 116), but they are nonetheless the result of the ordering of several elements.

[74] With *indirect statement* I mean an implicit allusion to an agreement between two active elements of the communication of film utterances, producer and spectator, which is not explicitly made for every instance, but is implicit in the commonly accepted definition of the film institution.

[75] This emphasis on the unpreparedness of documentary images prevents me from adopting the useful categories of narrativization and narrative discourse theorized by Tom Gunning. The different levels that constitute the narrative discourse (the pro-filmic, the enframed image, and the process of editing), are purposely determined, in Gunning's view, so as to characterize the unique narration of the film (Gunning 18). Incidentally, I must add that I share his assumption that "change in narrative form […] can in part be understood as a response to changes within the film industry and its role in American society" (Gunning 10), and I will attempt a response to similar questions in section 3 of the dissertation.

[76] For a definition of mockumentaries and docu-dramas, see Rhodes and Springer; Juhasz and Lerner.

[77] A brilliant example of this strategy is Errol Morris's well known documentary *The Thin Blue Line* (1988).

[78] For example, a caption at the beginning of *Mondo Cane* (1962) reads that: "All the scenes you will see in this film are true and are taken only from life. If often they are shocking, it is because there are many shocking things in this world. Besides, the duty of the chronicler is not to sweeten the truth but to report it objectively," but few minutes into the movie we watch a clearly staged scene of actor Rossano Brazzi surrounded and stripped by fans.

[79] From the point of view of a pragmatic theory, Roger Odin comes to similar conclusions. See Odin 229.

[80] In this sense, Husserlian phenomenology is consistent with Bazin and Metz's insistence on the idea that mediation is fundamentally an exploration of the natural meaning of things.

[81] I will return to the notion of transparency in the next chapter, when the institution of documentary will be addressed from the point of view of Kendall L. Walton's aesthetic theory. In fact, both Ihde's and Walton's theories resort to the notion of transparency when they describe the man-machine relation, one from the point of view of a philosophy of technology, the other from that of a philosophy of technologically-mediated art.

[82] Jean-Louis Baudry comes to similar conclusions, when he interprets the *camera obscura* as one of cinema's ancestors (Baudry 39). Baudry, however, insists on the ideological nature of film epistemology, because his objective is to reveal what he thinks is a deliberate (hence ideological) effacement of cinema technology caused by the "continuity" effects of editing and narrative techniques. Drawing on Jacques Lacan's analysis of the mirror stage, he

considers science and cinema as technologies that substitute human organs, instead of sense-enhancing them, and he affirms that this substitution is possible only if the instrumentation is hidden or repressed. I do not think that cinema hides its human-technology relation, and even though I agree that there might be some "ideological" constraints at the technological level of the film medium (the position of the subject, the privilege accorded to the sense of sight), they are intrinsic to the medium itself, so I doubt that the revealing of such constraints should be a priority of contemporary film studies.

[83] Jean Douchet's theory is summarized in Elsaesser 14.

[84] Digital media did not invent the manipulation of images. Actually, the urge to modify camera images is as old as photography itself, as the exposition "Faking It - Manipulated Photography Before Photoshop" at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art from October 11, 2012 to January 27, 2013 demonstrated. However, nobody denies that digital software made image manipulation a lot more common and affordable.

[85] Walton's theory, in fact, can be considered as a departure from a linguistically oriented theory of representation. It presupposes a cognitive approach to the problem of pictorial identification, in that it is based on the assumption that perceivers deal with pictures as if they were somewhat isomorphic with corresponding real-world displays. If one wants to keep the linguistic terminology, she could say that pictures, in Walton's theory, are neither indexes nor symbols, but icons. For a thorough analysis of the debate between linguistic and cognitive approaches to the problem of pictorial representation, see Prince.

[86] I explored the notion of unpreparedness of non-fictional images in chapter 2.2.5.

