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Remapping the Neorealist Nation: *Il cammino della speranza* and the Rhetorics of the Road to Realism

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Based on the hypothesis that realism in narrative cinema is the result of a set of rhetorical strategies that operate at the indexical, representational, communicative and social levels, and at the same time merging a post-structuralist and a cultural studies methodology, this essay compares three post-war films which share the ambition of embracing the entire peninsula: Roberto Rossellini's *Paisà* (1946), Pietro Francisci's *Natale al Campo 119* (1948) and Piero Germi's *Il cammino della speranza* (1950). Arguing for post-war cinema's need to replace Fascist geopolitics with a novel mapping of the nation based on a realistic impulse, and proposing that road narratives promised the successful negotiation of realism and ideology, this article discusses the position of *Il cammino della speranza* in particular and examines its rhetorical strategies vis-à-vis those of Rossellini's canonical neorealism and of Francisci's popular cinema.

KEYWORDS filmic realism, communicative negotiation, neorealism, travel films, nation mapping

Realism continues to present intractable problems of definition, cultural as well as textual. In the discipline of Film Studies, decades of scholarship have clarified a range of issues concerning realism, especially in the spheres of aesthetics, ideology, psychology and filmic language. Our understanding of the field has further transformed as a result of the introduction of new critical paradigms, most recently postmodernism and cultural studies, which define themselves according to texts' relationships with other texts, as well as with society, economy and power, and indeed with culture as a discourse that is shaped and determined by such spheres. This whole body of work is characterized by a multiplicity of perspectives applied to a problem which is always the same and yet forever different; a problem that appears to be ever shifting, not only because realism is never characterized by stability and permanence (as is evinced by how our response to the realism of specific films transforms over time), but also

under the pressure of novel technologies that impact on the production and reception of audiovisual texts.

One way of responding to the complexity of the field is to think of realism as an ongoing process rather than as a fixed outcome, as a series of interrelated operations instead of a static product.¹ Deriving from Stuart Hall's reception theory, the concept of negotiation, which suggests mediation and presupposes social as well as symbolic and semiotic fields (thus responding to both a post-structuralist and a cultural studies perspective), is especially useful.² Realism can be seen as a process of negotiation in at least two ways, which imply different scales: the scale of the artistic field (and of movements, styles, and currents); and that of the single text (seen in relation to other texts and cultural contexts). With regard to the first scale, any realist movement can be studied diachronically, as it evolves from the emergence of a style and the establishment of a canon, to the attainment of self-awareness in the use of its style, to the progressive contamination with other, often anti-realist styles and genres, until its specific realism dispels under the pressure of new styles or, better, regenerates as intertextual reference, and continues to exist as socio-cultural memory.

In terms of the single filmic text, then, realism may be seen as a structure, a form of organization that implies a complex internal dynamism. In an essay on the rhetoric of neorealism, Casetti and Malavasi have identified four levels at which the film operates in order to construct an effect of reality: the level of reproduction, where a direct relationship is established between filmic sign and real referents; the level of representation, where a film's desire for a verisimilar rendering of the world finds expression; the level of enunciation, with the *veridiction* through which a film appears to 'tell the truth' and, thus, persuade its spectator; and the level of fruition, which implies the need to activate a belief, corresponding to the spectators' judgement that a film is congruous with the reality in which they live.³ Filmic realism is, in this sense, a system of negotiations performed by the text within and between the four levels (indexical, representational, communicative, and social), which operate in the symbolic and social fields. From a combined post-structuralist and cultural studies approach, then, what need to be foregrounded are the dynamics between the different components rather than their fixed configurations, and the ways in which texts negotiate potential conflicts and frictions. These are of particular interest, because it is precisely in the instances of its crisis that the effect of realism is exposed and becomes most visible. Such areas of tension, in which realism clashes with other styles and discourses, may also reveal something of the underlying textual urges and objectives, and of the socio-cultural contexts with which the film interacts.

Hailed in its time as a cinema of perfect, outstanding mimesis, re-conceptualized several times over the following decades, Italian neorealism constitutes an interesting dual case study, firstly of the birth, evolution and demise of a realist movement, and

¹ These ideas have been shaped in conversation with Francesco Casetti, whose contribution I here wish to acknowledge.

² On filmic negotiation see Francesco Casetti, *Communicative Negotiation in Cinema and Television* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2002).

³ Francesco Casetti and Luca Malavasi, 'La retorica del neorealismo', in *Storia del cinema italiano*, vol. vii, 1945/1948, ed. by Callisto Cosulich (Venice and Rome: Marsilio, Edizioni di Bianco e Nero, 2003), pp. 176–190 (177–78).

of its regeneration through its influence on subsequent cinemas; secondly, of the effect of reality as a system of negotiations operating within and around the filmic text. In this essay, I intend to focus on both levels. My objective is to examine how a film made at the end of the most creative and propulsive phase of a realist movement such as neorealism constructs its effect of reality within a system of references to a canonical style, while negotiating the pressure of other styles, as well as of a range of cultural discourses.

My essay intends to contribute, first and foremost, to the conceptualization of filmic realism from a combined post-structuralist and cultural study perspective, by applying the concept of negotiation to a range of textual and extra-textual operations. It will also engage with the ongoing debate on neorealism as a critical category,⁴ and will make claims about how post-war Italian cinema attempted a new, realistic representation of the nation, which required a negotiation between the apparent transparency of realism and the visibility of ideological structures.

The mobilization of the gaze and cross-regional journeys

My choice of case study — Pietro Germi's *Il cammino della speranza* (1950) — is strategic; the film was released at the end of the golden era of neorealism, when the movement was struggling to preserve its stylistic integrity in the face of changed productive, political and ideological conditions. It is, in this sense, a borderline film, made — according to traditional historiography — between the end of the movement (some critics indicate 1950 as the limit year of neorealism⁵) and the beginning of its phase of dissolution, or at least evolution into more popular forms of filmmaking.

