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**The Image of Truth:**
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by


Edoardo Giovanni Zavarella


A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of


Doctor of Philosophy


in Anthropology


in the Graduate Division of the


University of California, Berkeley


Committee in Charge:

Prof. Paul Rabinow
Prof. Stefania Pandolfo
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Fall 2012

Abstract


The Image of Truth:
Portable technology and Truth-practices in Contemporary Italian Video-journalism.

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Edoardo Giovanni Zavarella

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, Berkeley

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In this dissertation I examine the forms and possibilities of truth-speaking in contemporary Italian news and media industry. I ask the following questions: 1) What does an Italian contemporary journalist need to do in order to be acknowledged as a truth-teller? 2) How does technological innovation, and in particular portable video-technology, influence self-reflexivity? 3) What kind of relation to the political present does truth-telling enable?

I assume Italy's news and media industry as a "case-study" rather than as a self-enclosed field because my focus is on a problem rather than on a "culture". The approach followed in this dissertation is thus a conceptual one: rather than highlighting the Italian cultural specificity, I seek to conceptually articulate *problems in news and media* that, while more manifest in Italy, belong to contemporary news and media industry per se. Approaching Italian journalism as a "case-study" enables the author to address a more general topic: the transformation of contemporary forms of self-reflexivity in the sway of technological and political change, and, in particular, of that quintessential form of self-reflexivity that is truth-speaking. Since I adopt a conceptual approach, I explore, where I find it necessary, "cases" seemingly "far away from the field", such as the semiotics of all-news channel Aljazeera's website (Chapter II); the ethics of BBC's treatment of the Libyan revolution (Chapter III); or the use of portable media in the Libyan revolution itself (Chapter IV). Every chapter focuses on a specific aspect of truth-speaking: its relation to self-reflexivity, to economy, to technology, and to aesthetics.

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## Acknowledgments

I would like to begin acknowledging all the people that helped me transforming the somewhat ordinary Ph.D. experience into an enthusing adventure – an adventure of thought, of life – by thanking Hubert Dreyfus, to whom I owe a great deal. In particular, I want to thank him to invite me to Berkeley in summer 2004 to conduct research for my undergraduate dissertation on Michel Foucault. By trusting the e-mails of an unknown Italian student who, on the other side of the globe, was enthused with the book that him and Paul Rabinow had written together – what startling power to change people's existence do good books have! – he enabled me to meet the book's co-author, the then skeptical Paul Rabinow, who afterwards became my advisor in the Ph.D. program in Anthropology, and my master of thinking.

To Paul goes my deepest, warmest gratitude for the innumerable lessons taught over five years. For teaching me that intellectual restlessness is a thinker's pride; that the only critique worth doing is the type of critique that changes lives; and – the greatest gift – that rejoining life and thinking is neither an action, nor a series of actions, nor a process, but rather a problem. All these teachings were transmitted through seminars, books, and, above all, through semi-private conversations in those strange moments of suspension that are office hours, whose weekly attendance, almost uninterrupted over five years, has been of inestimable value to me. I will miss all of it.

Office hours must have been my way out of the nightmarish daily academic routine, and Stefania Pandolfo is the one who, during our meetings, taught me more than anybody else how to think through the ghosts that haunt our everyday lives. I would like to thank her for teaching me that there is no point in looking closer and closer to something, because the essential neither lies in plain view in the glimmering surface of the visible, nor hides in the abysses of things; rather, that truly essential is only our desire to look at things from a different angle. I would like to thank her also for her attentive care when the ghosts that haunt my life were a little more manifest than they should ever be.

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## Chapter I


## Introduction

In this dissertation I examine the forms and possibilities of truth-speaking in contemporary Italian news and media industry. I focus on (1) how Italian journalists *need to be* in order to be acknowledged as truth-tellers; (2) the ways in which technological innovation, and in particular portable video-technology, influences self-reflexivity; and (3) the ways in which truth-telling relates to the political present.

I assume Italy's news and media industry as a "case-study" rather than as a self-enclosed field. My approach is indeed a *conceptual* one: rather than highlighting the Italian cultural specificity, I seek to conceptually articulate *problems in news and media* that, while more manifest in Italy, belong to the contemporary news and media industry per se. Adopting a "conceptual approach" will enable me to explore "cases" seemingly "far away from the field", such as the semiotics of all-news channel Aljazeera's website (Chapter III); the ethics of BBC's treatment of the Libyan revolution (Chapter IV); or the use of portable media in the Libyan revolution itself (Chapter V). What links all these cases is the general theme of truth-speaking; thus, every chapter focuses on a specific aspect it: truth-speaking in relation to self-reflexivity, to economy, to technology, and to aesthetics.

It is almost three decades that, on the sway of the 1960s and 1970s philosophical critiques of "writing" and of the objectifying tendencies of the human sciences, anthropologists have begun to take up ethnography as an experiment rather than as the transparent medium for communicating one's "findings" in "the field". Clifford and Marcus (ed.) (1986), Rabinow (1996), Pandolfo (1997), Massumi (2002), are few of such experiments that had the manifest objective of breaking the established codes of anthropological writing. In Rabinow (2003), the link between forms of writing and modes of inquiry is explicitly thematized:

*An anthropology of the actual works with problems, diagnoses, and exemplar, rather than theories, hypotheses, and data set…. I advocate pursuing in our thought and writing something like a motion, through different scales and different subject positions, that Starobinski proposes in the quote and exemplifies in his criticism* [the quote is from Starobinski's *L'Oeil Vivant* E.Z.]. *Such movement is easy to initiate and hard to master. Yet I firmly believe that in the actual conjuncture of things, it is a paramount challenge for philosophy and the human sciences to experiment with forms that will be, if not fully adequate to, at least cognizant of, the need for such movement through scale and subjectivity* (136).

Following Rabinow's suggestion, I endeavor to approach the movement of transformation of journalistic subjectivities through the different "scales" of local history and global dynamics; microphysical journalistic practice and macro-physical technological milieu; personal self-reflexivity and general ethical prescriptions. I assume "journalism" as my main point of articulation because of journalism's fundamental implication with truth – we shall see how my informants understand the relation between

truth and one-Self, truth and politics, and truth and technology, and how their understanding of those relations mark their unique journalistic style(s). Analysis will thus be oriented by the following questions:

1) Journalistic practices mediate journalists' access to reality: consequently, a transformation of practices affects the way journalists "see" or "approach" events. Technological and economic mutations both change the conditions of production of journalistic texts, and stimulate different subjective responses to change. How do journalists' specific reactions to technological and economic change affect journalists' access to reality? This question will guide analysis in Chapters I and II.

2) Organization of journalistic labor affects journalistic reporting. This is known to American sociology since the "newsroom ethnographies" of the 1970s[1]. The present analysis, however, is interested less in how organization of labor affects journalistic reporting, than on how it affects *truth-practices*. Newsroom ethnographies focus on the plural options for journalistic reporting vis-à-vis *fixed events*. The current analysis is interested in showing what comes to constitute an event worth reporting in the first place. This question will be addressed in Chapters III and IV.

3) How does "technological innovation" affect journalism? Contemporary portable video-technology enables video-makers to both film dramatic actions from very close, and to operate with an unprecedented number of aesthetic options to capture the flow of events. This means that both one's familiarity with one's video-camera, and one's capacity for quick aesthetic reflection, are paramount in constructing "narratives of real events". How do the physical and aesthetic qualities of portable new media affect the forms of journalistic reporting? What is influence does portable technology bear on storytelling? This question, which intersects aesthetic micro-practices, portable technology, and self-reflexivity, is addressed in Chapter V, where I discuss my experience as a video-journalist during the Libyan campaign of liberation in the summer 2011.

These questions will guide anthropological analysis of contemporary Italian journalistic practices through the multifaceted Italian present. Few introductory words on this multifaceted present follow.

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[1] Tuchman, Gaye. 1978. *Making News: A study in the construction of reality*. New York: Free Press; Gans, Herbert. 1979. *Deciding What's News: A study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time*. New York: Vintage Book; Fishman, Mark. 1980. *Manufacturing the News*. Austin: Texas University Press.

## 1. Contemporary Italian Media

Italians call *First Republic* to period 1945-1992, when Italian interior politics were decisively influenced by the geopolitical context of the Cold War, and *Second Republic* the period 1993-to the present, characterized by the political affirmation of media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi. During the First Republic Italian politics hinged on the conflict between a massive filo-NATO Catholic Party, and a massive filo-Warsaw Communist Party. Since the Yalta Powers decided that Italy was to belong to the NATO sphere of influence, and since the Italian Communist Party never succeeded in seizing the majority in the Parliament, a coalition led by the Catholic party governed Italy, election by election, for 47 years. It is true that the Catholic party and its allies succeeded in the tasks of reconstructing Italian infrastructures and of developing a modern industrial economy byway of classical Keynesian policies; in the long run, however, the lack of change in political power proved detrimental, for it gave rise, as usual, to massive bribery and corruption. In the period 1982-1992, the last 10 years of the First Republic, corruption and bribery had become "systemic", so to speak, so that the costs of new infrastructures became unsustainable. The paradoxical outcome of this situation was that the Italian state was on the verge of bankruptcy in spite of the fact that private entrepreneurship was flourishing and that Italian families were wealthy.

This state of things was brought to the end in less than one year. In 1992, an obscure magistrate from Milan, Antonio Di Pietro, began to investigate upon a member of the local Socialist Party, suspected of corruption. What started as a local "case", was soon to become the most famous judicial investigation of Italian history, *Mani Pulite*, [Clean Hands] as Di Pietro and his colleagues from the Milan *Procura* succeeded in finding the evidence of the "bribery system" that linked together the Italian ruling parties, from their local representatives up to their national leaders, and the more or less famous members of the financial and industrial Italian elites.

The unprecedented scandal swept away the Italian ruling parties and changed the dynamics of the Italian political system almost overnight. When media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi founded his own party *Forza Italia*, and, at his first run, became Prime Minister in 1994, the Italian *Second Republic* was born. Since the proportional electoral system of the First Republic was deemed the main responsible for the lack of alternation in power, the Second Republic adopted the British model first-past-the-post. This electoral system privileged Berlusconi's own party Forza Italia, and the main leftist party PDS (former communist party that had changed name in 1991). The Second Republic thus hinges on the contraposition and on the alternation between these two.

Many observers maintain that the Second Republic also came to an end on November 10, 2011, when Berlusconi resigned from Prime Minister two years before the ending of his mandate, and a new Italian Government composed of "technicians" – critics say *technocrats* – was formed, with the objective of navigating Italy out of the most important financial, political and social crisis of its recent history. It goes without saying that this crisis was determined both by the massive sovereign debt that the First Republic left as a legacy to the Second Republic, and by the political ineptitude of the Second Republic ruling parties (hence by Berlusconi himself, by his allies, and by his main opponents).

Whether Italy will succeed in giving rise to a Third Republic, hopefully better than the Second, we shall see in the next years. What is relevant for the present analysis is that that media analysts, journalists, and opinion-makers, are advocating a reformation of the press and media system as one of the most urgent policies of "new Italy". If another institutional and political system is to come – so the reasoning goes – it is unthinkable that Berlusconi keeps his media Empire. Arguments to support this view range from economic, to institutional, to legalistic. Perhaps a schematization will help clarifying the extent of Berlusconi's media influence and the terms of the question:

1) In Italy, there are 7 cable television channels: RAI 1, RAI 2, RAI 3, Rete4, Canale5, Italia1, and La7. They share 82% of the total television audience (only since 2008 has Satellite Television substantially incremented its audience).[2]

2) Berlusconi is the direct owner of 3 (out of 7) cable television channels (Rete4, Canale5, and Italia1).

3) The Italian Parliament elects the Directional Board of the 3 national television channels (RAI 1, RAI 2, and RAI 3). Thus, while state-television is formally independent from political parties, in practice is *decisively influenced* by them. This "distortion" is by no means imputable to Berlusconi, who became Prime Minister long after state television's subjection to political parties had become a "given". In any case, insofar as leader of the parliament majority party, he is able to extend his influence on 2/3 of state owned television channels (RAI 1, and RAI 2. RAI 3 has always been under the influence of the Italian Communist Party and of its cultural environment).[3]

4) Berlusconi directly owns the *monopolist* Italian advertising company, *Publitalia*, and his television company, *Mediaset*, possesses 33% of *Endemol*, producer of international television entertainment[4]. These "properties" have always been underestimated in media analyses; however, insofar as advertisement and entertainment are the main sources of funding of the news industry, *Publitalia* and *Endemol* are perhaps the most strategic properties in Berlusconi's media empire.

5) Furthermore, Berlusconi owns two major national newspapers, *IlGiornale* and *Il Foglio*, and the most Italian publishing company, *Mondadori*, publisher of 27% of books published in 2010, and of 35% of the magazines and tabloid issued in the same year[5].

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[2] The data are available online at www.auditel.it/dati.htm
[3] Bechelloni, Giovanni. 1995. *Giornalismo o Postgiornalismo?*. Napoli: Liguori; and "Il silenzio eloquente e il passato come capro espiatorio"," in: Carlo Sorrentino (ed.) 2005. *Narrare il quotidiano: il giornalismo italiano tra locale e globale*. Firenze: Mediascape, pp. 3-11; Sorrentino, Carlo. 2002. *Il giornalismo. Che cos'è e come funziona*. Roma: Carrocci. Murialdi, Paolo. 2006. *Storia del giornalismo italiano: dale gazzette a Internet*. Bologna: il Mulino.
[4] Data available online at the websites: www.mediaset.it; www.endemol.it; www.publitalia.it.
[5] Data available online at: www.mondadori.it

The list, to be sure, may continue indefinitely. For instance, with Berlusconi's direct share, or indirect financial interest, in telecommunication, insurance companies, banks, distribution companies, and so on; or with Berlusconi's ownership of one of the most popular football teams on the planet, AC Milan.

How could a media tycoon become Prime Minister in a democratic regime? The answer, from a legislative point of view, is easy: Italian law does not prevent a media tycoon from becoming Prime Minister. In the intricate Italian legislative corpus there is not a single norm that regulates cases such as Berlusconi's.

Why, when the Italian left sized the majority of the parliament a first time in 1996-2001, and again in 2006-2008, was the regulation of this "blind spot" of Italian legislation ruled out of the government agenda? This is an interesting question but I will leave it to political analysts. What is relevant to this dissertation is that in the past 18 years the Italian news and media industry had to come to terms with its manifest embedment with political power. Having illustrated Berlusconi's media power, I would now like to describe the ways in which people dealt with it. The picture of contemporary Italian media in fact is less negative than it may appear at a first sight.

Italians who are committed to contrast Berlusconi's media hegemony normally approach the "Italian anomaly" in two ways. The first approach focuses on the history and on the rhetoric of Berlusconi's media power: analysts look at how Berlusconi came to dominate the Italian news industry, and analyze the rhetorical strategies that enable his media to dismantle "facts" into a free-floating play of opinions. The second approach to the "Italian anomaly" consists in *reading* Italy as one of the most manifest symptoms – a particularly problematic one to be sure – of the passage from capitalism to late-capitalism. This approach reads the First Republic's social and cultural forms as hybrid expressions of free-market and Communist-oriented policies, and Berlusconi's televisions and political agenda as incarnations of neo-capitalism at its worse – for their sole goal is to erode the substance of democratic participation and to replace it with the endless interchangeability of void "images[6]". Both approaches are particularly suited to political activism, and in fact they recur in public lectures, television debates, conferences, and protests, thanks to the activism of common people, journalists, students, sociologists, and so on.

Whether more prone to explain the Italian anomaly as a distortion of the correct functioning of the press, or more willing to see it as the expression of a larger neo-capitalist order, these two readings share the vision that contemporary Italian news industry stands in need of remediation. This is the second order observation that interests me. What form does remediation assume in contemporary Italy? If we assume that social actors remediate situations of discordancy by giving existing concepts and practices new

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[6] It is worth noticing that as early as 1989, David Harvey spoke of President Ronald Reagan in terms that are perfectly applicable to contemporary Italy: *"Strangest of all is how such a President could leave office ride so high on the wave of public affection, even though more than a dozen senior members of his administration had either been accused or been found guilty of serious infringement of legal procedures and blatant disregard for ethical principles. The triumph of aesthetics over ethics could not be plainer"*. Harvey, David. 1989. *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, p. 323

meanings[7], we will answer the question if we will be able to point to an existing set of journalistic practices that has taken on new meanings in recent Italian journalistic history. Is there such thing in contemporary Italy? There can be no hesitation in answering this question, because in the past ten years Italian audiences have witnessed the flowering of one of journalism's noble subgenres: investigative journalism.

Here are few data that will illustrate how the "Berlusconi era", which for many represents the worst period of Italian news industry, has also been the ground of a spectacular mushrooming of investigative journalism:

1) In 1997, Milena Gabanelli invents investigative journalism TV program *Report*, aired by state television RAITRE. Gabanelli conceived of *Report* as a low-budget TV program. Young freelance journalists, trained by Gabanelli herself, armed with (then) new portable Sony *prosumer* (professional + consumer) video-cameras, produced ten 15-minutes-long video-reportages that they would then "sell" to Gabanelli. Today, *Report* produces 20 1-hour-long video-investigations per years; it is broadcasted in primetime; and scores an astonishing 14% audience share in spite of its regular engagement with topics as complex as financial intrigue, environment frauds, mafia business, international financial flows, and so on. *Report* is praised as the creator of a school of authoritative, uncompromised, and commercially successful journalism.

2) In 1998 Carlo Lucarelli invents TV program *Blunotte*, also aired by state TV RAITRE. *Blunotte* reconstructs the most famous unresolved "cases" of the recent Italian past, ranging from famous assassinations that remained in the collective memory, to the most controversial acts of political terrorism of the turbulent 1970s and 1980s.

3) In 2004 all-news satellite TV channel *Rainews24* creates a small unit (5 journalists) exclusively dedicated to investigative journalism, and launches program *L'inchiesta*. *L'inchiesta* is specialized in international relations, and gives special attention to the Middle East and to Russia.

4) In 2008, famous Italian magazine *L'Espresso* enhances its existing investigative unit, and begins to produce multi-media investigations on mafia and immigration.

5) In 2007, a consortium of freelance journalists and of private financers creates publishing company *Chiarelettere*, specialized in investigative journalism. *Chiarelettere*'s publications meet unexpected commercial success.

6) In 2009 the flowering of investigative journalism is certified by the organization (and the great success) of the first *Festival del giornalismo d'inchiesta* in Marsala, Sicily (replied in 2010, and canceled in 2011 for "logistic problems").

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[7] This understanding of remediation is partially modeled on John Dewey's concept of "thinking" as developed in his 1916 *Reconstruction in Philosophy*. This part of Dewey's work will be discussed at the end of this introduction.

7) In 2009, a consortium of journalists, both freelance and non-freelance, launches the Master in Investigative Journalism in Milan and Rome, specialized in the use of informatics for investigative purposes.

8) In 2010, prominent Italian newspaper *laRepubblica,* launches *R'E Le Inchieste*. *R'E Le Inchieste* is a successful experiment in participative journalism, insofar the newspaper launches a weekly investigation on a topic decided by the readers.

9) In 2011, *Corriere della sera*, the most important Italian newspaper, starts *Reportime*, a multimedia project in collaboration with Milena Gabanelli's *Report*, thanks to which some of *Report*'s uncut footage is available at *Corriere della Sera*'s website.

This list could continue with local newspapers and televisions. A point worth noticing is that investigative journalists are the most open to experiment with audiences' participation. We may add that, in the plurality of their ideologies, visions, and opinions, all of my informants have openly said and practically demonstrated – not without a touch of coquetry – that what "gives meaning" to journalistic investigation in Italy today is the extraordinary popular participation.

This somewhat unexpected prestige calls for an explanation, and indeed many of my informants tried to make sense of it. Roughly speaking, they maintained that the social, politic, and economic situation is Italy is so degenerated, so far beyond the "normal" functioning of democracy, that common people feel compelled to take a greater interest in what is happening, and to form a clearer opinion about the complexity of present occurrences. The disoriented and hopeless Italian public opinion turns to investigative journalism because, in the absence of a political alternative to Berlusconi – the Italian left being a nullity – investigative journalism provides clarity and political commitment to truth, and hence can be truly seen as a form of democratic reaction.