[87] In January 2012 Eastman Kodak Co., the largest producer of film for moving and still pictures filed for bankruptcy. Currently, there are only a handful of film manufacturers still operational, mostly in Asia. See McCarty and Jinks.

[88] Since I explained in what sense I consider documentary images fictional, I will use the term without brackets from now on.

[89] To those who are particularly interested in this endeavour, I recommend: Poorthuis, Schwartz and Turner.

[90] Instead of claiming a particular property of the documentary image, Walton distinguishes between two properties of the photographic picture, that of being "photograph of" and that of being "picture of" an object. Using this terminology, a documentary image would be that in which the object "photographed" and the object "pictured" are the same, whereas a non-documentary image is that in which the object photographed stands for something else, and therefore depicts something different from what it is a photograph of. See Walton, "Fotografische Bilder" 11.

[91] A classic example is Alfred Hitchcock. See Moral 67.

[92] The DVD was released on October 27, 2010.

[93] "Mary accompanied and guided him, accepting silently the humiliations and gossips of malicious passersby, who, looking at Enzo acting and drinking in front of a camera that would tell his story, did not miss the opportunity to disparage him – and she was there, not far away, taking wordlessly the umpteenth blow. That was it... humiliations, until the movie took a shape and was free to fly away from the Croce Bianca ghetto to the rest of the world, giving consent and redemption to this story among the stories." (Translation is mine).

[94] "What separates Croce Bianca from the rest of the world? Mary knew it well: indifference, and fear of the others, of those who are different. The invisibles are those who are excluded, those nobody wants to look at or see. The film gave Mary hope to have her life with Enzo recognized, to have them both cease to be excluded among the excluded." (Translation is mine).

[95] For an interesting examination of the inflections of the concept of paradigm in art criticism, see Jones.

[96] One of the most compelling of these endeavours is that of Pierre Bourdieu. See Bourdieu.

[97] The fact of being able to explain, rather than simply describe, the object of analysis is what distinguishes a neo-Durkheimian theoretical framework from other competing frameworks, according to Perri 6. See 6, *Explaining Political Judgement* 9.

[98] This is the edition I will cite from in the following pages.

[99] Film, like any other language, has its own restricted and elaborated codes. Actually, we could re-think the quarrel between Bazin and the Russian formalists, that I discussed in chapter 2.2.4, in terms of preference accorded to restricted versus elaborated codes.

[100] Many of them have contributed to a collective anthology edited by Perri 6 and Gerald Mars. See 6 and Mars.

[101] "Perri 6" is a nickname, whose numerical part will be treated as a family name in all further references.

[102] One of the most complete and clear classification is in Douglas, Heap and Ross 199-201.

[103] For a more detailed analysis of some relevant aspects of Metz's theory, see section 2.2.5 of this dissertation.

[104] I am convinced that, with few adjustments, this theory could be adapted to the institution of cinema as a whole, and even the art institution; however, my focus here is on documentary, and specifically Italian documentary, so I will not broaden unnecessarily the scope of the framework.

[105] In his biography of Mary Douglas, Richard Fardon stresses that it is a motive of equivocation, in the first edition of *Natural Symbols*, whether "the elaborated code is to be related to its local social structure, or whether somehow it manages to escape social structural determination." See Fardon 114. Moreover, in the second edition of the book Douglas moves explicitly beyond the distinction between elaborated and restricted codes, so that it is not easy to trace a comparison between her theory and Bernstein's.

[106] These data are revealed by Michelangelo Frammartino in a video interview with Luca Indemini on February 22, 2011. See "Le Quattro Volte – Wi-PieTV."

[107] The source is Boxofficemojo. See "Le Quattro Volte."

[108] The interview is available on the Viaemiliadocfest website. See "Viaemiliadocfest. Intervista a Michelangelo Frammartino."