Initially regarded as one of neorealism's best products,⁶ *Il cammino della speranza* is no longer considered central to the canon, thus confirming the shift in the critical perception of neorealism as a genre and as a style. Critics have often framed the Genoese filmmaker (probably better known for his comedies and, especially, *Divorzio all'italiana* (1961)) as a figure at the margins of neorealism because of his formalism. *Il cammino della speranza*, indeed, is beautifully photographed as well as carefully scripted. Its most widely quoted model, even by Germi himself,⁷ is John Ford's classic *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), about a family's migration from Oklahoma to California during the Great Depression. This model points to an epic narrative style and to international experiences of dislocation, rather than to specific Italian forms and contexts; on the other hand, as we will see, the film also openly quotes a significant number of neorealist milestones.⁸ Germi references neorealism, but also

⁴ For an account that stresses the ways in which central elements of the reception of neorealism can be said to continue to give rise to sharp debate see Catherine O'Rawe, "I padri e i maestri": Genre, Auteurs, and Absences in Italian Film Studies', *Italian Studies*, 63: 2 (2008), 173–94.

⁵ Alfonso Canziani, *Gli anni del neorealismo* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1977), pp. 15–17.

⁶ *Catalogo Bolaffi del Cinema Italiano. Primo volume: 1945/1955*, ed. by Gianni Rondolino and Ornella Levi (Turin: Giulio Bolaffi Editore, 1977), p. 32.

⁷ Giacomo Gambetti, 'Piero Germi: storia di un uomo all'antica' (1960), in *Pietro Germi, la frontiera e la legge*, ed. by Orio Caldiron (Rome: Bulzoni, 2004), pp. 40–43 (p. 40).

⁸ Far from being atypical of neorealism, such a mix may be traced both in films that are still considered canonical and in films that no longer are. Two such examples are the moments of *Roma città aperta* modelled on war action movies, and the references to American music and film genres in Alberto Lattuada's *Il bandito* (1946).

other realistic styles (most notably, American and Soviet) as well as non-realistic film styles and genres.

For Sesti, *Il cammino della speranza* typifies Germi's ambiguous positioning within neorealism:

Da una parte oggi [*Il cammino della speranza*] sembra compiere d'istinto proprio quel passaggio dalla cronaca al romanzo che era considerato il passaggio naturale e necessario dal neorealismo alla fase successiva; dall'altra, l'intensità del suo formalismo sembrava allora negare alle fondamenta il principio dell'autosufficienza dell'informazione, dell'abolizione di ogni diaframma, della presa diretta con la realtà che era alla base della sua estetica. Da una parte sembrava assumere senza riserva il suo carattere morale (essere dalla parte di chi soffre) dall'altra falliva caparbiamente nell'analisi ideologica e sociale dell'ingiustizia, della povertà, dell'insubordinazione, puntando con tutti i mezzi di cui disponeva a commuovere il pubblico.⁹

This passage suggests that in 1950 neorealist realism was already evolving or, as a response to its perceived crisis, was expected to begin to evolve from the chronicle's direct rendering of reality to the complex narrative structures typical of the novel. Embracing this critical trope, Sesti sees Germi's film as one of passage between two phases of neorealism (or between neorealism and its evolution into another type of cinema), and also sees formalism and emotionalism as radically incompatible with realism. An in-depth engagement with these ideas would imply making reference to a range of critical debates that I do not wish to introduce here — those, for instance, on the melodramatic components of Rossellini's war trilogy, on the highly scripted nature of De Sica and Zavattini's films, on the formalism and epic breadth of Visconti's *La terra trema* (1948) — or even reflecting on how several films of the immediate post-war period already mixed neorealist and generic features.

I will set aside these questions, which are important but have been the focus of much scholarship, and more decisively contend that Germi's film, while coming at a point of crisis of neorealism, is also central to the movement for a number of reasons: firstly, because it embraces its ideological choice of siding with destitute classes and bearing witness to social inequality not as mere narrative background, but as central thematic and ethical concern; secondly, because it adopts some of neorealism's key practices, which ever since Bazin have been viewed, rightly or wrongly, as its distinctive features (the mix of professional and non-professional actors, the location shooting, the faithfulness to reality and the authenticity of the stories);¹⁰ and, thirdly, because it shares with canonical neorealism the key project of remapping the nation. It is especially with the latter question that this article contends.

Indeed, at the core of neorealism can arguably be discerned the project of reconceptualizing national identity after Fascism; the vitality of this project 'attests to the

⁹ Mario Sesti, *Tutto il cinema di Pietro Germi* (Milan: Baldini&Castoldi, 1997), pp. 172–73.

¹⁰ On the use of locations, non-professional actors, and real situations in Germi's film see *L'avventurosa storia del cinema italiano raccontata dai suoi protagonisti: 1935–1959*, ed. by Franca Faldini and Goffredo Fofi (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1979), p. 207. The film is an adaptation of Nino De Maria's *Cuori negli abissi* (1949), based on the real story of a group of Sicilian miners who almost died while attempting to cross the Alps in 1948. On the illegal Italian emigration see Sandro Rinauro's study entitled, after Germi's film, *Il cammino della speranza* (Turin: Einaudi, 2009).

profound disarray that Italy found itself in at the end of the war, a disarray marked precisely by the collapse of a coherent national narrative that would be taken as meaningful by Italians'.¹¹ As Francesco Pitassio has suggested, realism itself was the vehicle through which neorealist filmmakers proposed a new, anti-Fascist idea of Italy, simultaneously responding to 'the need for a representation which adheres to the notion of the nation based on its iconic features — landscapes and faces'.¹² Anthropological and geographical aspects of the national landscape are deeply intertwined with both a realistic and an ideological vision; as Rosalind Galt has suggested, with reference to the different context of contemporary heritage cinema, 'landscape images in a film are uniquely able to investigate [the] relationship of politics, representation, and history because landscape as a mode of spectacle provokes questions of national identity, the material space of the profilmic, and the historicity of the image'.¹³