Once again, however, we need to separate first and second order observations. While I agree with this interpretation, I would like to push analysis one step forward. There would be nothing noteworthy in the commercial success of investigative journalism in Italy, if by investigative journalism we meant the "anatomy of a murder" type of reporting: for instance, Truman Capote's journalistic inquiry *In Cold Blood*. Bourgeois societies' fascination with gruesome spectacles and murder has been investigated upon so many times that we do not need to repeat the argument here.

What is noteworthy in the mushrooming of investigative journalism in contemporary Italy, however, is that it is seemingly an ethical form of investigative journalism: what we may call political investigative journalism. Is it possible that ethical practices entered the circuits of capitalist distribution? We shall see in the next chapter what are the (many) shortcomings of this flowering of investigative journalism. For now, it is sufficient to notice that political investigations might be particularly palatable to Italian leftists because they call into question the "established narrative" of the Italian present and recent past. A whole class of bestselling investigations targets the so-called "mysteries of the *First Republic*": its 25 years of political terrorism, its violent collective struggles, its political assassinations, and so on. All these investigations point to shed

light on the larger contexts of the Cold War geopolitics. Another type of bestselling investigations targets the Second Republic and in particular the obscure origins of Berlusconi's wealth, with the aim of calling into question the legitimacy of Berlusconi's political role. The problem with both kinds is that, given the mixing of rhetoric genres and more generally the cultural momentum, it is not always easy to identify which investigations spur out of, and genuinely communicate, true ethical commitment to analyze the past and the present, and which ones can be seen as hybrid forms of postmodern entertainment.

It is a common saying that Modernity is better understood in those places in which its project is unfinished. In spite of its (declining) economic power, Italy, with its still persistent flows of internal migration, its weak and instable national identity, its institutionalized corruption system, its mafia, but also with its high-quality city life, its successful model of decentralization of political and economic power, can be seen as a instance of unfinished modernity in the heart of advanced capitalism societies. If Modernity was a project, the Contemporary, with its lack of project, is a problem. In the problems of the Italian unaccomplished modernity I will delve in the next chapters.

## Chapter II

## Finding the Form in Journalism

This chapter sets out to find the proper object of the anthropological analysis of journalism; thus, I will interweave excerpts from my first conversation with Milena Gabanelli, the creator of the Investigative Journalism TV show *Report*, and analytical sections in which I extrapolate from some of her (many) insightful self-reflexive observations.

### 1. A conversation with Milena Gabanelli

**Edoardo:** *Milena Gabanelli, when did your career as a journalist start?*

**Milena:** *In 1981.*

**Edoardo:** *At the time neither you, nor any other TV journalist worked alone.*

**Milena:** *Correct. I began to work alone only ten years later, in 1991. It happened by chance, when I was covering the Balkans War. I was in Belgrade, alone, waiting to meet the rest of my troupe. I had a Super8 video-camera because the production company for which I was working needed war footage. For reasons that will be to long to tell, my troupe never made it so Belgrade, hence I decided to take a day-trip to Vucovar before coming back to Italy, so that I could at least bring back some images. Little did I know that Vucovar was going to be besieged precisely the day after my arrival! For 10 days, until the fall of Vucovar, I could not get out…*

**Edoardo:** *What a baptism...*

**Milena:** *Yes, I have to say that it was my first time in many ways. My first time in the frontline, my first time alone… from that moment on, however, I always worked alone.*

**Edoardo:** *Why did you decide to work alone?*

**Milena:** *I had to cut costs. My reportages from abroad were costly and were not appealing for Italian audiences. So I thought that I may start cutting costs by working alone. To be sure, I had always been a bit uneasy with depending on someone else…*

**Edoardo:** *Do you mean your collaborators?*

**Milena:** *Yes. Since I put all of my energies and attention into my reportages, I could work for a whole day without eating or sleeping. I was aware, however, that not everybody was used to that. I knew that I was demanding a lot from my collaborators, in*

*particular from my cameraman and my assistant. So, after my experience in Yugoslavia I learned that working alone meant essentially three things: (1) low cost; (2) deciding my own time-schedule; and (3) having the opportunity to craft a product that resembled me [my emphasis].*

"Crafting a product that resembles its author" means imprinting one's "style" on the product. We may thus say that Milena Gabanelli was after her personal journalistic style. What "journalistic style" is, however, is not as easy to understand as it appears. Thus, I will take a detour through problems of literary analysis in order to obtain a preliminary understanding of "style".


## 2. Literature

Decades of literary criticism have persuasively argued that a literary text triggers an aesthetic experience in virtue of its structural unity, rather than in virtue of the biography of its author, or of the circumstances of its creation. The reason why *La recherche du temps perdu* means so much to its readers is because, and only because, the text is able to communicate in virtue of the unique arrangement of its multiple "layers" – narrative, linguistic, syntactical – and of the unique arrangement of the multiple "elements" of each layer – dramatic pacing, linguistic register, syntactical experimentalism – and not because Proust wrote more than half of it from his death-bed, or because the book tells us anything about Marcel. These premises lead to the conclusion that the circumstances of creation of literary artifacts, do not, or ought not to, influence the way in which the literary text communicates its particular truth to the reader.

Of course, separating the creator's personality and *Lebenswelt* from his/her work, and viewing the text's structural relations as the generators of the reader's experience of the artistic text, does not imply conceiving the literary text as a "transcendent", or "pure" entity, absolutely separate from the fuss of mankind's history. The early proponents of French structural or formal approaches to literary texts, such as Roland Barthes, or, from a different angle, the early Michel Foucault, just to name two among the most famous, recognized that it has been primarily as an "engagement with the literary form" that history has manifested itself to artists since 1848.[8]

Naturally one must understand what it is that both Barthes and Foucault meant by "literary form", for one of the most important points they both made, was that along with Modernity a new way of conceiving "form" also came about, a conception that Roland Barthes calls *écriture*:

*A language is therefore a horizon, and style a vertical dimension, which together map out for the writer a Nature, since he does not choose either. Language functions negatively, as the initial limit of the possible, style is a Necessity which binds the writer's humor to*

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[8] Famously this point is argued by Barthes in: Barthes, Roland. 1953. *Le degree zéro de l'écriture*. Paris: Éditions de seuil, and by Foucault in Foucault, Michel. 1969. Qu'est que un auteur? In: *Dits et écrits* (1994)). In this light, one can read the glimmering *ekfrasis* that opens Foucault's *Les mots et le choses* (whose literal translation, it should not be forgotten, is "words and things" and not "The Order of Things"), as an ironic homage to literature's powers to couple words and things.

*his form of expression…. In both cases he deals with a Nature, that is, a familiar repertory of gestures, a gestuary, as it were, in which the energy expended is purely operative, serving here to enumerate, there to transform, but never to appraise or signify a choice.*

*Now every form is also a Value, which is why there is room, between a language and a style, for another formal reality: writing. Within any literary form there is a general choice of tone, **of ethos,** if you like, and this is precisely where the writer shows himself clearly as individual because this is where he commits himself* (13).[9]

With the concept of *écriture*, which made him famous, Barthes tried to capture a specifically modern ethos: French writers after 1848 were not simply concerned with the form as any other artist in any other epoch had been; they developed a unique understanding and a unique practice of the literary form, because for the first time *they took up their engagement with the artistic form as a response to a historical situation*, and as a manifestation of their position with respect to that historical situation:

*A language and a style are data prior to all problematics of language, they are the natural product of Time and of the person as a biological entity; but the formal identity of the writer is truly established only outside the permanence of grammatical norms and stylistic constants, where the written continuum, first collected and enclosed within a perfectly innocent linguistic nature, at last becomes a total sign, **the choice of a human attitude,** the affirmation of a certain Good. It thus commits the writer to manifest and communicate a state of happiness or malaise, and links the form of his utterance, which is at once normal and singular, to the vast History of the Others. A language and a style are blind forces; **a mode of writing** is an act of historical solidarity. A language and a style are objects; a mode of writing is a function: it is the relationship between creation and society, the literary language transformed by its social finality, form considered as a human intention and thus linked to the great crises of History* (14).[10] [my emphasis]

Pierre Bourdieu, with his concept of "literary field"[11] as the discursive milieu that shapes a novelist's self-understanding as a "creator", agreed with Roland Barthes that the artists' obsessive search for original forms that we have witnessed in the past 150 years is a way for artists to take up their artistic practice, one among many ways of responding to *a specific problematization* of the aesthetic experience.

This way of conceptualizing literature allows us to consider the engagement with literary practice as a historical ethos. In *Anthropos Today*, Paul Rabinow defines the task of Anthropology this way:

*The challenge is threefold: (1) to provide a toolkit of concepts for conducting inquiries into the contemporary world in its actuality; (2) to conduct those inquiries in a manner that makes the relations, connections, and disjunctions between logos and ethos apparent and available to oneself and others, that is to say, to make those relations part of the*

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[9] Barthes (1953).
[10] Barthes (1953).
[11] Bourdieu, Pierre. 1992. *Les règles de l'art: Genèse et structure du champ littéraire*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

*inquiry itself as well as part of a life; (3) to take into account the pathos encountered and engendered by such an understanding, and to find a place for it within the form under construction* (12).[12]

Perhaps we can appropriate Barthes' *écriture* through Rabinow's concepts of logos and ethos: *écriture* can thus aptly be understood as a specific way of connecting logos and ethos in the practice of the French *belles lettres* between 1848 and the 1950s.


## 3. Modern Forms of Engagement

Terry Eagleton argues that in the practices and aesthetic reflections of Modern Europe the work of art *changed status*:

*Conceptions of the unity and integrity of the work of art, for example, are commonplaces of an "aesthetic" discourse which stretches back to classical antiquity; but what emerges from such familiar notions in the late eighteenth century is the curious idea of the work of art as a kind of subject. It is, to be sure, a peculiar kind of subject, this newly defined artifact, but it is a subject nonetheless. And the historical pressures which give rise to such strange style of thought, unlike concepts of aesthetic unity or autonomy in general, by no means extend back to the epoch of Aristotle* (4).[13]

The new status of the work of art required (and at the same time provoked) new ways of experiencing the artistic text. Bourdieu spent a great deal showing how "Literature" became a professional field between the end of the nineteen and the beginning of the twentieth century (Bourdieu 1992). We can perhaps complement Bourdieu's story as follows: the growth of literature departments after WWII contributed to the *professionalization of readership*, and, in particular after the 1970s, literature departments started to propose/adopt different theories of "textual relation" – I intentionally used "textual relations" rather than "textual interpretation" since one of the hottest academic debates of the past decades has precisely been whether texts ought to be "interpreted" or "used", "deconstructed" or "re-contextualized", etc.[14] As any other theory, the theories of textual relations also emerged from a coalescence of institutional and political agendas, epistemic premises, and practical demands: within the plurality of positions, however, all theories maintained *the centrality of the text itself* as the proper object of criticism.

This means, however, that our current approaches to textual signification are largely informed by strategies and solutions that were originally conceived for literary texts. This is particularly true of ways of understanding the relation between authors,

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[12] Rabinow, Paul. 2003. *Anthropos Today: Reflections on Modern Equipment*; Princeton: University Press
[13] Eagleton, Terry. 1990. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers.
[14] For reflections on this debate and its significance see: Eco, Umberto. 1992. *Interpretation and Overinterpretation: a Debate with Richard Rorty, Jonathan Culler, and Christine Brooke-Rose*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press; Abrams, M.H. 1989. *Doing Things With Texts: Essays in Criticism and Critical Theory*. New York: Norton; Jonathan Culler (ed.). 1982. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

texts, and history. If, however, the analytic grid for understanding the relations between authors, texts, and history, is the one invented for literary texts, then the specificity of any other textual production is glossed over, and scholarly analyses run the risk of foreclosing important research-possibilities. As a matter of fact, approaching journalistic texts with critical strategies drawn from literary criticism becomes particularly problematic because analysis simply falls short of conceptual instruments to understand the connections between journalists, the textual realities that they produce, their commitment to truth, and their engagement with their time.

Ideally, in fact, there are at least two ways of understanding Roland Barthes' concept of *écriture*. As I already mentioned in the first paragraph, one can understand it as a way to capture the specific way of transforming a logos into ethos that certain French Novelists and Poets came up with in a determined historical moment, as an appropriate response to a complex historical transformation. This is the approach that will be followed here. Another way of understanding the concept of *écriture*, however, would consist in hypostatizing the concept into an ontology of Modern Writing, and thus positing that the "attention to the form" is, or, *ought to be*, the prerogative of all Modern Writings. The lurking risk of such an understanding of the concept of *écriture* would be that, starting with such premises, one could only conclude that any writing that is not form-oriented is "conservative", and that, on the contrary, the sole form of subversion of the communicative codes of our late-capitalist society is an artistic one.

The problem, however, is not to deny the validity of *analyses of forms*. I believe that, whether we like it or not, we are locked into a theoretical privileging of forms over contents, and we "measure" human practices according to a metric of innovation and originality. Rather, the problem is how to conduct a formal analysis of journalism without using ideas and methods conceived for literature. This problem means that before moving on, analysts should answer the preliminary question: *what is form in journalism?*


## 4. Journalistic Form

Both literary texts, and journalistic texts, are different from, say, train schedules, insofar as the formers *project textual authorship*, that is, they entail one, or multiple, entities that function as narrators.[15] While both journalistic and literary texts project textual authorship, however, literary texts only, as we saw, shall be approached, and analyzed, as being absolutely separate from their *empirical authors*,[16] whereas journalistic texts shall be considered as *non-absolutely separable from their empirical authors*:[17] hence, the subjectivity of journalists *matters* in journalistic texts.

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[15] See Eco, Umberto. 1979. Lector in Fabula. Milano: Bompiani

[16] The empirical author is the person who wrote the text in the plainest sense of the verb (see: Eco 1979).

[17] In the sway of the American and Anglo-saxon reception of Jacques Derrida's late work, many literature departments in the U.S. have been transformed into more generalized "Cultural Studies" departments. The changing of the name reflects a profound epistemological transformation: Derrida's followers held that maintaining the specificity of literary texts was no longer a productive theoretical option, as literary texts, like any other text, are products of a "textuality" that generates both texts, and their possible receptions. Moving from these premises, "cultural analysts" *do in fact* feel that they can legitimately apply methods that were originally set up for literary critique to virtually every manifestation of human "culture".

It follows that analysts should take into account subjectivity's role in the signifying functions of journalistic texts. It is well known that journalistic reporting is inevitably "subjective", even when it masks itself as objective. Does this imply that we shall give up any historical critique of journalistic forms because "anything goes"? Not necessarily. It means only that, if we want to provide a historical critique of journalistic forms, we shall recast our analytic focus on the relationship between journalistic texts and subjectivity. We can do so by taking into account journalists' own reflections on the matter:

**Milena:** *After my experience in Yugoslavia I learned that working alone meant essentially three things: (1) low cost; (2) deciding my own time-schedule; (3) having the opportunity to craft a product that resembled me. To be honest, I also thought that I could finally stop negotiating between my own desires and those of my collaborators (laughs)!*

**Edoardo:** *Of course! How could you work with people who weren't even willing to stay in a besieged city! (laughter)*

**Milena:** *Oh C'mon! (laughs). In any case I did not choose to go to Yugoslavia, I was sent there. The point is that I finally changed my way of working. At the time, producing reportages with the Super8 was a challenge: I needed to have very strong "contents" because footage was very low quality…* **So I thought: in order to justify the use of amateur-like images, my reportages need to deliver something that is impossible to deliver in any other way** [my emphasis]. *Thus I started to put myself in extremely dangerous situations, and everybody was happy: I produced reportages that guaranteed great results at low costs.*

Insofar as Gabanelli asked herself what might justify the use of certain images rather than others, her reasoning can legitimately be considered a form of *aesthetic reflection*. To be sure, it is a peculiar form of aesthetic reflection, perhaps one we are not used to. As we saw in the discussion of literature, Barthes maintains that the privileged object of modern artists' aesthetic reflexivity is *form*. Innovating the form received by the tradition is what makes an artist a Modern Artist. Gabanelli, on the contrary, does not think that innovating the form of journalistic messages is a watershed. The commitment to the innovation of forms is simply not a problem for a contemporary journalist, at least not for the journalists that I worked with. My informants, as any other journalist, were neither interested in "renewing the tradition" of investigative journalism, nor in inscribing themselves in a line of continuity/discontinuity with respect to certain journalistic-

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So the legitimate question: why did I construct my diagnosis as if none of these "theoretical adjustments" ever took place? While my objection to this paradigm is that it misses the specificity of textual productions and modes of subjugation *to non-literary texts*, the real answer to this question is another. The point is that, in spite of the inflamed debates around the status and limits of "texts" "contexts", and "textuality", I believe that it is still too early to see whether a "new" relation to texts will emerge from such a paradigm, or whether "Cultural Theory" will not turn out to be, as "Theory", "Deconstruction", and "New Criticism" before it, an epiphenomenon of a more profound historical dynamic whose trajectory we are still unable to trace.

practices; my informants were primarily interested in finding the most effective ways of obtaining the information that they wanted. Their enmeshment with history and with its movements is different than artists'. Here is Gabanelli again:

**Milena (continues):** *I started to put myself in extremely dangerous situations, in limit-situations, and everybody was happy: I produced low-budget reportages and I guaranteed great results.*

**Edoardo:** *For example?*

**Milena:** *Japanese Jacuza, first free elections in Cambodia...*

**Edoardo:** *What kind of contract did you have?*

**Milena:** *None. I was freelance.*

**Edoardo:** *Did you realize immediately the limits of the Super8?*

**Milena:** *Yes. Consider that I had a college degree in cinema.* ***But I did not care about the aesthetic limitations of the video-camera because I was much more interested in its journalistic potential: in particular, in the fact that when you are alone nobody pays attention to you, nobody considers you a threat…*** [my emphasis]

We may gloss Gabanelli's words by saying that small video-cameras encourage journalists to work alone by granting them *a different access to reality*. In the next chapter I will discuss the significance of this small revolution. For now it is sufficient to notice that video-journalism seemed from its very beginning a strong push towards the valorization of one's individuality. While Gabanelli was somehow temperamentally driven to working alone, the people who worked with her were much less so. Thus, she tried to create a venue that would attract *different* people:

**Milena:** *This is how Report was born. I was invited to give classes in various schools of journalism and to coordinate an internship at RAI. My director and I agreed that rather than offering the classical internship, we might take the opportunity to produce an experimental, fully new, low-cost TV program. We would train the students to produce mini-reportages with small video-cameras, and we would air the reportages at an absurd late night timeslot, something like 00.30am. It was a great success. Consider that 4 of those students are now Report's backbone…*

**Edoardo:** *In your opinion when was freelance video-journalism born?*

**Milena:** *To be honest I never asked myself this question. All I know is that back in the 1990s there was much less mobility. Anywhere I went to for my reportages, I always found that the only "insiders" were local freelance journalists working for Reuters or Associated Press. Always the same people providing news for the whole world… You see*

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*the problem? It does not sound very pluralistic does it? Freelance video-journalism offered the amazing opportunity to make world-journalism more pluralistic.*

**Edoardo:** *So in 1995 you had the opportunity to "form" some talented students, and they had the opportunity to shoot reportages that would be aired by RAITRE (a great opportunity I have to say). Then what happened?*

**Milena:** *After the first successful experiment I proposed to my director that we kept our collaboration with the students going, and that we created a full-reportage program. He authorized me, and he gave me a budget of 7,000 euros per episode, which was to include my salary, the editors' salaries, and a reward for the students who shot the reportage. As you can see that this was even less than a low-budget program…*

At this point in our conversation I, trapped in my academic approach to texts and human relations to texts, asked the following question, which, as it will be clear, did not make any sense to my interlocutor:

**Edoardo:** *When you started, what did you want Report's episodes to look like? What style did you want for your program?*

**Milena:** *To be completely honest, all I cared about was the content of the reportage. I always asked my collaborators: do we want to treat this argument? Well then: we need to have the juice. It is essential that, before we even start debating the "form", we need to have the evidence behind anything that we narrate. The narrative form of investigative journalism is pretty static, it does not leave much room for creativity.*

In this exchange it is clear that, while Milena did renew the practices of investigative journalism thanks to her intuition about the possibilities offered by Super8, *renewing narrative forms* was, not surprisingly, simply not an issue for her.