[109] This is the transcription of Frammartino's words in the above mentioned interview. My translation follows: "In a way, I wanted to put my eye to the test and to not allow it, to not allow my role as a director, to control reality. This confrontation with reality, this little skirmish, I wanted to lose it. So, despite a meticulous narrative structure, and a careful composition, I tried to select programmatically elements that were not controllable, elements that dictated the rhythm, instead of being subjected to it, like animals, an entire village that pulls a tree during a

procession, [...] or the coal process. [...] I tried to avoid the typical arrogance of the man, the eye, that pretends to take possession of reality, while filming it, [...] to make as if the border between fiction and documentary, controlled and uncontrolled, could become a bit more fragile."

[110] The interview is available on the web. See "Intervista a Michelangelo Frammartino."

[111] "[...] belongs to the dangerous category of the poetic essay-films." (Translation is mine).

[112] "[...] an unclassifiable, yet welcoming object." (Translation is mine).

[113] See "Le Quattro Volte - Film Atelier."

[114] Data on recipients of public funds are publicly available. See *Direzione Generale Cinema, Relazione attività 2010*.

[115] See Mancini.

[116] See "Le Quattro Volte - Scheda film."

[117] *Il dono* was Frammartino's first attempt to deal with Calabria and its fatal impoverishment. It is the story of the few inhabitants left in a village that once was populous, and now resembles a ghost town. The protagonists are an old farmer, who is introduced to modernity when two workers lose at his place their mobile phones and a porn image; a young girl who thinks she is possessed by demons, and prostitutes herself in exchange for the lifts she needs to go to work; a shop owner, who never sees clients; and some kids playing football. Like *Le quattro volte, Il dono* is a film without dialogues and with a very simple storyline: the old man falls in love with the girl and uses all his money to pay her a moped, so that she can stop hitchhiking. Even more than the former, the latter is a movie about a very personal perception of a place, and the effort to portray its decadence. Half of the actors of *Il dono* come from Frammartino's family, and the movie cost just €5,000, because most of the locations are family's

or friends' houses, as his cousin reveals in a blog (see Martina Frammartino). This isolate context of production is reflected in the style of the movie, which lacks the rejuvenating perspective of the cycle, and conveys the idea that the past is irretrievable and the future has nothing to deliver.

[118] Unless differently specified in the citations, the source I used for the history of Caulonia is Nicola Frammartino.

[119] "The clergy, whose direct or indirect influence had a big role in the formation of these expressions of syncretism and adaptation, realized the pedagogical connecting function that it could have, even at a basic level: it allowed, then, people to ward off the evil in pagan fashion, as long as the spell was opened or closed by a sign of the cross, or by prayers, and replaced pagan tales with Christian tales, and even tried to replace the tales with brief rhymes, in order to make it easier for illiterate people to remember the Christian precepts." (Translation is mine).

[120] "It is an old tradition rooted in Southern Italy: originally it was the dirt of the temple, then it became the dirt of the church, which is considered the essential part of the sacred and a carrier of therapeutic virtues. According to the Pythagoreans, the dust is the border of the visible: this dust goes from the body of the goatherd, who is just a container, to all the others, until it becomes mineral, coal, and the cycle can start again." (Translation is mine).

[121] "In the well-known festivity of san Domenico di Cocullo, celebrated each first Thursday of May in the homonymous village of Abruzzi, this year, like every year, the believers, after having visited the patron, collected the dust behind the altar and, proceeding forward, rang a bell pulling a rope with teeth. The dust, which substitutes the dirt of the church's pavement, used until very recently for the same purpose, is, in many cases, diluted in water and drunk by those

who suffer from fever, while the people who pulled the rope think they are free from dental problems for one year, until the next festivity of san Domenico." (Translation is mine).

[122] Durkheim insisted on a sharp distinction between religion and magic, but Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss have a more nuanced position. See Hubert and Mauss 97-103.

[123] For example, in an interview for *Rapporto Confidenziale*. See Rippa and Galbiati.