Unquestionably, not only canonical neorealism, but also the entire spectrum of post-war Italian cinema proposed a new image of the country for both internal and foreign consumption; however, what is distinctive about neorealism is its construction of an effect of reality to negotiate ideology. I argue that two tools in particular, a mobile gaze and a travel narrative, were adopted to this end: the exploration and exhibition of the reality of the post-war landscape aimed to replace geopolitical Fascist mapping with a post- and anti-Fascist image and interpretation of the nation, while offering a truthful and naturalistic representation.

In his appraisal of neorealism, Gilles Deleuze famously described post-war Italian cinema as a cinema of the seer and no longer of the agent, which reflected a dispersive and lacunary reality, and frequently took up the 'voyage form'.¹⁴ The idea that neorealism privileged on-the-road narratives has subsequently been repeated several times. For Sorlin, '[i]n many respects, the Neorealist films are itineraries, journeys through a portion of land';¹⁵ for Wagstaff, '[i]n many ways, the road movie is the neo-realist narrative, with its special dramaturgy not of conflict but of discovery';¹⁶ Sesti suggested that neorealist cinema typically adopts a traveller's point of view, thus drawing attention to the fact that not only the narrative moves, but also the gaze.¹⁷ For Deleuze, this mobilization was produced by the war, for socio-economic, political, moral and artistic reasons. I would add that it specifically embodied the reaction

¹¹ Angelo Restivo, *The Cinema of Economic Miracles: Visuality and Modernization in the Italian Art Film* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 25.

¹² Francesco Pitassio, 'Making the Nation Come Real: Neorealism/Nation, a Suitable Case for Treatment', *Annali Online di Ferrara — Lettere*, vol. 2 (2007), pp. 147–63 (p. 154), <<http://annali.unife.it/lettere/2007vol2/pitassio.pdf>> [Accessed 24 July 2010].

¹³ Rosalind Galt, *The New European Cinema: Redrawing the Map* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 27.

¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* (London: The Athlone Press, 2003), pp. 205–15.

¹⁵ Pierre Sorlin, 'Tradition and Social Change in the French and Italian Cinemas of the Reconstruction', in *The Culture of Reconstruction. European Literature, Thought and Film, 1945–1950*, ed. by Nicholas Hewitt (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 88–102 (p. 99).

¹⁶ Christopher Wagstaff, 'Rossellini and Neorealism', in *Roberto Rossellini: Magician of the Real*, ed. by David Forgacs, Sarah Lutton, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: BFI, 2000), pp. 36–49 (p. 40).

¹⁷ Mario Sesti, 'La vita quotidiana nell'età neorealista', in *Neorealismo: Cinema Italiano 1945–1949*, ed. by Alberto Farassino (Turin: EDT, 1989), pp. 115–20 (p. 115).

against the Fascist centralization of power and control over culture, which suddenly vanished at the Liberation — as well as the expression of the filmmakers' hunger for an exploration that would give an anti-Fascist account of the new realities of the country. The urge to produce a chronicle, thus, concealed from the start the inclination to offer an ideological (re)mapping. The road narrative, however, is also one of the most distinctive representational strategies adopted by neorealism to produce an effect of verisimilitude. A travelling dramaturgy, in fact, suggests a natural unfolding; the journey allows for an ordering of the events that is perceived by the spectator as natural since, while one travels, things happen, places are crossed, and encounters take place. In a road movie, the story 'moves on', conveying the impression of an unstructured, open, realistic narrative.

Il cammino della speranza is one of a small number of films such as Roberto Rossellini's *Paisà* (1947) and Pietro Francisci's *Natale al campo 119* (1948) that were made during the first five years after the war with the ambition of travelling throughout the peninsula and offering a new image of the nation.¹⁸ *Paisà*, *Natale al Campo 119* and *Il cammino della speranza* confirm that there is more to post-war cross-regional journeying than the chronicling of an everyday reality, and that the project of the redefinition of the national image was central to post-war Italian cinema. Before engaging with this question, I will establish the significance of maps to the Fascist regime; because it is indeed with the principles of Fascist mapping that these films must negotiate in recreating such an image. In other words, they must engage with a structure of representation which is ideological through and through.

Mapping the nation: from Fascism to neorealism

The importance of cartography to Fascism as a function of the processes of creation and consolidation of the regime and of the empire was paramount. During the *ventennio*, cartography and propaganda went hand in hand, following the model of Nazi *Geopolitik*, according to which 'the map is no longer a record of the actual situation but of [a] dream of hegemony'.¹⁹ The establishment of the Comitato Nazionale per la Geografia in 1921 was the first step towards obtaining the consent of Italian geographers, who were to give their total approval and support to the regime's land reclamation projects and colonial policies.²⁰ Indeed, to the Fascists, maps were particularly valuable tools in the way they could be used to promulgate two major components of their ideology, the idea that Roman history was Italian history, and the idea that one of the logical outcomes of this shared Roman past was colonial expansion.²¹

¹⁸ Also Zavattini in 1951 was planning a film in episodes encompassing the entire nation, *Italia mia*. See Cesare Zavattini, 'How I Did Not Make *Italia Mia*', in *Film Book no 1: The Audience and the Filmmaker*, ed. by Robert Hughes (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1959), pp. 122–45.

¹⁹ Claude Raffestin, 'From Text to Image', in *From Geopolitics to Global Politics: A French Connection*, ed. by Jacques Lévy (London: Frank Cass, 2001), pp. 7–34 (20).