**Edoardo (continues):** *I must confess that this point is quite surprising to me, given that I always felt, watching Report, that you invented a new "language" in journalism. I also have to say that I am not the only one perceive this or to think so, as any time that I find, say, a favorable newspaper article, or anytime that I am conversing with other people about Report, I can't fail to note that we all seem to think that you invented a new language.*

[Please note that I while I was right in pointing to the fact that *Report* has invented a new language, i.e. that *Report* has produced a substantial innovation of the form of journalism, at the time of the interview I had not yet fully grasped the consequence that "to innovate the journalistic form" does not mean "innovating the narrative register" or "the format of the TV program/newspaper article", but rather "innovating the journalistic-practices through which the news are grasped in the first place". I will illustrate this point more thoroughly in the next chapter]

**Milena:** *My main "formal" concerns at the beginning of Report were two. First of all, how to transform a 10-minute reportage into a 60-minute reportage. I was used to 60-75 minutes reportages when we started, but my team wasn't. So we started working immediately on interviews, alternate montage, and so on. Secondly, I insisted from the start on the complete elimination of adjectives, on verbal chastity. Why? Because, first of all, if you work hard to obtain "strong contents" you can get rid of embellishments or "emphases" of any kind; secondly, because eliminating adjectives allowed us to reduce our partisanship (I use the word "reduce" because obviously absolute neutrality is impossible).*

[Notice again how Milena emphasizes "obtaining strong content"; it is here that the originality of the approach, the mark of authorship, and thus the forging of one's relation to the present, lies.]

**Edoardo:** *What about the almost absolute absence of the journalist herself from the video-investigation? We hear the voiceover but we almost never see the journalists during the narration. We seldom see them during the interviews. Isn't that an innovation of the form?*

**Milena:** *You tell me. Yes, it is perhaps an innovation of the form… But, that is because I think that the journalist must be present as authorial force. I let you see the journalist when s/he deals with a particularly complex situation, or when s/he asks a particularly evil question. That's it: when you ask a particularly evil question I want to see your face* [my emphasis].

[This is perhaps Milena's most revealing choice of words in highlighting that the innovation in journalistic language *is a consequence* of the innovation of truth-practices. A journalist's "authorial force", as she says, consists in in asking evil questions or putting oneself in complex situations].

**Edoardo:** *Let's go back to the beginning. The elimination of adjectives…*

**Milena:** *…Straight story-telling. Why is inquiry is called thus? Because it should be similar to the judiciary inquiry, which means that it should adhere to the facts themselves. So first of all you line up the facts; then, if you want, you can also add…*

**Edoardo:** *Ironic counterpoint*

**Milena:** *If it is witty, if it says something that you cannot say otherwise. Yes. Otherwise, if it states the obvious, no.*

**Edoardo:** *Let's change the subject. You told me at the very beginning that you studied cinema: do you have a model, any source of reference for your video-aesthetic?*

**Milena:** *Uhm... I wrote my dissertation on Resnais because I liked him. Resnais, unlike Godard, uses a very artificial pacing, a pacing that tries to capture people's inner life.*

*But if your question is "did you draw from Resnais for your own language?" my answer is: not at all. I developed my language on the field, I adapted my language to myself, to what I felt was closer to me. I made thousands of mistakes, to the extent that if I knew where many of my initial video-reportages were stored I would destroy them (laughter)!*

**Edoardo:** *Let's get back to the history of Report. After your first episodes you started to climb your channel schedule grid…*

**Milena:** *Yes. After 4 years in the timeslot from 10.00pm to 10.45pm, we moved to primetime in 2001. That was quite a challenge, because moving to primetime means a lot: first of all you have to guarantee a stable length, secondly you have to score high audience shares, thirdly, you have to keep the tension high because you are speaking to a certain kind of audience… I wanted to deal with all these constraints without betraying our way of working. I have to say that our editors always believed in us. At the beginning our audience shares were low; we used to score 7-8%; when we got to 9% we made a toast…*

**Edoardo:** *So what did you do?*

**Milena:** *I came up with an idea. Along with the reportages, which had to be 60 minutes long, every episode was also going to offer space for a sort of participatory journalism experiment. We would ask citizens to signal things to us, we would select the most interesting ones, and we would send one of our journalists in training to the place. This idea accomplished multiple things at once: it was a good opportunity for training, it kept the public's interest high, and it allowed us to solve the problem of length…*

This remark speaks to Milena Gabanelli's ability in and passion for experimenting with new journalistic forms. The next chapter will provide an analysis of *Report*'s innovations in the context of contemporary Italian journalism.

## 5. Conclusion

If we want to interpret historical transformations of current journalistic practices, we need to preliminary understand what the journalistic form is. The journalistic form cannot be understood in the same way as the literary form. Any time that I tried to force a "literary" understanding of form onto Gabanelli, she manifested her impatience and proudly argued for the autonomy of the journalistic form with respect to the artistic one. The journalistic form must be understood in its own terms, from within. Gabanelli's remarks help us to understand the journalistic form as the set of activities that enable the journalist a certain access to reality. The next chapter provides both an extended analysis of the journalistic form, and an assessment of *Report*'s formal innovations in the context of contemporary Italian journalism.

**Chapter III**


**They Got a Clue**
**Investigative Video-Journalism in Contemporary Italy**


As we saw in the previous chapter, Gabanelli originally conceived *Report* as a low-budget program run by enthusiastic young freelance journalists willing to work individually with small semi-professional video-cameras. Her plan was *to form* the young video-journalists (and herself), *to propose* Italian audiences a kind of television journalism they were not used to – direct, gripping, and ethically committed – and *to experiment* with new ways of organizing journalistic labor.

Today, fourteen years later, *Report* is the most popular Italian *investigative video-journalism* television program, and is considered the most authoritative journalistic venue in contemporary Italy, as acclaimed by its supporters as respected by its opponents. *Report* airs (in primetime) 20 formidable video-investigations per year, which are conducted by a team of 11 freelance video-journalists and co-edited by Gabanelli.

While, as I shall illustrate, the qualities of *Report*'s products are truly outstanding, we shall not forget nonetheless that *Report*'s critical acclaim and commercial success in Italy is to be contextualized in the crisis of legitimacy and credibility that has haunted Italian mainstream journalism and media ever since media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi started in 1994 his successful political career.

A sociological analysis may perhaps demonstrate that *Report*'s "internal" qualities, and *Report*'s "external" context, are somewhat interrelated, insofar as precisely the symbolic, financial, and social tensions that have characterized the Italian "journalistic field" (Bourdieu 1996) in the past 17 years have pushed ethically committed journalists to experiment with new forms of organization and new journalistic practices as more or less effective responses to a situation perceived as problematic. Sociological analysis may perhaps also track down the feedback effects that *Report*'s innovations have had on their context of emergence, focusing for instance on how Gabanelli created a new market niche with its specific communicative codes and audiences, or, perhaps most importantly, on how *Report* impacted the sphere of symbolic relations by creating a different economy of truth.

This anthropological analysis, however, will focus on the human dimension, that is to say, on the anthropological significance, of the new forms of organization and journalistic practices that have been invented by Gabanelli and her team.

In order to carry out my analysis, I rejoined two threads of contemporary anthropological research: the line of inquiry in media that privileges practices (Ortner 1984; Ginburg 2002; Hirschkind 2006; Postil 2010; Bird 2010), and Paul Rabinow's proposal of an "anthropology of the contemporary" (Rabinow 1996 and 2003).

Anthropological analyses of practices maintain that "*culture (in a very broad sense) constructs people as particular kinds of social actors, but social actors, through their living, on-the-ground, variable practices, reproduce and transform – and usually some of each – the culture that made them.*" (Ortner 2006). Since people both re-iterate and re-fashion cultural forms at once, it is no surprise that there are no inherently good or

bad media technology and media practices; rather, "*Film, video, and television—as technologies of objectification as well as reflection—contain within them a double set of possibilities*" (Ginsburg 2002). These insights will enable us to appreciate how *Report*'s investigative video-journalism transforms television in a technology of reflection rather than objectification: the first step of the present analysis will thus consist in showing that *Report* journalists invented new relations to existing journalistic practices such as interviewing, shooting, and so on. We will see that common journalistic practices acquire new meanings because they are inscribed in a new system of relations.

My field experience made me realize that my attention to practices had to be oriented towards a specific class of practices: what we may call *truth-practices*. Truth-practices are a very peculiar class of practices insofar as they call into question people's identity (albeit "professional" identity) and ethical dimension. That my analysis had to be oriented towards truth-practices, as we shall see, depends on both the fact that my informants are investigative journalists – we may say that any investigation embarks in a journey of truth-discovery, and that any journey of truth discovery is, to a certain extent, a journey of Self-discovery – and on the fact that they are such *in Berlusconi's Italy*. As one of them once told me:

**Giovanna:** *I realize that some people today look at us for political guidance. They turn us into heroes just because we do our job. I do not like that and I am scared of it. We know how to defend ourselves against people in power, but we are defenseless against those who like us. Actually, let me correct myself: we are not defenseless, as long as we keep concentrating on truth.*

For these reasons I turned to Rabinow's anthropology of the contemporary (Rabinow 1996 and 2003). Rabinow is interested not so much in the formal requisites, as in the institutional and ethical conditions, of truth. Accordingly, Rabinow focuses on *expertise* as the pre-requisite set of practices for the production of truth-claims in a determined field; and on self-reflexivity as the capacity to distance oneself from ones' practices. Focusing on informants' expertise means asking the question: what makes my informants precisely what they are? This question in the present case will become: what is journalism? What kind of expertise makes someone a journalist? Once we will gain an understanding of journalism from within, we will focus on informants' self-reflexivity. As we shall see, my informants have their ideas about what it means to be a journalist, but they realize that there are serious blockages preventing them from committing to their ethical images. Thus, they self-reflexively change their practices in order to solve the problematic situations.

This preliminary conceptual work will put us in the condition of carrying out our anthropological analysis of investigative video-journalism television show *Report*. The conceptual object that this analysis is after is *Report* journalists' way of being engaged with the present, i.e. their self-understanding as subjects of historical action. I shall demonstrate that *Report* journalists both embody and manifest a unique way of relating the Self to its historical time that is worth illustrating and promoting.

## 1. Contemporary Historical Consciousness

*Report*'s video-investigative journalism was born, developed, and flourished, within the matrix of social, political, economic, and symbolic tensions of the so-called Italian "Second Republic". The Second Republic, on its turn, is a dramatic explosion of the contradictory tensions of the "First Republic". Italians call *First* Republic the period 1948-1992, when internal affairs were deeply influenced by Italy's geopolitical position in the context of the Cold War, and *Second Republic* the period from 1993-2011, where Italian internal affairs were inextricably linked to Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's private business.

Political events and dynamics of the First Republic – from the recrudescence of Sicilian separatism in 1947, to the Red Brigades political assassinations in the 1980s; from the booming economic development of the late 1950s, to the neo-fascist bombings of the 1970s – are often times grasped, in contemporary media discourses – in television but also in printed press – as enigmas to be deciphered with a double key. They need a double key insofar as both the national and the larger geopolitical context are presumed to be in a relation of direct causality to events; and they constitute enigmas insofar as, while local responsibilities for the bloodsheds and assassinations have been in most cases ascertained, their immediate geopolitical reasons have not (Veneziani 2006; Fasanella and Priore 2010).

It goes without saying that this contemporary perspective on the Italian past sheds light on the Italian state's lack of full sovereignty over its own territory and population during the First Republic. One of my informants, an Italian magistrate who investigated for over 20 years on the 1969 neo-fascist bombing of Piazza Fontana, maintains that there is a critical lack of investigative results as regards the geopolitical context. The Magistrate argues that the interpretive frame of understanding of Piazza Fontana et similia is clearly the Cold War "silent war" within the Italian territory, but that it is impossible, due to the "synergies" [sic] between Italian and foreign states highest political authorities (and Secret Services), to proceed any further in the investigations.

Since the chains of bloodsheds and sensational political assassinations were directly experienced by the Italian civil society in the period 1970s-1993, and because the truth about them is contested, hence problematic and unstable, it is no surprise that they are still very much alive in contemporary Italian discourses in the media, in political rhetoric, in everyday conversations, and in artistic production. Hence, in spite of the numeral index that emphasizes the discontinuity of the current *Second* Republic, the unresolved political past still articulates current discourses, and it inhabits the present much less as a historicized sequence of events cut off from contemporary historical consciousness than as a series of questions whose ultimate truth is still under investigation.

So much for the return of the historical memory of the First Republic in current media discourses. The contemporary Second Republic, however, which started in 1994 after the sudden collapse of the First Republic's main ruling parties (Ginsborg 1989; Scoppola 1997; Pombeni 1994), also offers manifold reasons for political investigations. The main enigma of the Second Republic is Berlusconi himself. The origins of Berlusconi's wealth in the turbulent Italian 1970s; the reasons of his entering into politics, and, perhaps most importantly, the circumstances of creation of his own political

party *Forza Italia* in 1993, are largely obscure (we may add that another enigma haunting Italian leftists is: "how is it possible that half of Italy votes for him?"; this, however, is beyond the point). Berlusconi himself changed version about all these matters many times during the past 18 years, while judiciary investigations about his alleged connections to the Italian mafia as origin of his breathtaking rise to wealth and power, and about his alleged bribing in the acquisition of large parts of his current media empire, are still undergoing. What is relevant for the present analysis, however, is that the paradoxical situation of having an alleged mafia-contractor as Prime Minister of the Republic has led to an extreme polarization of the Italian civil society. The result of this polarization is that in the past 17 years Berlusconi's past has been excavated, dissected, debated, and contested innumerable times in the press that he does not directly or indirectly influence, and illustrated, exalted, and defended in his own press and media.

Past, present, and truth-seeking, are here articulated along a second axis so to speak. While the stake of the investigations on the enigmas of the First Republic is the past's sovereignty, here is the present's legitimacy. In both cases, however, investigations are means to keep the contemporary open to political change, and in both cases investigative journalists make direct appeal to the Italian civil society as the supplier of those intellectual and moral energies that the state institutions seem to lack.

These circumstances perhaps explain the contemporary flowering and the commercial success of investigative journalism in Italy. Aside from *Report*, bestselling Italian newspapers *laRepubblica*, and *Corriere della sera* launched *ad hoc* investigative programs (respectively *RE Le inchieste* in 2009, and *Reportime* in 2011); newsmagazine *L'Espresso* reinvigorated its pre-existing investigative units; a consortia of freelance journalists launched low-budget publishing company *Chiarelettere*, specialized in investigative journalism (flourishing in a moment of deep crisis of the bookselling market); M.A in investigative journalism have been launched in Milan and Rome; local newspapers (which are very important in Italy as Lumley (1996) notices) started successful investigative campaigns on environmental themes; and so on. In addition, political investigations are also commercially exploited for entertainment in various successful television shows and series, in fiction films, and in books (the most famous of which is perhaps writer Roberto Saviano's bestseller *Gomorrah*).

It goes without saying that this commercial success means that political investigation has become fashionable, and thus that the same historical consciousness that is been invigorated by investigations has also, at the same time, started its own self-disintegration. Not only conspiracy theories flourish, but also, given the necessity to sell investigations, journalists and authors alike sometimes make use of the lowest rhetorical strategies to make their products palatable when they are short of new ideas. For instance, nothing sells "the year 1993" better than the famous black and white picture of magistrates Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino as they laugh together in an attitude of tranquil intimacy, taken few months before the mafia assassinated them.

Thus, while the flowering of investigative journalism is keeping the past and the present in tension as a reservoir of political weaponry, it is also, by its own inner logic, simultaneously working to defuse the tension, that is, to throw over the past a veil of commonplaces, romanticized images, and kitschy references that inactivate the past's potential for unleashing fresh historical consciousness. It goes without saying that an analysis of the overall field of contemporary Italian investigative journalism would very

likely reveal that its shortcomings outnumber its pros. Before the postmodern tendency to sell everything, including historical consciousness and mafia bloodsheds, however, an anthropologist committed to the present has two alternatives: either to denounce the contemporary curse of commodification, or to illustrate, in the inevitable corruption of all forms, what are the intellectual resources from which the inner force of historical consciousness originates, the everyday practices in which it is embodied, and the strategies that preserve it. In the present analysis I opted for the latter. Before turning to *Report*, however, we shall gain an understanding of journalism from within, thus we shall answer the preliminary question: what is journalism?

## 2. Journalistic Expertise

There is an indubitable *consensus gentium* among historians, journalists, sociologists, anthropologists, semioticians, philosophers, and so on, on the point that "the news" are by no means static forms for reporting real events, existing since the beginning of the printed press, and impermeable to historical change (Lippmann 1922; Habermas 1961; Wolfe 1970; Schudson 1973; Tuchman 1973; Gans 1979; Fishman 1980; Cavallari 1990; Bechelloni 1995; Lumley 1996; Papuzzi 1998 and 2003; Sorrentino 2002 and 2005; Vesperi 2010). Historians notice that when the physical objects known as newspapers appeared in Europe between the end of XVII and the beginning of the XVIII century, they were used either as commercial bulletins, or as means to divulgate political pamphlets (Murialdi 1996; Papuzzi 2003). It goes without saying that they contained no "news". The inexistence of news was correlative with the inexistence of professional journalists, as the newspapers were written, run, and sold by the printers.

Schudson (1973) argued that the "news" as we know them today were literally *invented* during the 1830s American *Penny Press Revolution*, when journalism ceased to be a semi-private communication between members of the same elite and became a professional activity, with its rules, codes, and procedures whose ultimate goal was to earn the trust and the money of the emerging Jeffersonian middle class (Schudson 1973). The news thus became an object, and the journalist became the professional with the expertise necessary to fabricate that object. Drawing from Schudson, Papuzzi (1998) defines journalism as follows:

*What is journalism? What distinguishes it? It is the culture and the technique of the news. This technique, with its specific characteristics, spurs in the 1830s, the decade of the "penny press"… "News" emerges out of the relation that the journalist establishes between the nature of an event and the interest of an audience* [my translation]."

This definition needs to be made more precise by clarifying that the expression "technique of the news" shall be not understood reductively, as it would be if we were thinking to "writing" or "shooting" techniques. While a novelist approaches his/her writing as a creative work that challenges eternity, a journalist thinks that a day old newspaper is useful only for wrapping fish. Journalists do not partake of liturgies of writing or shooting; rather, their relation to writing and shooting is an instrumental one. To be sure, change in journalistic writing or shooting style does occur; however, insofar

as journalism is bound to truthful and accurate reporting of real events, change in writing or shooting style occurs, and gets transmitted historically, only when it is functional to express a most fundamental change in approaching reality. As a matter of fact, change in journalistic style(s) occurs precisely when the ethically committed journalist feels that the communicative codes received by the tradition are unable to effectively convey "the news" that s/he fells compelled to capture. Perhaps we can grasp this point if we remember that, in *In Cold Blood*, Truman Capote (1973) felt legitimated in using the narrative technique of the "inner monologue" in virtue of the fact that he changed his approach to his interviewees (because he had spent with them most time than any other journalist had ever done before; because he had established a sympathetic relationship to them that was unprecedented in journalism; and so on).

If by techniques of the news we do not mean "writing or shooting techniques", however, what do we mean? I think it is commonsensical to understand journalistic expertise as made primarily of other kinds of techniques: interviewing techniques; techniques for gaining people's trust and confidence; techniques for cultivating and maintaining contacts; techniques of persuasion; techniques of observations and inference, and so forth. What they have in common is that they are much less formal techniques than techniques that are inextricably tied to the way of being of the journalist. One of my informants illustrated this point:

**Sigfrido:** *Earning people's trust is been one of my characteristics all along. Perhaps it is a question of personality, but I think it is also important to let people understand that we are on the same side when we denounce something. If you create a wall between you and the denouncer – and you can trust me if I tell you that journalists are very cynic in this sense – you close off many opportunities. I think that people are used to deal with cynic journalists, so when they deal with someone who approaches them "humanly", so to speak, they feel more secure…*

Naturally, I am aware that in mainstream journalism "the news" depends much less on the way of being of journalists than on the mechanics of the press industry. I am not, however, providing here a general theory of the contemporary press, but an anthropological analysis of Italian investigative television program Report, one of whose most successful innovations is a valorization of freelance journalism i.e. of the individual talents of journalists. We may add that it seems less interesting providing a theory of the mechanization of labor than identifying the ways out of it.