²⁰ Gary S. Dunbar, *Geography: An International Survey* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), pp. 139–41.

²¹ Heather Hyde Minor, 'Mapping Mussolini: Ritual and Cartography in Public Art during the Second Roman Empire', *Imago Mundi*, 51 (1999), 147–62 (p. 159).

Together with maps, photography provided a public-institutional image of Italy 'from above'. This vision was literal in the case of the aerial photographs taken by the topo-cartographic section of the army's Istituto Geografico Militare before preparing topographic and geographic maps of both the national territory and future colonies.²² The step from military photography to artistic photography and other visual arts was short. In her analysis of nationalist, imperialist, and regionalist impulses in the Fascist conception of landscape, Noa Steimatsky has argued that an important moment of the modernist refashioning of the image of Italy's landscape was Futurist *Aeropittura*, which 'celebrated the conquering and liberating of space and perception from the forces of gravity and from a traditional, limited human viewpoint'. In works of the 1930s such as Gerardo Dottori's landscapes and Filippo Masoero's photographs 'a modernist utopia of a Futurist universe made local, and a vision of Italy made universal lent themselves to Fascism's containment of oppositions and to its desire to command space in all its dimensions'.²³ A similar desire can be traced in films that celebrated Italian aeronautics, such as Gennaro Righelli's *L'armata azzurra* (1932) and Goffredo Alessandrini's *Luciano Serra pilota* (1938), the greatest Italian box-office hit of the decade.

Thus, military cartography, aerophotography, public art and ritual, painting and the cinema all espoused and supported the Fascist project of the mastery of space from above. Such a vision implied on the one hand the harmonious depiction of a land of plenty, and the composition of the potentially subversive and fragmenting diversity of the regions in a unified vision of progress; on the other hand, it suggested the image of a hegemonic, modern and technological nation, which dominated a vast imperial territory and was in control of its own destiny.

Suddenly freed of the 'vision from above' crafted by the regime, after the war Italian filmmakers set out to chronicle and explore the country from below, by mobilizing the camera's gaze. While some films aimed at representing the whole national territory, others took a city as a synecdoche of the entire country under Nazi-Fascism, as *Roma città aperta*, or as a metaphor of the post-war system of urban classes, as De Sica's *Miracolo a Milano* (1951). Focussing on the former set of films, those that had the ambition of embracing the peninsula in its entirety, I will now discuss *Paisà* and *Natale al Campo 119* in their role as predecessors and models for *Il cammino della speranza*.

Released respectively in 1946 and 1948, *Paisà* and *Natale al Campo 119*, a canonical neorealist film the former, a generic product the latter, even though temporally contiguous are the outcome of two different historical moments. A war drama, *Paisà* still reflects the opening generated by the end of Fascism; a war comedy, *Natale al Campo 119* mirrors the restoration of old powers, marked by such events as the Togliatti amnesty of 22 July 1946, the reopening of Cinecittà in November 1947 and the general election of 18 April 1948. While stylistically very different, and endorsing distinct ideologies, the two films arguably share a similar agenda. Both traverse Italy region by region, from Sicily to Lombardy; both are episodic narratives.

²² See, for instance, Luigi Goglia (ed.), *Colonialismo e fotografia. Il caso italiano* (Messina: Sicania, 1989).

²³ Noa Steimatsky, *Italian Locations: Reinhabiting the Past in Postwar Cinema* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 2008), pp. 20, 23.

However, the first adopts a travel structure to link the episodes, unlike the second — a difference which is thoroughly significant.

In his study of the motif of travel in Italian cinema from 1945 to 1965, Mirco Melanco has claimed that, in *Paisà*, ‘il territorio italiano viene presentato nella sua massima estensione, ma le distanze appaiono molto ridotte, grazie al senso di solidarietà, unità, coesione che sono forza emergente contro il dilagare della violenza, dell’ingiustizia, della barbarie’.²⁴ This opinion is arguable; at the opposite of the Fascist mapping of a united, functional, wealthy, modern and homogenous Italy, *Paisà* chooses to emphasize fragmentation, division, linguistic and cultural misapprehension. There is little need to retell the plot to substantiate my claim; I will simply point out that no character travels from episode to episode, from region to region. Most characters, indeed, are at a loss in an utterly incomprehensible landscape, made unreadable by the massive ruination, the collapse of societal and power structures, and the fragmentation of the national territory caused by the war and by the controlling presence of foreign armies. Most episodes foreground the impossible negotiation of an unknowable landscape: Carmela cannot traverse the mined beach to search for her missing relatives; Fred is unable to locate Francesca in Rome; at great risk Harriet crosses into the occupied side of Florence, but cannot be reunited with Lupo; partisans and civilians are unable to hide from the Nazis in the Po River marshes. While the characters are trapped in their regions and episodes, only in the linking sequences, which adopt the omniscient style of the newsreel, the film is capable of transcending the painful unknowability of the local, thus offering a tragic overview of the country as a mosaic of human suffering in the face of the indifference of history. *Paisà*’s ideological mapping of the nation emerges in the interface between the gaze of an immanent narrator, who observes local situations through the eyes of characters-seers, and the voiceover and gaze-from-above of an all-knowing and detached enunciator-historian. This enunciator-historian is not neutral, but adopts the rhetorical tropes, narrative style, and timber of voice of the newsreel — for years associated by the audience with the regime, and then with the new powers.

Through the stratagem of the visualization of the memories of a group of Italian war prisoners in California, *Natale al Campo 119* charts the peninsula, focusing, like *Paisà*, on a number of key cities (Rome, Naples, Florence, Milan, Venice) and regions (Sicily).²⁵ The prisoners come from, and represent, all these places; the variety of dialects and accents is greatly emphasized, as well as the fact that the Italy that awaits them, three years after the war, is a new country, subjected to foreign influences. The historical question of the distance and contrast between North and South, and between regional or even local identities and a new Italian identity, are overtly if simplistically presented and resolved. In his final speech before the soldiers’ return home, for instance, a priest intimates that the shared wartime suffering should now unite Italians. *Natale al Campo 119* reveals post-war Italy’s simultaneous anxiety

²⁴ Mirco Melanco, ‘Il motivo del viaggio nel cinema italiano (1945–1965)’, in *Identità italiana e identità europea nel cinema italiano dal 1945 al miracolo economico*, ed. by Gian Piero Brunetta (Turin: Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, 1996), pp. 217–308 (p. 219).

²⁵ The effect is reinforced aurally by the records of popular regional songs donated to the prisoners by an Italophile American officer. The records are collected in a bound volume significantly titled ‘Italy’.

about, and need for, national reconciliation, cross-regional solidarity and cosmopolitan openings. The film calls on emotionalism and national pride, and its image of the Italian landscape is consistent with a tourist brochure. The visualization of the soldiers' memories provide highly conventional regional representations, with an emphasis on architectonic and artistic landmarks, in stark contrast with the neorealist canon, which shun well-known sights, and favoured novel, disquieting visions of Italian cities and landscapes. Regional difference is praised as cultural richness, and is composed in the vision of a united, popular, apolitical Italy ready to start anew.

Natale al Campo 119 promotes the optimistic image of a country of untouched cultural and artistic heritage and resources, something achievable only by resorting to (nostalgic) images of the past and by foreclosing the representation of the war.²⁶ Conversely, *Paisà* shows the conflict inside the cities, the ruination and death, the division of the country, and suggests that the positive view of a unification generated by common suffering is the discourse of authority, rather than the people's reality (and, in so doing, it takes a gigantic step away from *Roma città aperta*). A comparison between the two films' narrative structures and representational strategies shows how successful canonical neorealism was when dealing with ideology as a potential point of crisis of realism. The fragmentation of *Paisà*'s episodic structure, with its geographical, thematic, narrative and stylistic diversity, is effectively, naturally composed via the progression of the northbound march of the Allied armies. The similarly unmatched episodes of *Natale al Campo 119*, by contrast, are artificially and unconvincingly held together by the narrative pretext of the prisoners' mixed backgrounds.

Early neorealist travelling, while producing a thoroughly ideological remapping of the nation, succeeded in persuading its spectators that they were simply discovering their country by themselves, via the film's journey. As Fellini once observed, commenting on his participation in the making of *Paisà*, 'L'esperienza con Rossellini, il viaggio di *Paisà*, rappresentò per me la scoperta dell'Italia [...] Rossellini cercava, inseguiva il suo film in mezzo alle strade'.²⁷

Il cammino della speranza: Remapping the nation after Paisà

Germi's fourth feature was written by Federico Fellini and Tullio Pinelli and produced by Lux — the only producer that in the post-war years attempted an industrial programming of the neorealist current.²⁸ It is significant that the film, which Germi initially intended to title *Terroni*, was deprived of the government's financial funds, '[fondi] che fino ad allora non erano mai stati negati, nemmeno al più infimo dei film'.²⁹ The funds were finally assigned only after the exclusion of some sequences portraying the police in a negative light.

²⁶ In the Florentine episode, the war is an ellipsis in the story signified by a shadow passing over the closed doors of the Uffizi, in stark contrast to *Paisà*, which lingers with tangible anguish on the Nazis patrolling Piazza della Signoria.

²⁷ Mario Verdone, *Federico Fellini* (Milan: L'Unità/Il Castoro, 1995), p. 10.

²⁸ Sesti, *Tutto il cinema di Pietro Germi*, p. 47.

²⁹ Enrico Giacovelli, *Pietro Germi* (Milan: Il Castoro, 1997), p. 34.

The story opens in Capodarso, Sicily. In the wake of a failed attempt at averting the closure of the local sulphur mine, Ciccio (Saro Urzi) offers to escort the miners and their families to France, where jobs are easily available. Some of the villagers decide to sell their miserable belongings to pay the guide; among them are Saro (Raf Vallone), a widower with three young children; a newly-wed couple with the bride's parents; an old accountant with his dog; Barbara (Elena Varzi) and her outlaw lover, Vanni (Franco Navarra). The journey takes them from Capodarso to Messina to Naples, where Ciccio is caught by Vanni while attempting to elope with the emigrants' money. At Termini Station, in Rome, Ciccio denounces Vanni to the police, and takes advantage of the ensuing confusion to run away. Vanni eludes the police, but most of the emigrants are arrested; a young woman, Lorenza, is accidentally separated from her husband. Anxious to go in search of her, he confesses their real destination; the travellers are ordered to return to Sicily to avoid being charged with illegal expatriation. Led by Saro, many decide to dismiss the order and head north, having bought a passage on a truck directed to Parma. Once in Emilia, they accept seasonal work from a farmer, thus provoking the hostility of the local workers, who are on strike. During a violent clash, Saro's daughter is hit by a stone; Saro and Barbara stay behind to nurse her, while the others set off towards the Alps. Here, Vanni reappears and joins the travellers, but at Saro and Barbara's arrival the tension explodes. Vanni and Saro duel by knife, and the former is killed. The group then crosses the mountain; the old accountant is lost in the snowstorm. Finally, on the other side, they are intercepted by the French border police; after a few tense moments, the officer takes pity on them, and decides to let them go.