## 3. *Report*

If journalists' expertise consists in establishing a relation between the nature of an event and the interest of an audience, then we may say that innovations in journalistic techniques are correlated to – in the sense that they spur, address, and encourage – changes in audiences' sensibilities. Tom Wolfe for instance recognizes that his and his colleagues' innovations of journalistic techniques were due to the social transformations of the sixties (Wolfe 1970). One of my informants made a similar point about the birth of

*Report*, stating that Gabanelli wanted to invent new journalistic forms in order to meet renewed sensibilities:

**Sabrina:** *Milena* [Gabanelli] *told us from the very beginning that she wanted to do a type of journalism that nobody else was doing in Italy. She bet on Italians' need to understand the transformation that both Italy, and the world, were undergoing in the 1990s. She wanted us to investigate in the dark corners of this immense financial, environmental, and social transformation, because she felt that people would appreciate that. As you see, her bet was successful.*

Gabanelli's first and certainly most visible innovations are in the organization labor. Ever since its birth, *Report* has been aired by state Television channel RAITRE, one of the two Italian television channels neither directly owned, nor indirectly influenced, by Berlusconi. Within RAITRE, *Report* is a completely autarchic small unit, as aside from Gabanelli herself and co-author Sigfrido Ranucci, its backbone is constituted by 11 investigative freelance video-journalists.

     *Report*'s organization of labor hinges on, and effectively valorizes, collaborative freelancing. Gabanelli, Ranucci, and the 11 investigative journalists live in different Italian cities (mainly Rome, Milan, Naples, Bologna); consequently, they do not see each as frequently as members of an editorial board do. Rather, they meet, informally, only once or twice a year in order to decide the themes of the investigations, while the rest of the time they mainly collaborate, when needed, via telephone or Internet, sharing information, documents, opinions, contacts, and, in rare cases, footage. While they are all very collaborative, they are also proudly self-sufficient: each freelance journalist conducts in complete autonomy his/her own video-journalistic investigations and produces a 60-minutes rough cut that is edited in dialogue with Gabanelli and Ranucci (Ranucci in addition conducts his own investigations). *Dialogic editing*, so to speak, guarantees that *Report* maintain its stylistic unity in the multiplicity of personal approaches. Gabanelli made clear to me that two points are undisputable: (1) The voiceover shall use no adjectives whatsoever, not even the simplest ones; and (2) the freelance journalist shall appear in video as little as possible, that is: s/he shall appear only when his/her presence acquires meaning vis-à-vis the situational interaction. This last point is of extreme importance, so I shall elaborate on it in my conclusions.

     Each video-investigation lasts more or less 4 months, hence each freelance journalist crafts only two every year, working practically full time for *Report*. That investigations last so long speaks of both their degree of complexity, and the amount of accuracy and attention to the details that is put into them. When I first met Ranucci, for instance, it was two days after he scored one of his top journalistic scoops. The reader may perhaps remember the case of Italian entrepreneur Callisto Tanzi, president of colossus food corporation *Parmalat*, who went to jail for financial fraud in 2007. In 2009, when I was conducting my fieldwork in Italy, Italian magistrates were still investigating upon Tanzi in order to recover at least part of the capitals that he had illegally subtracted to his company. So was Ranucci. Ranucci conducted his own investigation, gained the trust of Tanzi's former bodyguard, reconstructed with him Tanzi's movements and phone conversations in the last days before his arrest, and made two important discoveries: he found out that Tanzi had invested several million euros in precious paintings, and, most

importantly, he found out where the paintings were! Ranucci and Gabanelli decided to inform the Italian police before *Report* aired Ranucci's video-investigation, so that there might be a chance to recuperate the paintings. The chief inspector of Parma's police gave Ranucci full credibility, acted immediately, and in grateful exchange allowed Ranucci to go shoot inside the caveau where the paintings where found. This eventful investigation became *Report*'s episode *Il cavaliere del lavoro*, in which the audience follows the video-story of how Ranucci met the bodyguard and worked with him, all the way to the recovery of the paintings inside the caveau [1]. The day after this episode was aired *Report*'s prestige was perhaps at its peak, as almost every single press organ mentioned the magisterial journalistic inquiry that led Parma police to recover several million euros illegally subtracted to *Parmalat* shareholders (it must be kept in mind that Italian shareholders are often times private middle class individuals, often time retired, who invest their savings in the national stock market).

While this is perhaps the one that, for both its unique circumstances, and its unprecedented result, most deeply impacted people's imagination, it shall be kept in mind that all of *Report*'s investigations deal with complex topics, and that many of them end up triggering judiciary actions. *Report*'s investigations target topics as difficult and diverse as environmental frauds, use of illegal weapons in war-zones, public administration inefficiencies, mafia traffics and money-laundering, illegal financial flows, and so on. Typically, investigations reach two or three dramatic peaks, and these are normally of two kinds. The first is when the freelance journalist confronts in a direct interview the chiefs, or the highest representatives, of the bank, the P.A., the political party, or the company on whose illegal or unfair behavior the investigation is trying to shed light: the journalist aptly builds up the tension of the direct confrontation by showing documents that prove the financial flow; by going to the place where the toxic waste has been illegally dumped; and so on. The second type of dramatic peak is when the journalist is able to shoot illegal behaviors, often times, but not always, byway of hidden cameras. In episode *La banca dei numeri uno*, for instance, journalist Paolo Mondani shows the route of Italian "*spalloni*" – men whose job is to transport cash offshore – across the Italian/Swiss border [2]. Another remarkable example is in episode *Mare Nostrum*, where Sabrina Giannini discovers that a big company that has received funding from the EU to give up particularly destructive fishing practices makes use of a forbidden fishing-net. She convinces the local police to tend a trap to the company's admiral boat in the open sea, where she is able to shoot a thrilling sea-hunting sequence [3].

At it is obvious from these examples *Report*'s journalists do not refrain from getting enmeshed in events when they feel that their enmeshment can make a difference. This is a second point that I will elaborate upon in my conclusions. For now it is sufficient to notice that the modesty of self-exposure imposed by Gabanelli as one of *Report*'s unifying aesthetic principles finds its somewhat inverted symmetry in the journalist's active enmeshment in the multiplicity of events.

## 4. Practices

If Gabanelli's form of organizing labor encouraged the freelance journalists' individual flourishing, what does their flourishing consist of? In the renewing of journalistic practices. This renovation invested mainly two fields: approaching techniques, and interviewing techniques.

One cannot fail to notice that *Report* makes a lavish use of "stolen" images; that is, of footage shot without the interviewee being aware. What are the limits to the "right to inform" is an issue as old and debated as journalism itself. Solutions have always been pragmatic and contingent, and they are so for *Report* as well. For the present analysis, it is more interesting to notice that, although sometimes *Report* journalists steal images from subjects who are completely unaware even of the journalist's presence, normally the "thefts" are limited to the cases in which interviewees are reticent in front of the camera but willing to "tell the truth" off-record. The difference between these two kinds of theft is essential. In the former case, stealing appears for what it is: as a cheap practice. Stolen images are not "earned" by the journalist, and thus seem objectively out of context and dwindle the overall "ethical force", and thus the truth-value, of that specific episode. In the latter case, on the contrary, viewers are led to appreciate the journalist whose preparedness and penetrating questions earned him/her enough respect from the adversary that the adversary is willing to tell "the truth" that s/he had forcefully denied just a few minutes before. Naturally, this will-to-tell-the-truth characterizes only certain kinds of interviewees, and it happens only in some circumstances; it is a fact, however, that happens *many* times, and almost exclusively (at least in Italy), to *Report* journalists. It is therefore legitimate to ask ourselves whether this somewhat bizarre occurrence for which people who have everything to lose in telling the truth to journalists freely decide to say it, might not have something to do with the way *Report*'s journalists approach their interviewees. Which leads us to interviews.

Interviews are certainly *Report*'s main weapons and one of its most successful journalistic practices. All of *Report* journalists agree that interviews are much more than moments in which they have the opportunity to ask few questions to people that they will never see again. The following exchange with Ranucci is a good illustration of his approach:

**Ranucci:** *Many people underestimate this point: what makes an investigation a great investigation is the capacity to formulate penetrating or embarrassing **second** questions.*

**Edoardo***: So when you prepare for interviews you also try to anticipate possible answers?*

**Ranucci:** *Yes. What would he answer to this? What would I object? If his answer is satisfactory, then 1 to 0 for him. Interviews are like boxing, this is how I see it. I am fond of American journalism. For me, interviewing as Americans do means that I, the journalist, allow you, the interviewee, to see the documents that I possess when I interview you, so that we play fair. I do not like adding things afterwards, in post-production. I do not like when journalists keep the last word. No. It is fair when everything happens there, in the moment of the interview. It is my deontological code.*

If Ranucci's interviews are like boxing, Alberto's resemble *a game of seduction*:

**Alberto:** *When I first approached G.* [private health entrepreneur] *he told me that he did not want to be interviewed, but that he was happy to pass me some information over lunch. So he took me in one of his restaurants, and we chatted about Rome, about Totti* [Italian football player]*, about women, and about what a smartass he is. In the middle of the conversation, he would drop a casual reference to the clinics to see how much I knew, to test my preparation, and to see what type of journalist I was.*

     *I knew I would play that game and I was prepared. I tried to let him understand that I knew many things about him and about his role in the Banco Ambrosiano bankruptcy* [the entrepreneur's role in this famous bankruptcy was never proved] *but, also, that my inquiry was not going to be on that. My game was to let him understand that I was not the type of journalist who gets easily tricked, who approaches interviewees without even knowing their personal stories. At the end of the lunch, he told me: "OK then, let's do this interview". As soon as he said that, I let him understand that I knew that he was going to use the interview to launch cryptic messages to his adversaries, to politicians…*

Alfredo's approach with the interviewee involves a subtle game of dissimulation, a coded language that in spite of its complexity is played according to unwritten rules, and that, above all, denotes a tortuous yet effective process of mutual acquaintance and psychological seduction.

     As it is clear, *Report* journalists' techniques and ways of being open up a whole field of reality foreclosed to other journalists. What do they think of such reality? And how do they understand themselves in relation to it?


## 5. Self-reflexivity

State television-channel RAITRE was launched in 1979, and it has gravitated since its very beginning around the Italian Communist Party. The Communist Party was the main political referent of many Italian intellectuals, and in fact the new television channel became, in the hands of former literary critic and co-founder of the Italian vanguard group *Gruppo 63* Angelo Guglielmi, who was its director from 1987 to 1994, a highly experimental and innovative television, whose philosophy was to bet on low budget programs hinging on, and promoting, people's direct participation.

     Gabanelli's challenge in 1996 was to invent a new form of low-budget journalism that would nonetheless guarantee high stakes. She maintained that when she was blocked inside sieged Vucovar during the Balkans War, she was able to appreciate the advantages [sic!] of working alone, which she had always suspected she would be temperamentally made for, and so the idea came to her of creating an experimental journalistic venue for young freelance journalists who were willing to work individually. More or less in the same years Sony had accomplished a small technological revolution by launching its first *prosumer* (professional + consumer) camera, the Sony MiniDv DSR PD-150P, which guaranteed at once high quality digital images, almost zero maintenance costs, and high

manageability. Gabanelli had already made a formative experience, few years before, with the Super 8 cameras, and she maintains that she had learned a decisive lesson:

**Gabanelli:** *When the Super 8 became popular in journalism we were all very excited but also uncertain as to what to do with it. Television images were supposed to be "clean", while the Super 8 cameras had limited power and their manageability seemed to encourage camera shaking, nervousness, and so on. I saw the journalistic potential of these tools, I wanted to experiment with them, but I had to be prudent, because television audiences were presumed not to be ready for shaky images.*

*So I thought: in order for people to accept low quality images, the images must deliver something unique. Something, that is, that a journalist either delivers with these cameras, or will not be able to deliver at all. Hence, I started to put myself in "extreme" situations, in which small cameras were necessary, and I covered Mozambique, Somalia, organs trafficking in India…*

In 1996, she decided to take the opportunity offered by the new Sony DSR to experiment *investigative video-journalism*. It goes without saying that Gabanelli's excitement about the journalistic possibilities offered by the new cameras, her commitment to capitalize them, and the concrete ways in which she capitalized them, were based on Gabanelli's meditations about the mission of journalism, and about her own role into it, i.e. on her specific ethical vision.

What journalistic possibilities do mini-cameras offer? From within a journalist's perspective – we shall remember that journalists approach their expressive means as instruments to craft news – we may say that journalists could now work in discrete solitude; move faster and with more dexterity; attract less attention; and give interviewees the impression of being less invasive, thus enabling them to be more at ease. In short, video-journalists had now the opportunity to shoot emotional states, and human situations, that were not accessible before (as Barnouw (1993) and Ruby (2000) argue, a similar dynamic, in the 1960s, enabled the Maysles Brothers, Fred Wiseman, Jean Rouch, the Mac Dougalls, and many others, to change the practices, and to invent new aesthetics, of documentary-making).

The ways in which these abstract opportunities were flashed out in concrete journalistic practices and products, however, depended on journalists' idea of journalism. Applications other than video-investigation were possible, and indeed were pursued, by other journalists. Two of such applications, for instance, are real-time journalism, in which video-reporters document car chases and other sensationalist events from very close, or real-life journalism, in which journalists construct detailed accounts of people's everyday minutiae.

The considerations that induced Gabanelli and the rest of *Report* journalists to use the new technology to create investigative video-journalism is well epitomized in the following remark:

**Paolo:** *It is well known that journalism in general, and investigative journalism in particular, should be the watchdog of power. Well, the problem is that in our post-industrial globalized world is hard to understand what power is, and who holds it. Who holds power in Italy? Difficult to illustrate, if one does not at the same time critically*

*reflect on Europe, on the Western world, on how the nature of power changed in the past 30 years. Any time I begin a video-investigation, my goal is to illustrate how Italy partakes of a larger logic of capitalist power, and how, in virtue of our political weakness, that larger logic can sometimes deploy its effects more dramatically here than somewhere else.*

If we follow Paolo's logic, we realize that his reasoning hinges on his understanding of himself as a "watchdog of power". He maintains that contemporary journalists ought to hold such self-understanding, but he also observes that logics external to journalism have disarticulated, or emptied of its real meaning, the qualification of "watchdog of power". Thus he transforms this self-understanding into a problem, and he finds that only a transformation of journalistic practices can solve it: in order for him to still be a "watchdog of power" he needs to conduct a critical discourse that consists in illustrating the new nature and working of late capitalist power.

As I clarified in the introduction, one of the ways in which Italy offers itself to contemporary historical consciousness is as a field of investigations; we may add that Mauro projects his understanding of Italy onto the whole world, and in fact many times him and his colleagues do physically follow the transnational working of capitalists economies, moving between Italy, Russia, and Cuba, or Antigua and Brazil, or Indonesia and Belgium. Journalists, however, are no academics, hence from their point of view, "power", "capitalism", or "financial flows" are not entities to be thought, and elaborated upon, abstractly, with the goal of gaining a conceptual knowledge, but rather dynamics to be captured in their concrete articulation into living individuals. In video-journalism, power and capitalism need to have a face:

**Gabanelli:** *Who would not want to produce a video-investigation on IOR?* [IOR is the Vatican Bank suspected of mafia money-laundering and put under investigation by the Italian magistrates after *Report*'s episode on it [4]]. *But there is a practical, unavoidable problem for video-journalism: who, among Vatican authorities, is going to give you a video-interview on IOR? You realize that putting your face behind your utterances is a bit problematic, in particular for people who are supposed to be decent. Can you produce a video-investigation on the Vatican bank without interviewing any Vatican authority? Faced with this difficulty, journalists normally produce speculative reportages, which can be accurate, but lack "force". We prefer to wait until we can have that face.*

That power needs to have a face in video-journalism may lead people or analysts to believe that video-journalism inevitably oversimplifies complex dynamics. To hold this view, however, is as misguiding as to think that movies cannot be as complex as novels. "Simplification" is no more necessary in video-journalism than it is in other image-based semiotic systems. As Bresson, the Coen Brothers, Fellini, Kurosawa, and Welles have demonstrated with their adaptations of classics of literature (and as Deleuze (1986 and 1989), Sobchack (2004) and Rancière (2007) have argued), it is *the overall semiotic system* in which images are framed that determines the degree of complexity and of conceptuality of any cinematic text.

If anything, indeed, Gabanelli's remark testifies precisely that the possible "lack of a face behind utterances" constitutes a problem for ethically committed journalists. As

such, it cannot simply be eschewed, but needs to be addressed, again, in a self-critical mode, through a change of approach. What happened in the case of the Vatican Bank? Precisely insofar as Paolo is bond to show the dynamics of power, rather than its episodic misdemeanors, he had no rush. He kept gathering documents, acquiring expertise, contacting deep throats, and creating contacts for more than 3 years while he was conducting other investigations. We may say that he relentlessly sieged the IOR Authorities and made them capitulate to his request of an interview.

## 6. Elaboration and Conclusions

Ortner observed that it is politically important to restore the question of subjectivity in social theory because subjectivity shall be understood "*as the basis of "agency", a necessary part of understanding how people (try to) act on the world even as they are acted upon*" (Ortner 2006). The use of "try to" in brackets testifies in my opinion that Ortner shares the Gramscian attitude of "pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will", or perhaps its contemporary version of "hyperactive pessimism" that Michel Foucault once ascribed to himself. Hyperactive pessimism means that, while the analyst preserves a healthy skepticism about the extent and the real effects of human agency, this attitude translates into centuplicating analyses, rather than to paralysis. Keeping this in mind I will now draw some conclusions. In the course of my elaboration, I observed 3 things: (1) Gabanelli wants the journalists to appear in video as little as possible; (2) the journalists sometimes actively enmesh with events rather than simply reporting on them; (3) *Report* journalists innovated their practices as a response to what they take to be the *change of nature* of contemporary power. We may say that these three observations relate to the aesthetic, the ethic, and the historic domain, and hence that they call into question the forms of representation, the subject's ways of being, and the relation between Self and historical time. Given what we said about the nature of journalism, all these three domains – journalists' ways of relating to history, to other people, and to their audience – affect the type of journalistic products that journalists are able to craft. This is how Gabanelli motivates her desire not to see journalists in the shot:

**Milena:** *I want to avoid what I call video-narcissism, that is, journalists' self-attribution of importance. The audience does not need to see the journalist going from here to there, going up the stairs, or reacting to an interviewee's answer. These are all unnecessary "remplissages". Do you know why there are so many in reportages? Either to cover jump-cuts, or for narrative purposes, because it is presumed that the image of the journalist guarantees the story's spatio-temporal unity. I do not see the point of this. First of all, I prefer showing the jump-cuts. Secondly, for me, the journalist ought to be present as an authorial force, not as an "image". Thus, I let my audience see the journalist only when s/he deals with a particularly complex situation, or when s/he asks a particularly evil question. That's it: when you ask a particularly evil question I want to see your face!*

We can make a few observations about these remarks. Insofar as *Report*'s "representation" casts off empty time (the "remplissages"), journalistic story-telling is completely absorbed by the unfolding of events. According to Gabanelli, there is no need

to give spatial-temporal clues that provide the illusion of a coherent story abstracted from the bush-like flowing of events: rather, the story is full of jump-cuts, and proceeds as an alternation between investigative reasoning, and "situations" in which the journalist has to prove his/her skills and value. The journalist is therefore not instrumental to the demands of story-telling; rather, journalistic story-telling changes because of the valorization of journalistic subjectivity. The journalistic "situations", as we saw, are of two kinds: they are either opportunities for journalists to use their knowledge to modify the state of things (the sea-hunting prevents illegal fishing; the discovery of the paintings retrieves illegally subtracted capitals; and so on), or opportunities to measure the journalists' subjectivities against their interviewees. In both cases journalistic subjectivity is caught in its movement, so to speak, from its fixity to its enmeshment in the present.