The travel as verisimilar narrative structure, as mobilization of the gaze and tool for nation mapping allows the film to negotiate between different impulses, including realism and ideology; the successful outcome of such negotiation was, as I have argued, at the heart of neorealism's project. However, by 1950 neorealism has already become a style, which Geremi, in fact, on occasion quotes, reproduces, or betrays. Among the direct references to neorealist films are those to Visconti's *La terra trema*, to *Roma città aperta*, to *Paisà*, and to *Ladri di biciclette*³⁰ — in other words, to a sizeable section of the canon. The film, however, also draws from international genres, including melodrama, road movie, and western; and references both American and Soviet cinema. In other words, by 1950 neorealism already belongs to film history, alongside other styles and genres. It is thus legitimate to ask what happens to the movement's rhetoric of realism when appropriated by a film that simultaneously is part of neorealism and comes at its end; and to investigate the remapping of the country offered by Geremi after Fascism, after the war and, even, after neorealism. I will explore these issues by engaging with indexical, representational, enunciational and social aspects of the film's rhetorical strategy.

Consistently with many canonical neorealist films, and even more radically, at the indexical level Geremi cast the camera's eye on an exceptionally marginal landscape. The roadside Italy seen in his film from the windows of an old bus or train or from the back of a truck travelling along country roads contrasts sharply with *Natale al*

³⁰ The latter is directly quoted when, after leaving the Police headquarters, out of despair Saro makes the decision to break the law.

Campo 119's tourist brochure. Germi's film shuns tourist images of the country; unlike *Natale al Campo 119*, no emphasis is ever placed on famous landmarks. Germi even introduces an episode to clarify his position vis-à-vis cinematic tourism; when in Rome's train station, with five hours at their disposal, three villagers ask Ciccio whether they could wander off into the city to visit the Altare della Pace; Ciccio's quick and vigorous rebuff highlights the absurdity of their wish.

The difference with *Paisà* is also significant. In Rossellini's film the landmarks, though defamiliarized by the war raging around them, were not absent and included the Sicilian temples, the Coliseum and Piazza della Signoria. Germi's Italy is liminal, provincial, archaic, and devoid of familiar sights. The only landmark that appears, St Peter's, is, thus, extremely significant. The dome does not dominate the Roman skyline as in the final sequence of *Roma città aperta*, but is seen fleetingly from the train, and then again from the yard of a working-class *trattoria*. If, in the first instance, it becomes the signifier of the protagonists' absurd aspiration to being tourists in the capital of both spiritual and secular powers (absurd because they have no rights as either travellers or citizens), in the second sequence, it functions as the reminder of the Christian humanism proposed by Rossellini's neorealist cinema as solution to the barbarism of the war, and to the lack of national unity. It appears, in fact, in the background of a scene in which Saro pleads his fellow travellers not to treat Barbara 'like an animal', but to demonstrate solidarity, and accept her as a rightful member of the community; thus, it is a reminder of the betrayed hopes of the immediate post-war era, and of early neorealist cinema.

Marc Augé has noted that 'the social space bristles with monuments — imposing stone buildings, discreet mud shrines — which may not be directly functional but give every individual the justified feeling that, for the most part, they pre-existed him and will survive him'.³¹ As a function of place, identity is formed by traversing one's home-place while assimilating all the signs (including monuments and landmarks) that designate the site of social order as the 'common place'. When travelling, one looks for landmarks precisely in order to find herself at home and counteract the disorientation endangering her sense of identity. Even more radically than Rossellini, Germi sent instead his characters travelling through an Italy devoid of familiar sights, thus problematizing the idea of national identity, and producing the opposite effect sought by *Natale al Campo 119*. Not unlike Augé's non-places of supermodernity (motorways, airports, malls, and supermarkets), which are reduced to mere billboards in the traveller's experience, here cities and towns are signified by a sign in a train station, or by a caption superimposed on the images. The film lingers on the anonymous interiors of vehicles (coaches, train carriages, trucks) or on places of transit and liminal zones (a port, train stations, the areas surrounding the railway, a farmyard, a frontier). Rather than the sites privileged by mainstream discourses on the nation, like those of Fascism and of the tourist industry, Germi's film shows an underdeveloped, pre-modern Italy of non-places, thus revealing the filmmaker's antithetical ideological position, which accounts for the government's hostility towards the film. This choice, of course, also augments the film's indexical realism, by producing

³¹ Marc Augé, *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. by John Howe (New York: Verso, 1995), p. 60.

instances of that documentary-like image of a deprived Italy so characteristic of neorealism.

The representational level privileges the cross-regional ‘voyage form’ typical of neorealist cinema. As the Allies’ northbound march was described as lengthy, difficult and slow in *Paisà*, *Il cammino della speranza*’s journey is also impressively long, dangerous, expensive, and physically demanding. Distances are vast; it takes the travellers two days and one night to reach Rome, first by an old coach, then by ferry and, finally, by train. When in the capital city, they must wait five hours for a connection that will take them north. They travel instead by truck; when in Emilia, the driver leaves them along the road, and directs them to a train station 20 km away — a four-hour walk. Distances are significant even between nearby localities; when Saro’s daughter is hurt, Barbara must walk a long way to the nearest town to call a doctor. The final leg of the journey by train to the Alps is compressed, as only the last stage is shown; however, the change of landscape is so dramatic that it again signifies great distance.

The journey’s difficulties reflect the deficiency of the country’s infrastructure, still severely challenged five years after the war; they also signify deep fragmentation and division, and lack of freedom to move and travel for Italian citizens — although it is even problematic to define the protagonists as such. *Paisà* questioned the gaze of both Italians and foreigners on Italy, and drew attention to regional difference and division. It definitely queried the meaning of nation, although never casting a doubt on its ‘Italianness’. *Paisà*’s project was that of mapping the country at the time of its struggle to emerge from Nazi-Fascism — a divided, occupied, torn nation in the process of fighting for its geographical and political existence. While affectionately highlighting regional differences and rivalries, *Natale al Campo 119* never once seriously challenged the idea of the characters’ belonging to a national community.