If interviews are moments in which journalists measure themselves, this is because their interviewees are approached neither as passive recipients of journalistic knowledge, nor as objects of journalistic investigations, but rather as subjects in the making of the present. This is the quintessential ethical dimension of Report's journalistic practices. While the dynamics of contemporary power are illustrated in their complex transnational dimensions, the interviews are the privileged moments in which journalists lead their interviewees to understand what difference their own subjectivity makes. For instance, in episode *Il prezzo è servito,* Pietro Riccardi interviews the president of one of the leading Italian distribution companies. He first illustrates the company's financial wealth, and then shows how the company's price policy is seriously and unnecessarily jeopardizing the *Parmiggiano Reggiano* industry. The journalist's objective, however, is neither to tell his interviewee what he knows perfectly well, nor to offer the audience a culprit. Rather, his objective is to recall the interviewee's and the audience's attention on Parmiggiano Reggiano's *social value*: on its being one of a few sustainable-farming industrial products; on its being a very healthy food; on its keeping traditional cheese-making procedures alive; and so on. A whole alternative world, historically, economically and socially sustainable, is illustrated through the Parmiggiano Reggiano's example, and is offered to the interviewee's self-reflexive conscience [5]. Byway of this mechanism, the interviewee is engaged in his full subjective dimension, for he is required, in order to sustain the interview, to expose his view of the present and his understanding of his own position into it (it goes without saying that the interviewee in this case did not change his views at all, but this is beyond the point). The dialectic between complex dynamics and individual responsibilities is therefore kept in tension, and the present is offered as an unstable field in which experts' agency makes a difference.

*Report*'s journalists, as we said, maintained that they had to change their journalistic practices in order to adequate to the change in the nature of power. Whether we believe that the "power" that journalism was originally watchdogging had a truly different nature with respect to "contemporary power", or whether we think that it is only our understanding of power that has changed in the meantime, it does not make much difference for our analysis (I will mention, however, that I noticed Michel Foucault's books in one of my informants' bookshelves). Either way, *Report*'s journalists are less interested in interviewing, and investigating upon, personalities who hold an elective role, such as Presidents, Prime Ministers, and so on, who we may say embody symbolic power, than in dealing with experts holding strategic positions within financial and social

articulations of neo-capitalist systems. Insofar as they focus their, and their audience's, attention on "strategic experts", and insofar as they use their own acquired expertise to push strategic experts to engage in self-reflexivity and sometimes in concrete actions, *Report*'s journalists embody an exemplar self-understanding as subjects of historical action, for they manifest their inflexible will, and sometimes also their effective capacity, to mould the historical field. Historical time is therefore approached, and manifested to the audience, spatially, as within the reach of human subjectivity, and temporally, as showing up in the immediate everyday life of certain kinds people (experts). While strategic experts scattered all over the globe take the crucial decisions that change our present, they are not so far removed from us that we do not have the possibility to engage in concrete (albeit local) historical action.

In contemporary Italy, where the journalistic field is ebullient of new practices and forms of organization, perhaps it is worth to keep in mind the following remark:

**Gabanelli:** *This crisis of 2008-2009 is a hallmark, a threshold separating the current productive model that we need to overcome from the new ones that we want to promote. Perhaps the key words of the economic future will be "bottom-up", "small-scale", "consortia", and so on. What does investigative journalism have to do with this? We think that the crisis of the current economic model is "the" problem. So let's try to reflect on it. Let's try to collect those small, but numerous, clues, that tell us what is it that is eroding the system in its foundations.*

# Chapter IV

## The Economy of Truth
### The Impact of socio-economic factors on Journalistic Practices

This chapter describes the impact that specific forms of organization of journalistic labor have on truth-telling. I will compare two investigative video-journalism TV programs, *Report* and *L'Inchiesta*, and I will discuss the ways in which the journalists' everyday practices, the forms of organization, and the time and budget constraints, influence journalists' understanding of the problem of truth and subjectivity, and how this different understanding determines a change in their truth-practices. In order to contextualize Italian journalism in global dynamics, I will sketch out a history of journalism and I will discuss news-colossuses BBC and Aljazeera's contemporary aesthetics.

## 1. History of Journalism

The press, it is known, "began", at least symbolically, with Gutenberg's prodigious invention in 1440. In the first 200 years of its existence the press was used for producing either heavy in-folio and in-quarto *books*, or, for the types of communications concerning "current events", *single sheets* ("folios").[18] The latter, the "folios", were the physical objects that would eventually evolve into newspapers. For their handiness, and their relatively low cost of production, the "folios" were in fact the appropriate objects for any kind of "rapid" communication. Rozzo (2008) reminds us that the handy folios were infused at times with immense political value: Luther's 95 theses were printed on single sheets, and a single sheet was the *Placard sur la messe*, posted on the door of the bedroom of Francesco I in the night between October 17 and 18 1534.[19] Cavallari (1990) notes that the so-called *commercial bulletins* were also printed on single sheets, the privileged means of information used by both merchants traveling the dangerous routes of Europe and the Orient, and businessmen speculating in the local markets[20].

Commerical bulletins started to be issued daily in the second half of the 17th century: the *Leipziger Zeitung* appeared in 1660, and the *London Gazzette* in 1665.[21] In 1702, a decisive event occurred in England: the price of both paper and transportation increased, so that printers were encouraged to engineer a new format that, while maintaining the handiness of the single folios, simultaneously reduced the costs of production of commercial bulletins: the issuing of the *Daily Currant* in 1702 marks the birth of the physical objects known as newspapers.[22] The success of the new format with

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[18] Febvre, Lucien, and Martin, Henri-Jean. 1958. *The Coming of the Book*. Thereford: Lowe & Brydone

[19] Rozzo, Ugo. 2008. *La strage ignorata: I fogli volanti a stampa nell'Italia dei secoli XV e XVI*. Udine: Forum.

[20] Cavallari, Alberto. 1990. *La Fabbrica del Presente*. Milano: Feltrinelli.

[21] Remarkably, the *Leipziger Zeitung* continued to be issued until 1921!

[22] Cavallari 1996; Murialdi 1996.

multiple sheets was spectacular in England and in the rest of Europe, testifying to the easy acquaintance of the reading audience with the new object.

Throughout the 18th century, in regimes of so-called Enlightened Despotism, disparate subject-matters began to be discussed or presented via newspapers. The latter thus became the privileged means through which European elites could make public the political discussions held in the teeming cafés of the European capitals.[23] In Italy, the first Italian newspaper, *Il Caffé*, published in Milan by the Verri Brothers from June 1764 to May 1766, contained political pamphlets, commercial bulletins, scientific discussions, and even observations on contemporary customs.

Four leading philosophers in the field – John Dewey, Jürgen Habermas, Michel Foucault, and Umberto Eco – in spite of their different approaches, all noticed that it was precisely in the 18th century that the codes and themes of "political communication" that are still relevant in contemporary journalism, such as public engagement with shared values, political critique, public pedagogy, and so on, were first practiced.[24] As we said in the previous chapter, however, European newspapers of the 18th century did not contain anything similar to what we call "news" today, because news, it shall be remembered, is rather the outcome of the unique expertise of a professional figure known as a journalist, who first "appeared" in history in the 1830s in the United States, in the course of what has been called the *Penny Press Revolution* (Schudson 1973).

In 1830, regular newspapers in the United States cost 6 cents "*when the average daily wage for nonfarm labor was less than 85 cents (17)*". Regular newspapers were, as their European counterparts, little more than commercial bulletins, issued by, and for, members of the upper middle class: "*Newspaper readership was confined to mercantile and political elites: it is no wonder, then, that newspaper content was limited to commerce and politics (ib.)*". It was under these circumstances that a few editors – some of whom, such as James Gordon Bennett, became legendary – understood that the *new* middle class formed in the Jeffersonian era might need typologies of public communication closer to *their* everyday lives and interests:

*The penny papers' concept of news not only created news as a remarkable product whose attributes – particularly timeliness – could be measured, it invented a genre which acknowledged, and so enhanced, the importance of everyday life (26).*

A new readership had come to inhabit the first American metropolises, demanding different typologies of information, and different communicative codes, that classical newspapers simply were not able to provide. A new form of organization, and new practices, were required, that is, a professional figure exclusively committed to the activity of gathering information and transmitting it: the journalist. Nothing is more revealing of the characteristics of this new profession than this self-promoting opening

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[23] Lippmann, Walter. 1922. *Public Opinion*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Company Inc; Sinclair, Upton. 1928. *The Brass Check*. Long Beach: The Author). It should also not been forgotten that the first newspapers contained also political pamphlets and were the privileged means to divulgate the ideals of the Enlightenment (see for instance Habermas, Jürgen. 1961. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Boston: MIT Press; Cavallari 1996.

[24] Habermas 1961; Foucault 2008; Eco, Umberto. 1983. *Sette anni di desiderio*. Milano: Bompiani; Dewey, John. 1988. *The Public and Its Problems*. Ohio: Ohio University Press.

from penny paper *New York Transcript* dated June 23, 1834, quoted by Michael Schudson:

*There are eleven large and regularly established daily papers in this city; and with the exception of the Courier and Enquirer, and perhaps the Times, not one of them employs a news reporter, or takes any pain to obtain accurate and correct local information – on the other hand there are two small NEWS papers, (ourselves and our contemporary,) and those two employ four reporters, exclusively to obtain the earliest, fullest, and most correct intelligence on every local incident; and two of these latter arise at 3 in the morning, at which hour they attend the police courts, and are there employed, with short intermissions, till the close of the office at 8 in the evening, while others are obtaining correct information about the city.*

This article is remarkable in a number of ways. In the first place, it signals that newspapers ceased to be filled with communications that had a more or less personal character and that occurred between people that belonged to the same social class and were often bound by personal acquaintance; rather, a large, unknown, anonymous multitude was now the ideal readership that newspapermen had to intrigue, seduce, and capture, and that journalists had to keep in mind in their news-hunting. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the article's "rhetoric" testifies of the new sensibility that newspapermen began to have with respect to the problem of reporting. Two observations can be made on this point:

1)  Penny Paper reporting is said to obtain "accurate and correct" local information. Since the earliest days of the paper press up to our present day, the word "accuracy" has only gained in prestige in journalism, becoming "the" cornerstone, and the capital virtue, of reporting. Reporting *must* be accurate. It is important to notice that "accuracy" does not so much prescribe a style of reporting, as it points to *a subject's way of being* with respect to the activity of reporting. Accuracy derives from the Latin *accurare*, a linguistic innovation of the $16^{th}$ century, certainly prior to 1597.[25] It means "doing with care". Reporting can thus be accomplished in the objective or subjective style, can be long or telegraphic, impassioned or detached, but in any case, in order to be able to convey the "earliest, fullest, and most correct intelligence" on local events, *it must be done with care*, that is, it must require time, energy, and physical as well as intellectual *involvement*.

2)  This means that reporting must entail some sort of *subjective verification* on the part of the journalist, whether in the form of "direct witnessing", or because the journalist "trusts" the source.

If the "invention of the news" set up new journalistic practices and standards, the heyday of modern journalism only comes with the so-called *Age of the Reporter* (1880s and 1890s), which Schudson sees as the first wave of professionalization of journalism, in

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[25] According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

which "*editors came to rely less on these informal sources of news and more on free-lance writers and hired reporters who wrote for pay* (65)".[26] It is for this reason that Papuzzi, as we mentioned in the previous chapter, captures the new dimension taken by journalism after the Penny Press Revolution with this insightful formula:

*What is journalism? What distinguishes it? It is the culture and the technique of the news. This technique, with its specific characteristics, spurs in the 1830s, the decade of the "penny press"… "News" emerges out of **the relation that the journalist establishes** between the nature of an event and the interest of an audience* (12-13)[27] [my emphasis].

Papuzzi's (and Schudon's) remarks signal two important points. In the first place they point to the fact that after the penny press revolution, any firm conceptual grasp of contemporary journalism must, sooner or later, take the subjectivity of journalists as its main focus. Secondly, it marks the coming of age of a new reflexive sensibility that puts an end to the "objective vs subjective controversy" in journalism. People today subscribe to the point that expressions such as "objective reporting" and "subjective reporting" refer neither to an alleged truth-content, nor to a cognitive strategy, but rather the style of reporting – the objective being matter-of-fact, unadorned of adjectives and emotional coloration, while the subjective allows more room for the journalist's expression of his/her point of view. The fundamental conviction underlining this view is that journalistic products *are inevitably subjective*.

While scholars and journalists alike rightly hail the end of the alleged "pretense to objectivity" as a positive factor, it seems to me that the end of the debate "objective vs subjective", with the triumph of the "subjective" vision, has had the side-effect of putting an end to the interrogation of the forms of truth in contemporary journalism. It is as if, once agreement has been reached on "the inevitable subjectivity of reporting", the question of truth stopped making sense and a generalized "anything goes" attitude became the dominant mood. An analysis of the relationships between truth and subjectivity, thus, is not only possible, but overdue.


**THE NEW JOURNALISM**

If one were to draw an ideal "chart of journalistic subjectivity" in the 19th century, its lowest point would be in the 1920s, when Walter Lippmann believed that only the objectively recordable events were news-worthy – Lippmann's favorite example of objectively recordable events was a football match-score – while its highest point would be located in the 1970s, when, with the *New Journalism*, the subjectivity of the journalist came to be valorized as never before (and perhaps never afterwards), giving rise to unmistakable news-crafting *styles*. A few lines of Tom Wolfe's plastic, nervous, hilarious prose, will illustrate this point immediately:

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[26] Schudson 1978
[27] Papuzzi, Antonio. 1998. *Giornalismo e letteratura*. Bari: Laterza.

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*For example, at the desk behind mine in the Herald Tribune city room sat Charles Portis. Portis was the original laconic cutup. At one point he was asked onto a kind of Meet the Press show with Malcolm X, and Malcolm X made the mistake of giving the reporters a little lecture before they went on about how he didn't want to hear anybody calling him "Malcolm," because he was not a dining-car waiter – his name happened to be "Malcolm X". By the end of the show, Malcolm X was furious. He was climbing the goddamned acoustical tiles. The original laconic cutup, Portis, had invariably and continually addressed him as "Mr. X"… "Now, Mr. X, let me ask you this…"* (5)[28]

Wolfe showcases the typical attitude of a journalist who has not only taken full conscience of his own enmeshment in the news-making, but also, more importantly, who *has switched his attitude towards said enmeshment*. Instead of hiding the inevitably "personal" take on the events, Wolfe does his best to capitalize on his own enmeshment by creating a voice, a style, that is unique, and that captures the reader much more for its unmistakable character than for the "relevance" of the events reported. With their stylistic innovations, therefore, Wolfe and his friends gave a clear demonstration that journalistic reporting could force its own limits, and enlarge the sphere of "news-worthiness" to encompass virtually *everything*; all that was requred was talent, of course, and subjective self-valorization:

*By the early 1960s… readers were bored to tears without understanding why. When they came upon that pale beige tone, it began to signal to them, unconsciously, that a well-known bore was here again, "the journalist", a pedestrian mind, a phlegmatic spirit, a faded personality, and there was no way to get rid of the pallid little troll, short of ceasing to read. This had nothing to do with objectivity and subjectivity or taking a stand or "commitment" – it was a matter of personality, energy, drive, bravura… style, in a word* (17-18)[29]

It is not by chance that the stylistic innovations of New journalism occurred in features making, because the so-called "features" – the stories of human interest – always allowed more room for experimentation. The fact that the *New Journalists* were feature-writers, however, also induced critics to suspect that Wolfe and his friends invented facts, or at least reported them inaccurately. It is interesting to notice that Wolfe rejected these charges on the basis that *new journalism* required if anything an extreme closeness to the facts:

*The kind of reporting they were doing struck them as far more ambitious, too. It was more intense, more detailed, and certainly more time-consuming than anything that newspapers and magazine reporters, including investigative reporters, were accustomed to.* **They developed the habit of staying with the people they were writing about for days at a time, weeks in some cases.** [my emphasis]**.** *They had to gather all the material the conventional journalist was after – and then keep going. It seemed all-important to be there when dramatic scenes took place, to get the dialogue, the gestures, the facial*

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[28] Tom Wolfe (ed.). 1973. *The New Journalism*. NY: Harper & Row Publishers
[29] Wolfe 1973

*expressions, the details of the environment…. Eventually I and others would be accused of "entering people's minds… But exactly! I figured that was one more doorbell a reporter had to push.* (21)[30]

The highlighted sentence: "*They developed the habit of staying with the people they were writing about for days at a time, weeks in some cases*" shows once again that successful stylistic innovations in journalism are consequences of innovations in journalistic-practices.

As any other innovation, *New Journalism* carried with it new problems. Wolfe and his talented friends had shown that journalists could aspire to stardom. Talent, however, goes astray much faster than "subjective self-valorization". *New journalism*'s legacy was a problematic one: journalists were not ready to expand their own *subjective take* beyond the limits of accurate reporting and beyond the commitment to accuracy and "closeness to facts" that still animated the *new journalists.* If, thanks to *New Journalism*, journalistic subjectivity acquired self-consciousness vis-à-vis news-making, one last frontier remained, a frontier that, as far as I can tell, was crossed only recently: the "news" has become the journalist him/herself.


## 2. Colossal-News

In his intervention at the Perugia International Journalism Festival in April 2011, Peter Horrocks, director of BBC Global News, compared BBC's and Aljazeera's current performances in the coverage of international "crises". With characteristic British detachment, Horrocks both acknowledged Aljazeera's role in innovating the language of war-zone television reporting, and spoke from his neutral point of view of BBC Global News as World Foremost International News Media. Perhaps in order to give the audience a more accurate idea about this last point in particular, during his introduction a gigantic screen at his back was displaying a train of images of BBC journalists while they were crouching under whistling bullets, displaying themselves spilling blood after being shot at, and so on.[31]

With these images running in the background, Horrocks conveyed his point of view on the evolution of television journalistic language in the past two decades. He reminded his audience that in 1991, during the First Iraqi War, legendary war journalist Peter Arnett was still reporting from within Saddam Hussein's palaces. He then recalled Aljazeera's innovative coverage of the Second Iraqi War in 2003, during which Aljazeera's journalists remained inside Iraq even after the beginning of the U.S. and British bombing. Finally, he argued, today [in 2011], satellite TV war reporting is broadcasted "from the field" virtually by any Media that can legitimately define itself "international" – by which Horrocks means media BBC Global News, Aljazeera, CNN, and China Central Television. The most recent example of such reporting from the field is, to be sure, the Libyan war.

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[30] Ib.
[31] http://www.festivaldelgiornalismo.com/post/16305/

Horrocks' intervention at the 2011 Perugia International Journalism Festival is telling as regards the current "ideal aesthetics" of war-zone reporting. It is known that, when Aljazeera became worldly renowned for broadcasting "from the field" during the Second Iraqi War, its critical acclaim – as well as its fierce rebuttal – was due to Aljazeera's effective countering of CNN's war news monopoly through "embedded" journalism. A proverbial saying in 2003, at least in Spain where I was at the time, was that for the first time in history one was able to follow the whole trajectory of every single bomb, from being dropped to landing: CNN privileged the winged images of the bombs being dropped from the bright blue skies, Aljazeera the gruesome perspective of their devastating effects on the ground.[32]

While Aljazeera's innovative reporting was filled with political intentionality, at the same time it was also innovating the war-zone reporting *form*. The images from the ground proved more thrilling, more adapt at bringing the war "directly into people's homes", so that since the Iraqi war, and in spite of BBC and CNN "orthodoxy" in 2003, Aljazeera's innovative style has become in just a few years, if not yet "the" official war-zone TV reporting grammar, at least, as Horrock's acknowledgment testifies to, the normative standard that sets up the measure of "danger" that a journalist must risk in order to convey the most accurate reporting. Many of my informants, be they Italian, British, Egyptian, confirmed this point by telling me that TV war-zone correspondence became slightly more dangerous than in the past due to journalists' competition for the "hottest spot". It is obvious that this tendency is only emerging today, and nothing says that it will become "the" normative way of reporting from the war-zones; yet, it still allows us to make a few considerations on the issue of subjectivity and truth.

One commentator of Horrock's conference noticed that, faced with images such as those that accompanied the talk, the audience was left with the rhetorical question as to whether staging the danger run by reporters adds anything at all to the comprehension of the war, or whether, instead, the dangerous enterprise does not become a spectacle, an event, a news-item in itself. It should be noted that this intelligent objection does not disavow the value of reporting from the field, but rather questions the dangerous temptation of transforming the journalist's peril into the news itself.[33] To draw the objection back to more general considerations, we may say that, while the new aesthetic launched by Aljazeera in 2003 had the indubitable merit of bringing war-zone TV correspondence closer to the visual perspective of the populations involved, today, 8 years later, we are confronted with a new problem: when such aesthetic *becomes fashion*, what kind of "intelligence" of the events does it produce?

As we said before, the intelligence of any event is always signified, in journalistic communication, as the journalist subjective enmeshment with facts. So we may legitimately ask: in what type of relationship with the events does a journalist staging before the camera his/her own danger engage?

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[32] See Jehane Noujaim's splendid documentary "Control Room"; also: Lynch, Marc. 2006. *Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, Al-Jazeera and Middle East Politics Today*. New York: Columbia University Press; Mohamed Zayani (ed.) 2005. *The Al Jazeera Phenomenon: Critical Perspective on New Arab Media*. Bouder: Paradigm Publisher; Miles, Hugh. 2005. *Al-Jazeera: The Inside Story of the Arab News Channel That Is Challenging the West*. New York: Grove Press; Della Ratta, Donatella. 2005. *Al Jazeera: Media e Società Arabe nel nuovo millennio*. Milano: Mondadori;
[33] http://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2011/04/14/news/perugia_gioved-14941192/index.html?ref=search

## AN ANALYSIS OF WAR-ZONE REPORTING

War – so the argument goes – is the supreme ethical test of journalism, the "locus", both real and symbolic, where the journalistic qualities of courage and ethical commitment find their highest point of expression.

Let's examine how Satellite all-news channels deal with wars. [34] Network colossuses such as the BBC, Aljazeera or CNN, typically diffract events such as "the war" in a multitude of angles, and consequently report from different places: from war-zones, from the White House, from the frontiers of the belligerent countries, and so on. In addition to direct reporting from the war zone, the war is debated, analyzed, criticized, by experts, politicians, journalists and common people, in talk-shows, live broadcasts, in-studio interviews, and so on. The overall project behind this massive organization is to provide audiences with the means to obtain the complete picture of the political, social, economic, and human complexity of "the war". In this grandiose "system", the war-zone reporter plays a pivotal role. His/her presence on the hot-spots guarantees both the network's, and the journalist's, personal involvement in the facts, granting "accuracy of information" and contributing to bring the war "into people's everyday life". The reporter's presence in the hot-spot, to be sure, is indispensable: it guarantees accuracy of information; it documents events in their unfolding, and it seeks to provide an informed perspective on those events. The reporter's presence in the hot-spot, however, is also problematic in two ways. To begin with, media colossuses sometimes fall into the temptation of making a spectacle of their reporters' real and alleged risks: this includes airing both the images of reporters crouching under *real* bullets, and the images of "fakes", as they say in jargon to refer to staged explosions, fake gas-threats and so on. In the next chapter I will examine more in depth the economy of body circulations in war-zone reporting; for now it is sufficient to notice that images of risk are rightly believed to give "color" to the notoriously static video-reporting narration.

The reporter's presence in the hot spots, as we said, is problematic for a second reason. Network colossuses often demand reporters to focus on stories of "human interest", while extended analyses of the war are often times conducted in studio by experts and opinion-makers. While this way of dividing labor makes the representation of a multi-faceted event such as "the war" more agile and appealing – the audience will be able to sympathize with common people, but at the same time will be given an informed perspective – it also cuts off the reporter from the analysis. In spite of the fact that closeness to events gives the reporter a unique perspective and intelligence "from within", this intelligence is not capitalized as it could be. The reporter thus seems less the organizing intelligence of the war-zone reporting than the collector of shocking war-images. This way of covering the war has two outcomes. First of all, it makes the risk run by the reporter appear *unjustifiable*: the reporter's life is in fact at stake for collecting images rather than for providing a unique perspective of events. Secondly, it makes audiences become more and more familiar with un-contextualized war-images, so that

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[34] The examination is based on observations of the news channels and web-sites: www.aljazeera.net; www.bbc.com; www.cnn.com; www.rainews24.com.

war-images become valuable in themselves rather than as referent to a brutal reality. The war can thus be *consumed* without many too second thoughts towards the *drâma* of the civilians involved in the war.

Let's be clear: I am neither denying the importance of war-zone reporting, nor maintaining that networks should not use war-images. I am critiquing the semiotic system in which both war-zone reporting, and war-images, are framed. Insofar it demands that reporters run considerable risks for the purpose of delivering stories of human interest, rather than for providing a perspective "from within" events, contemporary war coverage both stages the life of reporters as expendable, and denies local people or civilians a wider intelligence of the war. Reminding ourselves that *drâma* in ancient Greek means "action", and that any action is performed by a subject who has a partial, circumstantial, but to a certain extent effective intelligence of its surroundings, we may say that contemporary war-coverage denies the *drâma* of reporters and civilians.

The point of critique is to be constructive. Is there an alternative way to stage a journalist's involvement with local events, such that both the journalist's, and his/her interviewees', lives, will be captured in the full dimension of their *drâma*? Arguing that reporters should relate to their interviewees the same way investigative journalists do would be dishonest, because reporting and investigative journalism are different activities within the journalistic field – they follow different logic, respond to different needs, have different scopes and timing. At the same time, reporting and investigative journalism do share certain characteristics that make the comparison possible. One of the most important shared characteristic is that in both reporting and investigative journalism organization of labor is decisive for the type of access to reality that journalists will have. Thus, while in chapters II and III I discussed the ways in which journalistic practices influence journalists' access to reality, in what follows I will illustrate how different ways of organizing labor in investigative journalism relate to different truth-practices.

## 3. Italian Journalism's Current Challenges

Launched in 1999 *Rainews24* is the first Italian satellite TV all-news channel. It is state-owned, (relatively) low budget, and has been characterized since its beginnings by high experimentalism and attention to foreign correspondence – two characteristics that are unusual in Italian mainstream journalism. As I wrote in the introduction, *Rainews24* is the editor of the investigative video-journalism TV program *L'Inchiesta*.

During my fieldwork I had the opportunity to interview the creator and former director of *Rainews24*, Roberto Morrione, whose philosophy shaped the all-news channel. Morrione is the typical "man with a vision", in the sense that he both sees with uncommonly penetrating gaze through contemporary Italian journalism, and is committed to act in order to modify the distortions that he claims he so clearly sees. The following exchange synthesizes well the challenges that any Italian ethically committed journalism faces:

**Roberto:** *When we started we faced multiple challenges. Not so much technical ones – although integrating the web and the analog channel in 1999 was not as easy as it is today – as ethical: our challenge was how to de-provincialize Italian Journalism.*

**Edoardo:** *What do you mean by "de-provincializing"? Why is Italian journalism provincial?*

**Roberto:** *Italian journalism does not "speak" to the Italian citizens. It speaks only to politicians and to the economic elites. This is the main reason for its structural weakness. Politicians literally use journalists to send cryptic messages at each other. Since journalists never question politicians, politicians feel free to say whatever they want. Hence they are able to send both ambiguous messages to their colleagues, and demagogic messages to the people. Our journalism is in love with itself, examines itself, or critiques itself, but the point is that it is always self-referential.*

*A case in point. RAI possesses 20 regional headquarters. 20! This is a unique power for the effective coverage of local news: so RAI is structurally predisposed for a type of bottom-up journalism so to speak. Do you see this type of journalism in RAI? No. Why? Because the regional headquarters work exactly the same way the central headquarter does: they collect this or that politician's opinion.*

**Edoardo:** *I guess you are implying that RAI's foreign correspondence is as "weak" as the national and the local one?*

**Roberto:** *Yes. RAI has foreign correspondents in every continent, but it never uses them! Just check last year's* [2008] *data: RAI primetime news broadcast one foreign correspondence per week! One per week! This is ridiculous if you consider what happens in the world,* **and above all if you consider what type of world is the one in which we live** [my emphasis]*!*

That journalism has entered the epoch of globalization, and that globalization is both an opportunity and a challenge for it, is certainly not only an Italian problem. What is peculiar about the influence of globalization on Italian journalism, however, is that Italy does not have a well-established tradition of international journalism as the U.S., or England, or Germany do. Furthermore, while during the 2000s the new all-news satellite television – Aljazeera and China Central Television – flourished, the first decade of the third millennium left no trace in Italy.

Both Gabanelli and Morrione pointed to me that Italian journalism has entered the "global digital age" with little financial resources and low prestige. They also added, with some regret, that it is a shame because, in spite of everything, they see a great deal of enthusiasm among their younger collaborators.

The enthusiasm is perhaps due to the fact that the use of new portable technology such as prosumer (professional + consumer) video-cameras, the internet, last generation editing software such as Adobe Premiere and Final Cut, and so on, have determined in the past decade a drastic lowering of the costs of production and diffusion of journalistic products, and a dissemination of more or less professional expertise in video-narration. The dissemination of user-friendly video-technology opened up new intriguing possibilities for journalism in general and for video-journalism in particular. We may therefore say that *digital technology created the material pre-conditions for producing*

*valuable journalistic products at low-cost*. As I shall illustrate in the rest of the chapter, low-cost production is one of the keys of contemporary Italian journalism.

During my fieldwork, I indeed noticed that low-cost portable technology led to two important developments: (1) it induced a mushrooming of brand new small-scale journalistic enterprises; and (2) it pushed for some of the most receptive existing journalistic venues to re-structure in smaller, and more efficient units.

A few meaningful examples – meaningful insofar as they gained national attention in Italy – may illustrate this point.

## (1) Small Scale Journalistic Enterprises

**AGI,** *Associazione Giornalismo Investigativo*, was born in 2007, with the goal of forming journalists able to combine investigative techniques with modern technology such as computer hacking, spy-cams, and so on. The Association is a non-profit organization that distributes small stipends to its associates for their lessons. The Association grants a Master Degree in Investigative journalism.

**The newspaper** *Il Fatto Quotidiano* was founded in 2009 by famous journalists Marco Travaglio, Peter Gomez, and Antonio Padellaro who invested their own capital in the enterprise. The newspaper is characterized by aggressive journalistic style and is the only newspaper in Italy that, in spite of not receiving any public financial support, realized a profit for three years consecutively (2007-2010). *Il Fatto Quotidiano* sells 151,000 daily issues and has 42,000 subscribers (for Italian standards these are very successful numbers). The newspaper experiments with an interesting form of *horizontal hierarchy*, made possible by the renowned friendship between its three founders.

**Online newspaper** *Lettera43* is specialized in financial reporting and employs a total of 5 journalists. The ownership is divided among the 5 journalists themselves, although an important bank in Milan funded the commercial enterprise and owns 33% of the total share.

## (2) Miniaturization of pre-existing journalistic units

Beside the television programs *Report* and *L'Inchiesta*, and newsmagazine *L'Espresso*, all of which we already mentioned, news channels RAITRE and LA7 launched low-budget reportage TV shows *Presa Diretta* and *Exit* in 2008; and Al Gore online TV Current launched Current Italia with highly experimental program *Vanguard*, the (to date) most successful example of bottom-up journalism.

In all these emerging assemblages journalists manage to organize themselves so as to exercise a more direct control over all the phases of their activities. Thus, less hierarchical, more horizontally organized ways of arranging the journalistic activities are meeting the commercial and critical acclaim of what might be called, provisionally, for lack of a better name, *small-scale journalism*. The name highlights two aspects of the new assemblages: the dimension of the editorial boards, and (consequently) the type of interpersonal relationships involved. "Small-scale", however, shall not be taken as if

these new journalistic venues were lacking interest in national or global issues. On the contrary, in spite of the scarcity of material resources, journalists are committed to "de-provincialize" Italian journalism – to use Morrione's expression. My informants in Italy were all, more or less successfully, organizing themselves, developing a self-understanding as journalists, and implementing truth-practices, in forms that are slightly innovative with respect to both those of the traditional press, and those of Aljazeera, China Central Television, BSkyB Corporate, or BBC world. Small-scale companies thus represent a sort of "third way" to third millennium journalism, or, as it were, a response to the crisis of mainstream journalism.

Observers of mass media and journalism have indeed being using the word "crisis" to describe the current situation of both global and local journalism for years – and so did many of my informants. Everybody seems to agree that mainstream journalism, as we have known it in the past 30 years, is too costly, and that the organization in smaller venues and the innovation of journalistic practices is somewhat inevitable. If smaller units are (possibly) the future of journalism, perhaps an analysis of the kinds of truth-practices they enable is not a waste of time. In order to do so, however, we need to understand what is meant by truth-practices.

## 4. Setting Up the Concepts for the Analysis of the Contemporary

In *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres*, his penultimate *Cours au collège de France*, Michel Foucault provided the following definition of his analyses of *parrêsia*: "*c'est l'analyse de ce qui, dans la situation réelle de celui qui parle, affecte et modifie le sens et la valeur de l'énoncé* (6)[35]".

That the "sense and value" of statements depend on the contextual situations of the subjects uttering them was already known since J.L. Austin's mould-breaking analyses of the Illocutionary Acts[36]. Foucault, however, was not trying to describe a class of statements whose meaning depends on the statements' capacity to match codified situations. Rather, he sought to provide an account of the ways in which a subject can constitute itself as truth-teller. Given the contextual situation, what price does the subject need to pay in order to be a truth-teller? Needless to say, a truth-teller is someone who speaks the truth *to other people*; thus, s/he addresses an audience, a community of persons, in such a way as *to affect* them with his/her the speech acts. Truth as understood by Foucault has therefore a *dynamic* and a *dramatic* (in the sense that "it moves") character:

*Dans la parrêsia, quel que soit le caractère habituel, familier, quasi institutionalisé de la situation où elle s'effectue, ce qui fait la parrêsia, c'est que l'introduction, l'irruption du discours vrai détermine une situation ouverte, ou plotôt ouvre la situation et rend possible un certain nombre d'effets qui précisement ne sont pas connus. La parrêsia ne produit pas un effet codé, elle ouvre un risque indeterminé (60).[37]*

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[35] Foucault 2008.
[36] Austin, John. 1962. *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
[37] Foucault 2008

For the subject to be a *parrêsiaste*, a truth-teller and a truthful-teller, s/he must undergo some sort of risk. The risk is understood as the opening of a situation of uncertainty; the "situation of uncertainty", however, is not strictly codified: rather, every political micro- or macro-context seems to open a specific risk, and therefore demands a specific *parrêsia*. Foucault provides three examples, drawn from Euripides, Plato and Thucydides, which speak to three forms of *parrêsia* and three very different risks involved. In Plato for instance *parrêsia* takes the form of "risking one's life in order to tell the truth in the face of the tyrant", whereas in Euripides' *Ion* parrêsia is understood as a subject's will to engage his interlocutors in an agonistic game whose results are unpredictable.

Two details are important. First of all, as usual, Foucault suspends any value-judgment: he does not imply that "telling the truth in the face of the tyrant" is any better or any more democratic or even any more revealing of "courage" than "engaging interlocutors in an agonistic game"; he is simply interested in analyzing the forms of truth-telling upon different political conditions. Secondly, Foucault's focus on the forms of veridiction does not deny the legitimacy of epistemological analyses; rather, by shifting the philosophical exploration of the relation between truth and subjectivity to encompass the political domain, Foucault is interested in grasping truth in its trans-active, "communal" dimension so to speak.

It is for this reason that the concept of *parrêsia* proves to be particularly useful to analyze the dynamics of truth entailed by contemporary journalism, so to provide a viable form of interrogation of the question of truth beyond the debate "objectivity vs subjectivity".

At the same time, an analysis of contemporary journalism based on the concept of *parrêsia* – above all of contemporary *Italian* journalism, notably obsessed by media tycoon and prime minister Berlusconi – has to avoid the temptation of flattening the notion of *parrêsia* based on Foucault's Platonic example, that is, has to avoid the temptation of understanding *parrêsia* as simply "telling the truth in the face of the tyrant". This is for example the mistake made by sociologist Alessandro Dal Lago, when he describes Foucault's concept in these terms:

*This concept [parrêsia] was widely analyzed by Foucault in the early 1980s. According to Foucault, parrêsia was, originally, in Euripides' Ion, the earnest speech of the outcasts who, before the polis, throw the truth into the face of the tyrant. Foucault follows the evolution of the concept from the Greek Tragedy to Plato and beyond, when parrêsia is confiscated by philosophers who turn it into a form of private counseling for tyrants*[38]. (114).

During my fieldwork I had the opportunity to realize that many Italian journalists understand the problem of truth-telling precisely as Dal Lago does. With the remarkable exceptions of *Report*'s and *Rainews24*'s journalists, all my other informants, for instance, maintained that the clearest evidence of Italian journalism's current bad shape is that none of the journalists who regularly interview the Italian Prime Minister, or any other

[38] Dal Lago, Alessandro. 2010. *Eroi di carta. Il caso Gomorra ed altre epopee*. Roma: Manifestolibri.

member of the government, or participate in governmental press conferences, has the courage to ask "ferocious" questions. I certainly agree with them on this point; when, however, I asked my informants to provide concrete examples of questions that they would ask had they the opportunity to interview any member of the Government, many of them usually gave me examples of "rhetorical questions" such as the following one: "You are saying that the Government has the support of the industrials, but my colleague who went to their meeting yesterday reported that there have been a lot of critiques to the government's new plan for economic development. What do you respond to this?".[39]

This question typifies the tendency to privilege the "display of aggressiveness" over truly inquisitive or embarrassing questions. This tendency may be defined as a degeneration of the journalistic myth of "aggressiveness and independence" and it goes without saying that, in spite of the rhetoric, with this type of question the journalist never succeeds in destabilizing the interlocutor, since the question neither addresses a specific content, nor, consequently, requires a definite answer. We can perhaps better approximate *parrêsia* by taking into account journalists' self-reflexivity in the context of the contemporary Italian journalistic field.


## 5. The Italian Case

In 1996 Pierre Bourdieu wrote a much criticized essay titled <u>Sur la television</u>. Although the essay was, in my opinion, rightly criticized for its un-sympathetic language, I also think that it contains some insights that deserve to be capitalized. Bourdieu's aim was, preliminary, to reject "une forme de matérialisme court, associé à la tradition marxiste, qui n'explique rien, qui dénonce sans rien éclairer (44)"[40]; secondly, to understand the dynamics governing the everyday activities of journalists that structure the concrete experience, and yet, that remain completely un-conceptualized in their structural relevance by journalists and the public alike. These dynamics are the *symbolic relations* structuring "the journalistic field" (*le champ journalistique*):

*Pour essayer de comprendre ce que peut faire un journaliste, il faut avoir à l'esprit un série de paramètres: d'une parte la position de l'organe de presse dans lequel il se trouve, TF1 ou Le Monde, dans le champ journalistique, deuxièmement sa position propre dans l'espace de son journal ou de sa chaîne (46).[41]*

Bourdieu maintained that one failed to understand every single journalistic artifact crafted in France in the 1990s if one did not "comprehend it" in its structural relation to the whole journalistic field. This insight, however, can be set to work in two distinctive

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[39] I am using this question as a sample; the question, however, was really asked by a (young) correspondent of the newspaper *Il fatto quotidiano* to the Italian Minister of Economy on May 03, 2011. As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, *Il fatto quotidiano* is one of the newest and most interesting newspapers in contemporary Italy, as it is highly experimental in all domains: forms of organization, language, financing and so on. Precisely its youth and experimentalism makes it, as it is normal, still unripe in many respects.

[40] Bourdieu. Pierre. 1996. *Sur la television, suivi de L'emprise du jurnalisme*. Paris: Raisons d'agir Éditions.