Conversely, Geremi presents the journey across Italy as international travelling. Taking off from a shockingly archaic, deprived Sicily, the trip is, quite literally, a ‘going abroad’. Ciccio, the deceitful guide, admonishes the travellers to entrust themselves to him, as places, peoples, and roads are unfamiliar to them. The characters’ disorientation is a recurring trope, surfacing in dialogues, in the lost, searching gazes, and in entire episodes — in particular, that of Lorenza who gets lost in Rome. When meeting the locals in Emilia, it is highly significant that the protagonists identify themselves as *foresti*, ‘strangers’, and not as *paisà*, ‘compatriots’. Italians from different regions are complete strangers to one another, as the encounter with the hired hands from northern Bergamo shows. Thus, in between *Paisà* and *Il cammino della speranza*, Italians have gone from being compatriots to strangers; certainly on account of the fact that, by the time Geremi made his film, ‘le speranze del dopoguerra sembravano essersi rivelate un breve intermezzo prima di rientrare tutti di nuovo nel tunnel buio di un conflitto permanente ed eterno’.³²

In the ‘voyage form’, the journey moves the film along, and opens up a naturalistic chain of events and encounters. Mostly, *Il cammino della speranza*’s narrative is effectively unbalanced; time is dilated or else contracted; obvious stopovers alternate with unpredictable ones; episodes can be alternatively short, or lengthy. The journey

³² Sesti, *Tutto il cinema di Pietro Geremi*, p. 66.

is realistically full of diversions, delays, pauses, setbacks; and it depends on chance encounters even more than on will, or planning. Characters wander off, change direction, or go astray. However, the strategy of the road narrative, which borrows the perfect naturalism of the voyage, may also occasionally reveal instances of failure or tension of realism. This happens when the journey, instead of being open and unpredictable like life, becomes a site of negotiation of non-realistic styles and genres. The openness of *Il cammino della speranza* is, indeed, finite. In the concluding stages of the story, all the characters that did not get lost or return home arrive at the same hut in the same alpine village. It is the final, theatrical confrontation, the locus in which the melodramatic soul of the film reaches its peak, and finds its resolution. The fluid road movie becomes a frontier western, with the shoot-out between the hero and the villain. Good triumphs; the journey sets off again, towards unpredictable solutions.

At the communicative level, the film alternates an objective and a subjective point of view; when the latter, the elected perspective is that of the underprivileged protagonists. When the camera's gaze is thus mobilized, the film becomes an exploration of the country by a bunch of uprooted and disoriented characters. There are many subjective shots of landscapes in motion, taken from the point of view of the travellers, who are seen leaning out of windows, eagerly scanning an unfamiliar and unreadable landscape.³³ Thus, the characters as a group become the narrators of the story — a collective narrator.³⁴

Via this communicative strategy, the film addresses the question of social trust and constructs its relationship with its contemporary audience — in particular, a working-class one.³⁵ Thematically also the film foregrounds the question of social and national solidarity, both amongst the travellers and amongst Italians, thus pointing to the necessity of developing inter-regional ties and social trust, at a time when both were under severe pressure. The film is particularly explicit on questions of inter-class solidarity; a social-democratic, Germi highlights the desirability for workers from north and south to become aware of their shared interests and values and overcome divisions. The narrative is choral; in spite of the presence of well-known actors, equal attention is paid to the many co-protagonists of the story. The group's internal dynamics mirrors the process of negotiation inherent in the creation of social trust. During the film, the characters develop an increasing reciprocal respect, dependence, and trust. They move and stick together; when Saro is left behind, the group awaits his return before crossing the border. Their final success lies in their internal cohesion and reciprocal reliance. Furthermore, because they are endowed with a subjective gaze, they also become a collective narratee, the audience's direct

³³ 'Nel cinema, paesaggio significa non solo rapporto fra personaggio e spazio, fra uomo e mondo, ma anche rapporto fra diversi livelli di sguardo; c'è l'osservatore, che è un personaggio, e la cinepresa, che osserva l'osservatore'. Sandro Bernardi, *Il paesaggio nel cinema italiano* (Venice: Marsilio, 2002), p. 16.

³⁴ The song in Sicilian dialect *Vitti 'na crozza* opens the film with the tone of a popular ballad; the emigrant who often plays it during the story arguably embodies the spirit of the bard and, thus, of the folk itself as narrator.

³⁵ At the time of the film's release, acknowledging that he was sensitive to the public's tastes and preferences, Germi mentioned that his film seemed to be doing well with popular audiences: Pietro Germi, 'Lettere' (1951), in *Pietro Germi, la frontiera e la legge*, pp. 30–31 (p. 30).

representative in the text. These mechanisms ensure that spectators understand the film is about themselves and are forced to identify with the marginalized other, the *foresti*, the ‘strangers at home’. Thus, the pact of acceptance and trust that should gradually develop between audience and film is prefigured by the film’s narrative and communicative structures.

During the film, the figure of the enunciator alternatively hides and renounces its distinctive authorial voice to embrace a popular and collective narrative, as told by a bard; or else emerges as an epic narrator capable of using an ample spectrum of cultural and filmic references, and of resorting to formal and aesthetically self-conscious compositions. The travel sequences are those in which the enunciator is most invisible, and the story is mimetically narrated by, and is seen from, the point of view of the characters-seers. The enunciator, however, comes overtly to the fore at the end of the film, and has the last word in a long ‘oratory scene’ which was severely criticized by most reviewers, and which was a source of contrast between Germi and Fellini, who disliked its moralism.³⁶ It is the voice of the director himself that surfaces at the end of the story, over images of the characters framed from high above, in a bird’s-eye-view of the valley they must cross in order to reach the Alpine village ahead of them.