[41] Ib.

ways. One is the way chose by Bourdieu himself: one can decode the meaning of every journalistic activity as a singular manifestation of its structuring symbolic logic:

*Chacun à l'intérieur de cet univers, engage dans sa concurrance avec les autres la force (relative) qu'il détient et qui définit sa position dans le champ, et, en conséquence, ses strategies. La concurrence économique entre le chaîne ou lex journaux pour les lecteurs et les auditeurs ou, comme on dit, pour le parts de marché s'accomplit concrètement sous la forme d'une concurrence entre le journalistes, concurrence qui a ses enjeux propres, spécifiques, le scoop, l'information exclusive, la réputation dans le métier etc (46).*

Another way of make use of the concept of "journalistic field", however, remains un-articulated in Bourdieu's essay and in my opinion is *in nuce* contained in the following passage:

*Si je veux savoir aujourd'huy ce que va dire ou écrire tel journaliste, ce qu'il trouvera évident ou impensable, naturel ou indigne de lui, il faut que je sache la position qu'il occupe dans cet espace, cet-à-dire le pouvoir spécifique que détient son organ de presse et qui se mesure, entre autres indices, à son poids économique, aux parts de marchè, mais aussi à son poids simbolique, plus difficile à quantifier (47).*

This passage opens up the possibility of taking into account journalists' self-reflexivity as a force dynamically related to the journalistic field ("ce *qu'il* trouvera evident… la position *qu'il occupe* dans cet espace"). This possibility, as I said, remains unarticulated in Bourdieu's analysis. Bourdieu grants journalists only a very limited degree of self-reflexivity: he concedes that journalists have *a clear understanding* of the position that the news-corporations to which they belong holds in the overall journalistic field, but he is not willing to concede that journalists may have, exactly like sociologists, an understanding *of the structuring logic of the journalistic field*, and that such understanding may play a part in their self-reflexivity – for instance in choosing the most appropriate truth-telling strategy. Perhaps Bourdieu was only describing a historical contingency rather than the metaphysical structure of journalism. In any case, as far as I could tell from my fieldwork, my informants often times entered the journalistic profession with a degree of understanding of how media works; perhaps, they got it because in college they had the opportunity to study the books written, among others, by Pierre Bourdieu. This is how Mauro describes his and his colleagues' job:

**Mauro:** *We all judge negatively Italian elites: we think that they are distant from the social and economic reality of this country. What is our job in this wasteland? We think that the task of a journalist in contemporary Italy is not to find "the news of the day." In fact, we are never after the "news of the day". We try to create narrations that push people to reflect. We do not "represent reality": we try to move things! You see the difference? We do not report what Italian Magistrates do: we want Italian Magistrates to open a file after watching our investigations!*

While Mauro makes justice of Bourdieu assumption about journalists' unawareness of the symbolic logic of the journalistic field, Marina goes even further: she thinks that one

of the key to *Report*'s success is precisely its ethics of hard-work. This is how she sees herself, and thinks her audience perceives her, *in relation to the journalistic field*:

**Marina:** *We started as, and we still are, freelance journalists: we can hardly be said to have any type of privilege. I believe that people understand this point: that we are not part of a privileged world, that we are not privileged journalists standing on a pedestal and telling everyone else what is right or wrong, what political party is more or less corrupted, and whom they should vote. Quite the opposite: people understand that we are hard workers, that we work very hard to "get the facts". I think that people identify with us, because we lack privilege exactly as they do, and we want the exact same thing that they want: to understand.*

Marina is convinced that working freelance "forged" both her style of reporting and her journalistic agenda, and that freelance journalism is a life-style which is reflected on the product s/he crafts. Not only she is perfectly aware of the economic and symbolic relations that structure the journalistic field, but her awareness plays an important role when it comes to choose the appropriate truth-telling strategy (telling the truth "standing on a pedestal" vs providing only the logical articulation of facts). When Marina edits her video-inquiries, for instance, she reviews the voiceover times and again to secure that she is not being "moralistic"; that her narration clings to the facts themselves; that, when she is filled with indignation, she uses an ironic rather than a neutral or sentimental register.

The most interesting part of her remark, however, is the following: contrary to Bourdieu, who thinks that economic relations are "invisible" in journalistic artifacts, and that only sociologists can make them visible to the audience, she thinks that economic relations are instead *perfectly visible* on the signifying surface of the journalistic message; so much so, in fact, as to be the key to *Report*'s success. Journalistic messages crafted by *Report*'s journalist acquire "value" because they transmit the hard work necessary to produce them.

*Report*'s episodes do cost a great deal of hard work. In my 1 month collaboration with Marina, activities of a *typical* working day included: driving 6 hours a day from town to town; studying the correct legislative interpretation of environmental issues; analyzing bulks of documents to track down possible frauds; being threatened by the Italian police for interfering with their investigations; being complimented by the Italian police for helping them in their investigations; risking being beaten up by fishermen for asking (and filming ourselves asking) questions such as "why do I see on your boat the tuna fishing net that has been prohibited by the EU with the circ. 135/2001, and for giving up the use of which your company has obtained by the EU a refunding of 2.500.000euros, which have been paid to you on March 30th, 2006, with Min. Int. Att. 32-0004-13450?". 4 times in 1 month we found out at 10pm, after an intense day of activities, that we would have to wake up at 7am the day after. We were 1 hour away from the friend's house where we were staying.

Marina was investigating on the environmental fraud that a medium-sized Fishing Company from Southern Italy perpetrated against the European Union. The Fishing Company obtained a compensation for its alleged demission of a particularly destructive fishing-net. In the course of her investigations, Marina discovered (and documented) many interesting things. First of all, she documented that beyond constituting the body of

evidence of the fraud perpetrated against the EU, the net that the company never dismissed were having devastating effects not only on the environment – it was indeed the reason why the EU forbade them – but also on the local economy, because their massive use was strangulating the small business. Secondly, she found out that the local Coast Guard was, if not fully complacent, at least very negligent. Marina threatened the Chief Coast Guard Officer to report on his incompetence if he kept refusing patrolling, and – notice her diabolic subtlety – if he refused taking her on board in the open sea and allowing her to shoot the action against the illegal fishermen that she had just forced on him. The sequence of the "sea hunting" lasts 3 minutes and it is one of the dramatic peaks of the episode *Mare Nostrum*[42].

I hope that this brief account gives an idea of the total involvement, and of the *extreme fun*, that *Report*'s episodes demand. While the first relevant aspect of *Report*'s parrêsiastic strategy is the "hard work", it is also true that such hard work requires a certain life-style that includes, versatility, extreme mental openness, ability and willingness to put oneself into play.


## STEADYNESS OF CHARACTER AT REPORT

Be available to work 11 hours a day for 8-9 months, having fun in putting oneself in situations that many people may define dangerous or uncanny… working for *Report* requires one more inclination: extreme steadiness of character. In particular on Mondays, as the creator of *Report*, Milena, told me:

**Milena:** *Do you know why? Because we broadcast on Sunday evenings, so the following Monday we are unmistakably notified that the enterprises, the politicians, or the banks we have investigated upon have started a libel suit against us. Think that every single one of them requests hundreds of thousands of euros, and since the Italian law imposes to suit altogether the journalist responsible for the investigation, the creator of the program (me), and the editor… In this moment for instance, I have 36 libel suits against me. 36! [laughter].*
*But I am confident: in the past, we never lost a single trial, because the judges recognized that we never said anything inaccurate or undocumented or that had not undergone a scrupulous double-checking. The only protection that you have against these intimidating actions is scrupulous documentation.*

Milena was not trying to impress me, or to be self-indulgent, or to ask my emotional adherence to the difficult task of being an investigative journalist in contemporary Italy. She was rather providing me with a rational account of some important elements that make up the daily conditions of her job. She was stating the facts – not without a touch of *divertissement* – as she usually does and demands from her collaborators at *Report*. Learning from her the lesson of skepticism, some time past this conversation I double-checked how many libel suits were currently in place against *Report*; they are public acts,

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[42] Notice: all of the activities described in the paragraph produced no more than 20 minutes of footage, that is, 1/3, of the final episode!

so anyone who has the patience to deal with Italian bureaucracy can check them. In March 2010 they were 36, not 1 less. All of them came from governmental institutions, multinationals, corporations, banks, politicians, entrepreneurs. The lowest request was for 100.000euros; the highest, for 5.000.000euros (5.000.000!), requested by a Sicilian entrepreneur for "character assassination". Milena explained to me the reason why Italian corporations, and even private individuals, request such high amounts in libel suits:

**Milena:** *Almost everyday Italian journalists complain that politicians are too invasive, that they contrive journalists' freedom, and so on. My opinion is slightly different. That politicians try to control the press is anything but a recent phenomenon. It always happened and it will always happen. The real limit to the freedom of press in Italy is a juridical limit: we are the only European nation in which enterprises or politicians can sue journalists without risking anything. In France, when an enterprise starts a libel suit against a journalist, the burden of evidence is on the enterprise, rather than on the journalist. In the Anglo-Saxon world, if the enterprise looses the suit, the enterprise pays a triple of what it originally requested. In Italy neither one of these mechanisms exists. Do you know how much politicians and enterprises risk when they open a libel suit against us for 1.000.000euros? A fine of 100 euros.*

Right after this explanation, she added the following considerations, which prove crucial to understand the current situation of Italian journalism:

**Milena:** *Consider that in Italy libel suits take 1 to 7 years. Do you know what does that mean? First of all, that every year editors of investigative journalism programs are forced to put more and more of their financial budget into a "risk fund." What editor can afford that? Only the state television. Secondly, it means that a professional investigative journalist must endure a situation of psychological distress, with millions of euro fines impending on her head, for many years. One must be out of mind to be an investigative journalist!*

The last remark enables us to make a few considerations.

1) Whether "intentional" or not, the inefficiency of the Italian law is pushing away "big business" from investigative journalism. Contemporary investigative journalists have only two options: either working for *Report* or *Rainews24*, the only state-owned investigative TV show, or risking their own capitals by *founding new journalistic venues*. This last part translates into experimenting with new forms of organization of journalistic labor.

2) Either way, investigative journalists must be ready to accept a considerable personal economic risk with the perspective of a relatively small salary. This implies three consequences: first of all, investigative journalism in contemporary Italy demands strong inner motivation; secondly, the impending economic threats force the journalist to obtain an extraordinary level of accuracy; thirdly, journalists are pushed to find innovative commercial forms (the example of publishing company *Chiarelettere* is revealing).

3) The new forms of organization of journalistic labor entail a level of personal involvement that is hardly found in mainstream journalism, and that, as far as I could tell during my fieldwork, often encourages the construction of interpersonal relations of friendship, mutual respect, recognition, and so on.

I will now turn to illustrate how different forms of organizing labor influence the truth-practices adopted by investigative journalists in *L'inchiesta* and *Report*.

## *L'INCHIESTA*'S TRUTH-PRACTICES

The following is an exchange with Maurizio, creator of the investigative TV program *L'inchiesta*, broadcasted by all-news satellite TV channel *Rainews24*:

**Edoardo:** *Your video-inquiries are always very analytical. Report has a very dramatic pace, whereas you guys are always extremely didactic. Can you explain why?*

**Maurizio:** *We are very low-budget. This simple fact entails important consequences. First of all, that we are forced to work individually, because we cannot afford paying for cameramen. Secondly, we need to remain a small team. Thirdly, we need to carry over a maniacally detailed preliminary work before we go to the field, because anytime we go to the field we invest a consistent part of our budget. Consider this: every episode needs to be 24 minutes long, and we interview at least 12 people per episode (not necessarily all of them will appear in the final cut, but let's say that that is our magic number). So you see that our margins are very narrow, that we need to find a perfect way of balancing all these elements. So what do we do? We plan in advance the interviews and try to foresee what people might say. When you work this way, what you call "analytic style" follows almost naturally.*

*L'inchiesta* is a small unit of 5 people. Its size, its specialization on foreign affairs, and its low-cost grant it a large autonomy from *Rainews24* editorial management. Because it is low-budget, *L'Inchiesta* cannot spend more than 15 days on a video-inquiry. Journalists travel individually, although the whole unit collaborates in the preliminary preparation of any individual travel. The interview with Maurizio illustrates perfectly not only how the forms of organization condition the language of investigative journalism, but, most importantly, how they condition the type of truth-practice one is encouraged to implement. Preparing questions in advance, as *L'Inchiesta*'s journalists are forced to do by their extremely low budget, elicits an approach to truth that we may define "classical investigative". Precisely insofar as the journalist does not approach the interview with a pre-conceived truth, but rather with an image of truth, with a hypothesis of truth, so to speak, the interview becomes the moment in which *truth is negotiated*.

Forming an image of truth, obviously, is inevitable not only for *Rainews24*'s journalists, but also for *Report*'s journalists and, to be sure, for every single one of us as soon as we start interpreting the reality around us. When I compare my interactions with my informants at *Report* and at *Rainews24,* however, I realized that the multiple constraints that condition both *equips'* everyday work *encourage them to adopt* different

self-reflexive attitudes towards truth. I have already anticipated how, during my conversations with *Report*'s journalists, I realized that their way of reflecting on truth in journalism echoed Michel Foucault's. As a suggestive analogy – suggestive but based on empirical observation – I may then say that *L'inchiesta*'s journalists' way of reflecting on the problem of truth echoes what Umberto Eco multiple times schematized as the "classical investigative strategies".[43]

According to Eco, the most famous "literary" detectives, Sherlock Holmes and Philip Marlowe, typify nothing else than our common reasoning strategies, which have often been hypostatized as more or less rigorous philosophical procedures. In this view Sherlock Holmes is the best literary illustration of Baruch Spinoza's epistemology of immanence, that is, the idea that "the order and connection of things is equal to the order and connection of ideas" (*ordo et connexio rerum idem est ac ordo et connexio idearum)*. Eco notices that Holmes collects small details from which he "abducts" a perfectly rounded truth, a truth which was already "there", in the interconnections of small details, waiting for the right abductive reasoning to reach out its transparent solitude. In this kind of anti-pragmatist epistemology, whose radicalization Eco attributes to both Spinoza and early structuralism,[44] not only the problem of knowledge is purely resolved at the level of procedural rules – it is by implementing the "right reasoning" that the final truth is attained at – but also the truth is a unique result which does not pose any ethical puzzle to the observer/investigator insofar as it is *completely independent* from him. At the other extreme of the epistemological scale Eco places Philip Marlowe's radical pragmatism. Marlowe's technique is not abduction; rather, Marlowe actively enmeshes himself with the events that he's called to investigate upon, and it is in virtue of his subjective intervention that such events develop: criminals decide to rush their misdemeanors, or to commit murder in order to eliminate witnesses of their previous, often times less hideous, crimes. For Marlowe, "truths" are nothing else than the "effects" that derive from the investigator's own enmeshing with the events, and it is precisely the investigator's subjective enmeshment that opens up the ethical dimension of truth – and determines the inevitable bittersweet endings of Marlowe's adventures. Eco maintains that while literature and philosophy in the early XIX century used to hypostatize the two procedures as if they were absolutely incompatible, any active investigation and more generally any active interpretation is made of both deductions and pragmatic interventions. When I asked Salvatore, one of my informants at *L'inchiesta,* how he prepared for interviews, this is how he replied:

**Salvatore:** *When you interview someone you need to clear up your mind from the information that you already possess. You need to approach the person afresh we may say. You need to become the average viewer, who does not possess the information that you, the journalist, are trying to pre-figure. You need to let yourself discover the truth little by little, precisely such as the average viewer does.*

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[43] Eco, Umberto. 1994. *Sei Passeggiate nei boschi narrativi*. Milano: Bompiani; ----.1996. *Sulla Letteratura*. Milano: Bompiani; ----. 1997. *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio*. Torino: Einaudi; Umberto Eco and Thomas Sebeok (eds.) 2000. *Il segno dei tre: Holmes, Dupin, Pierce*. Milano; Bompiani.
[44] Eco, Umberto. 1972. *La struttura assente*. Milano: Bompiani.

Salvatore's response was very different from any response that any of *Report*'s journalists had given me. It is obvious that for Salvatore interviews are not agonistic fields in which the interlocutors "prove" themselves in front of the camera, but rather moments of a linear narration:

**Salvatore:** *If I go to Afghanistan and in a week or so I need to interview the President, Pakistan' ambassador, NATO's commander in Chief and so on, I cannot assume that the viewer knows who they all are. So I need to carefully plan my interviews in such ways as to make viewers understand who these people are, why is it that I am asking such questions precisely to them, and what these interviews reveal of the overall investigation.*

The time and financial constraints of TV program *L'Inchiesta*, combined with the commitment to both investigation, and accuracy, push Salvatore (and his 4 colleagues in the small team) to reflect on the problem of truth as the problem of how to provide an adequate representation of the events narrated. In other words, the problem of truth enters the domain of Salvatore's self-reflexivity as the problem of how to make the events or the findings intelligible to the audience that he has in mind when he is crafting his video-inquiry. Thus, we may say that the truth-strategy adopted by *L'inchiesta* is classical *adequatio ad rem*.

## *REPORT*'S TRUTH-PRACTICES

The following comparison between the words of Michel Foucault and those of Mauro, one of *Report*'s journalists, is strikingly revealing:

**Foucault:** *Pour que la philosophie ne soit pas pur et simple discourse mais bien réalité, il faut qu'elle ne s'address pas à tout le monde et à n'importe qui, mais a ceux-là seulement qui veut écouter* [In order for philosophy to be not simply a discourse but a reality, it is necessary that it addresses only those who want to listen, rather than just everybody] (212).[45]

**Edoardo:** *Your last inquiry dealt with a very difficult issue that, to be perfectly honest, was very difficult to follow. Why didn't you provide a synopsis in the middle of the narration?*

**Mauro:** *Because in my opinion one should not be obsessed with questions such as "who's following? Who's understanding?". I want the highest degree of attention from my audience, I do not tolerate that my audience get distracted. I am not interested in talking to people who are not available to listen to me carefully. If we start providing "mid-narration synopses" we will encourage our audience to behave irresponsibly towards us, and we do not want that! You think you can listen to music while you are watching me? Well then, I am not interested in talking to you.*

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[45] Foucault 2008.

Having a clear idea of the typology of one's audience and not necessarily wanting or desiring to reach just everyone, seem to be the preliminary mindset for a successful *parrêsiastic strategy* according to Mauro. Now listen to how Gabanelli speaks of interviews:

**Milena:** *Take Leonardo's interview to Foncalonieri [Leonardo is one of Report's journalists, Foncalonieri is the CEO of Mediaset]. Leonardo had been preparing the interview for days, so Foncalonieri did not succeeded in tricking him. He tried to say inaccurate facts, but Leonardo kept catching him in contradiction. Since, however, Foncalonieri was so convinced that he was right on the basis that he was somehow speaking for the whole Italian Entrepreneurship, he offered a good performance in the end. The interview was pleasurable, and I think that the audience thought: Foncalonieri is certainly sneaky, but also clever: he accepted to defend himself and his company even if they are indefensible. You understand the point? It was more convenient for Foncalonieri to appear in video and to be questioned, than to refuse the interview.*

Milena's understanding of the interview and of the subtle dynamics that come into play in it, reveals a peculiar *parrêsiastic* strategy. In order to be revealing of anything at all, the interview must be set up as a field in which the interviewee is left with means to defend him/herself, as a field of confrontation that becomes more interesting precisely insofar as it is a real discussion that takes place in it, with *both actors putting themselves into play*. Not all of the interviews need be necessarily in the "agonistic mode" however. In the former chapter I described how Ranucci's and Alberto's approaches to their interviewees open up a reality that is foreclosed to other journalists. If this is so, however, what are the consequences for truth-practices?