A certain type of voiceover was, of course, one of the most instantly recognizable features of the newsreel; but there is an obvious difference between the voice of history and authority used in *Paisà*, and Germi’s final voiceover. The latter mixes elements of the all-knowing ‘voice of God’ of a novel’s omniscient narrator, capable of reading into the characters’ minds, of summarizing the narrative, and looking into the future; and of an educator and moralist, who expresses his own view of the story, of society, and of life. It is noteworthy that, when commenting on the coldness of urban centres, and on the human solidarity that can instead develop in solitary places like mountains, Germi’s voice feigns a sincere, genuine manner, and acquires a layman’s unassuming tone. *Il cammino della speranza* ends with a populist enunciator who both lectures his spectators and attempts to come down to the level of his ideal, working-class audience. In so doing, it hopes to be believed on the basis of fundamental, shared, popular human values, hence strengthening the social trust and the text’s realistic credentials.

The enunciator’s voice does even more; it directly engages with the film’s ideological core, and puts forward a remapping of Italy after Fascism. It unmasks the artificiality of the Fascist mapping of Italy as a glorious empire in which regional, cultural, ideological, gender, and class differences were composed behind a façade of social unity and relentless progress. Indeed, it discloses and denounces the artfulness of cartography when it declares that: ‘i confini sono tracciati sulle carte, ma sulla terra come Dio la fece, per quanto si percorrano i mari, per quanto si cerchi e si frughi lungo il corso dei fiumi e lungo il crinale delle montagne, non ci sono confini, su questa terra’.

But what does the film’s remapping of Italy amount to? Having embraced neorealism’s exploratory spirit, *Il cammino della speranza* replaced geopolitical cartography with the direct examination of the country, and showed it as a deeply split and

³⁶ Pietro Germi, ‘Il mio film più cattivo’ (1961), in *Pietro Germi, la frontiera e la legge*, pp. 44–51 (p. 46).

diverse reality — north and south, country and city, rich and poor, landlords and hired hands, miners and peasants. It is a country in deep turmoil, whose great contradictions have not yet been resolved; and in which spare signs of modernization coexist with exceptionally archaic realities. It is a stifling bureaucracy and police state, whose laws criminalize the poor, and allow the exploiter to go unpunished. It still is a society in which, as André Bazin famously wrote of *Ladri di biciclette*, the poor have to steal from the poor in order to survive.

However, *Il cammino della speranza* has a utopian dimension. While casting its eye on an impoverished and liminal Italy, it suggests that liminality may also allow for positive outcomes and the development of idealistic zones, in which solidarity prevails over hostility and antagonism. There are two such places in the film. One is the yard of the Emilia farm, a place of work during the day, and relaxation and gathering at night; here, with the complicity of the dark, the Bergamo peasants and the Sicilian miners share a decent meal and a dance, in one of the rare moments of relief, and even joy, of the film. The second is the border between Italy and France, along which the French police and the illegal emigrants meet, scrutinize each other for long instants, and finally go their separate ways, exchanging a salute from the distance. Limens and borders, thus, not only separate and confine; they may also allow for exceptional moments of solidarity, which defy the prevalent socioeconomic logic.

This utopian undercurrent ultimately shapes the film's remapping of Italy; despite his predominantly negative portrayal of a vast, diverse, and disconnected national territory, Germi still chose to enclose its space within the borders of his film, thus making the nation possible. From the white, snow-covered frontier, the voiceover invites us to turn and mentally contemplate the white Sicilian village; in so doing, it minimizes regional diversity and distance, and ideally connects far north and far south, performing an all-embracing gaze on the national territory.³⁷

Similarly, three years earlier Rossellini had chosen to embrace the nation within the limits of his film. However, as Restivo observes, 'Rossellini ends his film not on "solid" images but on the fluidity of the sea'. The indeterminacy itself of the Po River's foggy marshes subverts 'any notion of an articulable national boundary'.³⁸ The discourse of authority, introduced in *Paisà* by the voiceover of an enunciator-historian observing the events from above and announcing the impending positive outcome of the end of the war, was undermined by the close-up of the partisans' horrific death in the water, in the here-and-now of a story abruptly left without retribution and without closure. Thus, *Paisà* allowed its ideological statement to surface from the fluidity and openness of a missing boundary (of the film, of the nation). *Il cammino della speranza* ends, instead, on a rock-hard mountain and on an official frontier and, thus, it does map Italy as a nation — a working-class nation, whose unity and success ultimately depend on its people's ability to overcome divisions and express human solidarity, as the voiceover claims. Such unambiguous enunciation of a generic populist ideology contradicts and, at least in part, invalidates the film's drive

³⁷ It is also significant that *Il cammino della speranza* is not a fragmentary film in episodes like *Paisà* and *Natale al Campo 119*; the same characters as a community manage to cross the whole national territory from region to region.

³⁸ Restivo, pp. 30, 33.

to the exploration of a historical reality, and its specific critique of post-Fascist Italian society's treatment of subordinate classes. As such, it is a point of crisis of the film's neorealist realism.

Restivo noted that, 'as the Italian Christian Democratic government solidified its power from 1948 into the early fifties, neorealism too lost its sense of radical openness (to be sure, a sense that was evident only in a handful of neorealist films, those which, like *Paisà*, we now consider the exemplars of neorealism)'.³⁹ *Il cammino della speranza* is at its most open, and at its most realistic, when it mobilizes the cinematic gaze through its characters-seers, and directs it with indexical thirst and exploratory purposefulness on an underprivileged, unfamiliar, roadside Italy. However, the time of radical openness was already over; and, after *Paisà*, the successful negotiation of realism and ideology had become more difficult to accomplish.

³⁹ Restivo, p. 23.