**Edoardo:** *Let's talk about your approach. It is obvious that you establish a sympathetic relationship with your interviewees.*

**Sigfrido:** *I think that it is question of personality. It's been one of my characteristic all along my career. I think it is important to let people understand that we are on the same side when we denounce something, because if you create a wall between you and the denouncer – and you can trust me if I tell you that journalists are very cynic in this sense – you close off many opportunities. I think that people are used to deal with cynic journalists, so that when they deal with someone who approaches them "humanly" they feel more secure…*

When I then asked Sigfrido the same question that I asked Salvatore, what type of preparation was appropriate for the interview, he first gave me the same answer as Salvatore, but then added one more detail that is revealing of the different ways of conceiving the interview:

**Edoardo:** *In your last inquiry, however, you got to sympathize with a person that you actually tore apart. I mean that you showed his histrionic sympathy, but also your commitment to know the truth of things.*

**Sigfrido:** *With someone like him it is important not to stop at the first answer. Being prepared does not only mean reading the documents or preparing questions in advance, but also anticipating his possible answers, because only this enables you to ask the fundamental second question. Many people underestimate this point: what makes an investigation a great investigation is the capacity to formulate penetrating or embarrassing second questions.*

**Edoardo***: So when you prepare for interviews you try to anticipate possible answers.*

**Sigfrido:** *Yes. What would s/he answer to this? What would I object? If his answer is satisfactory, we are 1 to 0 for him. In that moment we are on a ring, this is how I see it. I am a big fan of American journalism. For me, interviewing as Americans do means that I, the journalist, allow you, the interviewee, to see the documents that I possess when I interview you, so that we play fair. I do not like adding things afterwards, in post-production. I do not like when journalists keep the last word. No. It is fair when everything happens there, in the moment of the interview. It is my deontological code.*

In all of my interviews with *Report*'s journalists, this shift from "representing correctly the facts" to "engaging interlocutors in an agonistic challenge" was recurring. *Report*'s journalists felt that agonistic challenging is always a sort of game implying some *mutual recognition*. Recall from the previous chapter how Alfredo thought of an interview as a game of intellectual seduction:

**Alfredo:** *When I first approached G.* [Italian entrepreneur specialized in private clinics] *he told me that he did not want to give me an interview, but that he could pass me some information over lunch. So he took me in one of his restaurants, and we started to talk about Rome football team, Totti* [Italian football player]*, women, and what a smartass he is. Every once in a while, he would drop a casual reference to the clinics to see how much I knew, to test my preparation, and to see what type of journalist I was. I tried to let him understand that I knew many things about him and about his dirty affairs at the Banco Ambrosiano* [famous fraudulent bankruptcy]*, but, also, that my inquiry was not going to be on that. In particular, it was important that I let him understand that I was not the typical journalist that gets tricked so easily. At the end of the lunch, he told me: "OK then, let's do this interview". As soon as he said that, I let him understand that I knew that he was going to use the interview to launch cryptic messages to his adversaries, to his friend politicians…*

As it is clear from Alfredo's words, the approach with the interviewee involves a subtle game of reciprocal dissimulation, a coded language, that, in spite of its complexity, it is played according to rules that lead to a resolution, and that, above all, denotes a tortuous yet effective process of mutual acquaintance. It is precisely because this preliminary work grants the two subjects' mutual recognition that viewers perceive the journalists and their interlocutors as subjects confronting each other as peers and challenging each other in a fair game. What viewers see in any episode of *Report*, in fact, is that both the journalist, and the interviewee, have enough control of the situation, and enough knowledge of each other's *goals*, that the interview can be set as an agonistic field. It is

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worth remembering that *Report*'s investigations take an average of 3 months, and that nobody else in Italy enjoys the same timeframe for producing an investigation. Thus, a relative freedom from time constraints guarantees *Report*'s journalists the opportunity to meet their informants many times, to come back to them with new questions, to get to know them better and to let their interviewees know them better. This does not mean that any of *Report*'s episodes is constructed the same way or according to the same kinds of interactions; it does mean, however, that *Report*'s journalists are enabled to reflect upon, and to take up, the problem of truth and subjectivity, in terms of agonistic confrontation, challenge, and mutual recognition, instead that in terms of "adequatio ad rem".

It is therefore neither (or at least not only) as "adequatio ad rem", nor as "telling the truth in the face of the tyrant", but rather as *constituting others as subjects*, that *Report*'s parrêsia amounts to. By staging the interview as *an unfolding drâma between two subjects*, *Report*'s journalists succeed in conveying, beyond the content of any specific interview and even of any specific episode, the thickness and opacity, in one word the historical reality, of human public interactions.

**Chapter V**


**The Aesthetics of Truth**
**An Analysis of Truth-Telling Strategies**


This chapter illustrates the *truth-telling strategy* adopted by Italian investigative-journalism television show *Report*. First of all, I will provide a brief overview of different *theories of media* that will allow me to clarify the importance of my analytic re-centering on "truth-telling strategies", and the particular object that this re-centering allows anthropological analysis to grasp; secondly I will briefly introduce the concept of "truth-telling" itself. This part occupies the first three paragraphs.

Armed with theoretical clarity, I will then move on to provide a detailed analysis of *Report*'s truth-telling strategies, whose uniqueness will be highlighted through a comparison to other strategies (the one adopted by me in the video-investigation that I embarked upon as part of my fieldwork in Italy; the one adopted by the renown American television show *Frontline*; and the one adopted by Michael Moore in his 1986 documentary <u>Roger and Me</u>).


## 1. Classical Theories of Media and Journalism

Walter Lippmann's 1922 treatise *Public Opinion* is the book that founded "scientific" inquiry on the press.[46] With *Public Opinion*, Walter Lippmann was responding to what Upton Sinclar, today best known for his novel *The Jungle*, had written three years before in his own treatise on journalism, *The Brass Check* (1919): "The thesis of this book is that American Journalism is a class institution serving the rich and spurning the poor (147)".[47] Against this thesis, Lippmann argued that the role of the press in democracy was far more complex than that, and that his contemporaries' critical evaluations were flawed by the mistaken assumption that the press was an almighty mean to shape public opinion.

Lippmann understood that the press was only *one* among the means through which people form their opinions, and, to be sure, not the most powerful: his insistence that news and features ought to be crafted according to "stereotypes" if they were to convey anything at all to their readers, testify to his conviction that newspapers were in constant dialectic relation with the "patterns of thinking" and prejudices, in one word with the " stereotyped opinions", that readers formed by other means, beyond and outside

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the press, and that they *brought to* the act of reading the newspaper.[48] As an enlightened pragmatist, Lippmann thought that it was not the task of the press to form democratic public opinion, but rather the task of social science to provide people the type of education that would earn them a "truly" democratic press. Provide people with a better education, and they will accept to read only "good" newspapers:

*My conclusion is that public opinion must be organized for the press if they have to be sound, not by the press as it is the case today. This organization I conceive to the first task of a political science that has won its proper place as formulator, in advance real decision, instead of apologist, critic, or reporter after the decision has been made.* (32)[49]

The insight that the press is not a blind force but rather a field that molds itself in the dynamic relation between individuals and collectivities has fostered rich, often contrasting, theorizing, spurring from (1) the American "newsroom ethnographies" of the 1970s and 1980s to (2) the Marxist-oriented critiques in the U.S., England, and France, to (3) the "mixed" models in the Italian analyses of Giovanni Bechelloni and Carlo Sorrentino, just to name three very influential models.[50]

Newsroom ethnographies, predominant in the U.S. sociology of the press, and sometimes also called "organizational model"[51], study the dynamics from a perspective closer to the individuals who "make the news", focusing on the concrete ways in which the interplay of organizational needs, demands of the market, and journalistic values and ideals, inform the very activity of reporting or "crafting the news". Marxist-oriented analyses, on the contrary, study the dynamic between individuals and collectivities from the perspective of "collective or impersonal entities", and aim at highlighting the mechanisms through which the *status quo* of social-democratic regimes may be enforced by the action of the press. They consider the press as a field constituted, and acted upon, by over-arching impersonal "forces" such as the market, bourgeois ideology, or, more recently, technology.[52] Pierre Bourdieu's Marxist-informed analysis of the "symbolic logic" of journalism, which culminates in the forging of the concept of "journalistic

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[48] Today the word "stereotype" carries a decisive negative implication, but Lippmann was using it as a technical term borrowed from pragmatist psychology, indicating the recurring patterns of meaning in which the mind organizes its knowledge of the world.

[49] Lippmann 1922

[50] For "Newsroom Ethnographies", see the classical "triad": Tuchman 1978, Gans 1979, Fishman 1980. For Marxist-oriented approaches: Hall, Stuart. "The rediscovery of Ideology: Return of the Repressed in Media Studies," in Michael Gurevitch, Tony Bennett, James Curran, and Janet Woolllacott (eds.), *Culture, Society, and the Media*. London: Metheuen, 1982 56-90; Bourdieu 1996. In Italy, Giovanni Bechelloni and Carlo Sorrentino capitalized Bourdieu's concept of "journalistic field" to develop their own analyses in: Bechelloni 1995; Giovanni Bechelloni, *Giornalismo o Postgiornalismo?*. Napoli: Liguori; and "Il silenzio eloquente e il passato come capro espiatorio"," in: Carlo Sorrentino (ed.) 2005. *Narrare il quotidiano: il giornalismo italiano tra locale e globale*. Firenze: Mediascape, pp. 3-11; Sorrentino 2002

[51] Zelizer 2004

[52] This is what anthropologist Dominic Boyer wrote about journalism as recently as 2005: "*To be sure, journalists continue to view themselves as agentive in the practice of journalism, but they also acknowledge a rising sense of exposure and vulnerability to medial forces, forces like the velocity and abundance of information flows, the de-professionalization of journalism, the fickleness of capital and so on* (242)." Boyer, Dominic. "Making (Sense of) News in the Era of Digital Information". In: Bird (ed.) 2010

field", has been already presented in Chapter IV[53]. Finally, Italian mixed-models adopt a historical perspective aimed at tracking down the way(s) in which the Italian press "responded" – at managerial and organizational levels – to the socio-political changes of the nation.[54]

Beyond their distinctions in objects and political agendas, these approaches to journalism have three noticeable features in common. The first two features are tightly interrelated: (1) they are all written by scholars who *were adult* before the spreading out of internet, of the new media, and of satellite TV, and, (2) consequently, they *focus* on journalistic activities whose logic antedates the emergence of new media and of freelance journalism. This holds true also for more recent analyses if, still in 2005, anthropologist Dominic Boyer wrote the following paragraph:

*What Michael [reporter informant] often lamented to me was that so much of his time now was occupied filtering, sorting and selectively elaborating an increasing mountain of incoming information that it left him little time to think carefully through the broader social issues that cut across or contextualized the endless stream of event reports. The shift to digital information has created a new regime of mediated knowledge whose scope, distributed networks of communication, and accelerated temporality have served to challenge the vocational parameters and institutional practices of his professional expertise* (246).[55]

While such analyses may still prove useful to capture the anxieties of journalists "challenged" by the emergence of new techniques and pressures, they do not tell us anything about the logical articulation of the emerging field of journalism[56]. In particular, and here we get to the third shared feature, they fail in grasping a very important aspect of emerging journalistic practices: the *self-reflexivity* that, as I had the opportunity to appreciate during my fieldwork, seems to characterize journalists' current self-understanding, above all among younger generations. This is how one of my informants, 37 years old, described to me his apprenticeship as TV journalist:

**Salvatore:** *When I started my apprenticeship at RAI I started to work immediately in Satellite TV. Satellite TV was still young at the time* [mid 1990s] *so one was able to experiment with new forms. For instance, foreign correspondence has always been one of the structural weaknesses of Italian journalism: well, we decided to broadcast a lot of international news. The "means" that we had in our hands encouraged that. But we did*

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[53] Bourdieu 1996

[54] An offshoot of this approach is: Papuzzi 2003. In this limpid handbook for (written) journalism, Papuzzi puts his pluriennal theoretical research on journalism at the direct service of an "ethical" journalism, by illustrating the concrete ways in which the activity of crafting the news can escape the multiple constraints that the entrepreneurial nature of journalism sets up.

[55] Boyer 2010

[56] This remark holds true for *all* the essays contained in the collective volume *The Anthropology of News and Media*, in spite of the titles of parts 2 and 3, respectively: "News Practices in Everyday Life" and "News in the Era of New Media". See for instance: Mark Peterson Getting the News in New Delhi: Newspaper Literacies in an Indian Mediascape (pp. 168-181); and Maria Vesperi, When Common Sense No Longer Holds: The Shifting Locus of News Production in the United States (pp.257-269).

*much more: we thought that we could analyze the news through various interpretive strategies: semiotics, sociology of mass communication…*

That my informant became a journalist after that college education in Italy had absorbed disciplines such as mass communication studies, semiotics, and sociology of communication, makes a substantial difference in the way he conceives of "crafting the news".


## 2. New Questions

As I already mentioned, in spite of their differences, all theories of media and journalism unfailingly share the same point of departure set up by Walter Lippmann: people have the tendency to choose the newspaper, the TV news channel, in one word the "media", that mirror, and therefore reinforce, their opinions and their points of view. It is therefore perfectly understandable why, with respect to this initial assumption, the experience that I had multiple times in the past years when I watched Italian TV show *Report*, and that I had the lucky chance to repeat during my fieldwork, puzzled me to the extent that it pushed me to formulate what, with time, has become one of the core questions of this dissertation:

**Research Question:** How it is that, in spite of our natural tendency to be faithful to the media that confirm our stereotypes and views of the world, in some cases we choose media that on the contrary *modify* our points of view?

The brief overview of classical theories of journalism was meant to illustrate how scholarship on media and journalism, in spite of the multiplicity of approaches, has so far assumed as its point of departure what is it, in media and journalism, *that keeps us identical to who we are*. As far as the problem of ethics and truth in journalism is concerned, this point of departure allows scholars to debate topics such as the commercial character of the press, the critical ethical limits of a "scoop" or of censorship, and so on. At the most, as when Jürgen Habermas' often celebrated model of "communicative action" sets the bases to explain our relation to the public sphere, people's tendency to choose media that reflect their opinions is used to advocate a radical "plurality" of communicative strategies, provided that the best we can hope for is that the most Enlightened among us, recognizing their fundamental self-constitution in linguistically-mediated interaction, may negotiate their opinions according to those of others for accomplishing some pragmatic ends, and thus arrive at shared consensus[57]. This point of departure, in other words, has inevitably led scholars to set the problem of ethics in journalism *under the sign of the negative* so to speak: *in spite of* this or that structural flaw of media and the journalistic industry, *in spite of* all the constraints of the human mind, what possibilities are there to practice an ethically committed journalism? How shall ethically committed journalism make up for the structural deficiencies?

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[57] Habermas, Jürgen. 1990. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. Boston: MIT Press.

My own experience as both a media consumer, and as anthropologist on the field, have given me many clues to think that perhaps more interesting questions may be asked to current journalism if we changed altogether our analytic focus. Thus, it may be worth interrogating those journalistic products that *may make viewers a bit different from who they are*, taking as core analytic interest *why* and *how*, sometimes, some journalistic products encourage us to change our points of view, sometimes so successfully that we review our categories of understanding the political contemporary and our position as citizens in it.

Three clarifications are needed. First of all, I am not assuming that such elusive thing as "changing opinion" may depend solely and exclusively on more or less well-crafted journalistic products; what I do maintain, instead, is that changing opinion is not something that happens in the void, but, rather, always in our encounter with something else; the question to which this chapter tries to give an answer, therefore, may be formulated as: what is demanded from journalists, how are their "news" to be crafted, such that *they may encourage us to change* our opinions? It is clear therefore that my analytic focus is on the "form" that some journalistic messages may take.

Secondly, and consequently, while any analysis of the "form" somewhat implicitly aims to inspire further practices or analyses, it is obvious that I am not providing here neither a "magic formula for critical journalism", nor a philosophical fantasy, but I am rather conducting an anthropological analysis of some practices that have been concretely occurring in the past 7 years in the specific context of the Italian present.

Thirdly, in this chapter I am going to complement the analysis already carried over in Chapters II, III and IV. In Chapters II and III I sought to demonstrate that if we want to provide a historical critique of journalism we need to focus on truth-practices. Truth-practices are the marks of authorship for journalists, because it is always "in virtue of" and "through" truth-practices that journalists access the fundamental matter which they will then craft in "news". Truth-practices are, for journalists, what determines the fundamental ontology of reality. In chapter IV, I first provided both historical, and empirical, evidence for the claim advanced in the first chapter, and secondly I linked truth-practices to self-reflexive practices, in order to show how a certain understanding and practicing of truth is encouraged by certain forms of organization. In both chapters the textual reality, that is, the most immediate outcome of the truth-practicing/truth-telling strategy has never been presented. In this chapter I will therefore link the truth-telling practice to the sheer textual reality.


## 3. New Concepts

In what follows, I will therefore discuss the relation between truth and ethics in (some) contemporary Italian journalistic practices. It clear at this point that I will not, however, delve in the *vaexatae quaestiones* of "subjectivity vs objectivity", or of the " ethical limits of journalistic reporting", and so on; not because I find these issues worthless, but, on the contrary, because I think that they have already been thoroughly explored[58]. Since,

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[58] An interesting approach to these issues from a philosophical point of view is: Cohen (ed.). 1992.

as I mentioned above, my analytic focus is on *practices*, I find it more appropriate to my goal to use once again the concepts of "truth" and "ethics" that Michel Foucault, in his search for a "new style of critique"[59], assembled in his last years at the *Collège de France*: *epimeleia heautou, parrêsia, alèturgic forms*[60].

        With these concepts, Foucault proposed to shift the philosophical interrogation of the relationship between truth and ethics, from the "knowledge of oneself" to the "care of the self", from the "correct procedures" to the "truthful practices", from the "epistemological structures" to the "acts in which truth manifest itself". What was at stake with this rich analytical renovation was the question of *the access* to truth and to truth-telling: first of all, assuming that "truth" takes concrete historical forms ultimately irreducible to one single trans-historical meta-category, how do people become, through different practices, capable of *dire-vrai* (which, it seems to me, is meant to capture both "telling *the truth*" "*dire le vrai*" and *truthful* telling "*vrai-dire*")? Secondly, what *types of engagement with the present* do different *dire-vrai* need in order to be socially recognized as such?

        Foucault answers the first question in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* by saying that, in the moral reflection of the ancient Greeks and Romans, the access to *dire-vrai* implied always the inevitable cost of the transformation of one-Self. This idea has been put to work in Chapter III, when I illustrated the specific features that such transformation ought to take in order for contemporary Italian journalist to access the *dire-vrai*. In this chapter, I will rather make use of the second question that Foucault's concept of *parrêsiaste* enables to ask: what *types of engagement with the present* do different *dire-vrai* need in order to be socially recognized as such? While in the last chapter I thus explored the concept of *parrêsia* with relation to the self-reflexive activities of journalists, here I try to grasp the *relation to others* that different parrêsiastic strategies entail.

        Armed with Foucault's concepts, we are now ready to engage with the second part of the chapter. In what follows, I will start by illustrating my own experience as an investigative video-journalist during my 13 months fieldwork in Italy, in order to show how the specific form of engagement with reality that I adopted induced me to a specific form of truth-telling. I will follow by analyzing two other forms of truth-telling that in many ways are at the antithesis of mine, namely *Frontline*'s and Michael Moore's rhetorical strategies. Introducing them will enable me to highlight the specificity of *Report*'s truth-telling.


## 4. Historicizing the New Questions

The form of journalism that I referred to in the first part of this chapter has been practiced by a small but very noisy group of people who found their ideal milieu in the investigative-journalism TV show *Report*. It has been said that we cannot resist being

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[59] Foucault, Michel, 1978. Que'es que le Lumières? in: Foucault 2008.
[60] The concept were presented respectively in: Foucault, Michel. 2001. *L'herméneutique du sujet. Cours au College de France 1981-82*. Paris: Gallimard; ----. 2008. *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres: Cours au College de France 1982-83*. Paris: Gallimard; ----. 2009. *Le courage de la vérité. Le gouvernement de soi et des autres II: Cours au College de France 1984*. Paris: Gallimard.

captured by "mystery narratives", even by the most sloppily constructed, because "mystery" unfailingly embarks us in the fundamental journey for truth, be it of ourselves, of others, of the present, or of nature.[61] Far from being sloppily constructed, the truth-journeys that *Report* embarks both his makers, and his viewers, on, are certainly journeys "across the present".

I have already described in the previous chapter *Report*'s characteristics and form of organization: what is interesting for the present argument is that, while at first I thought that *Report*, given the objective difficulty of its narrations, and the politically un-grounding character of its investigations, was a *niche* TV show, a journalistic product for the "happy few", in the course of my fieldwork I had on the contrary the opportunity to appreciate just how much respect and public acclaim had *Report* earned among journalists, politicians, and non-specialists. As a matter of fact, during my fieldwork in Italy "*Report's last investigation*" appeared innumerable times in other newspapers and magazines, and was narrated, commented, endorsed or questioned; every time was accompanied by a praising of *Report*'s skilled video-journalists.

That *Report* might be praised by its supporters, however, does not reveal as much as the fact that it is also respected by its adversaries. It is for this reason that, instead of mentioning all the love-songs sung to *Report* by let's say *leftist* newspapers and people, I think that nothing illustrates *Report*'s critical acclaim better than the words of those journalists whose practices, political faithfulness, and ethical commitment, are at the antithesis of *Report*'s, namely the journalists who not only work for, but systematically conduct the fiercest battles in favor of, the Italian media tycoon & Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. This is how Alessandro Sallusti, director of newspaper *IlGiornale*, distinct for his demagogical, highly politicized, and proto-fascistic journalistic campaigns, is *forced*, by the force of incontestable evidence itself, to start his attack on Milena Gabanelli and *Report*:

*Since the very beginning, the great names of investigative journalism (and champions of moralizing) did their best to diverge people's attention from this topic. Finally, the greyhound of RAITRE, Milena Gabanelli decided to contribute her help. Gabanelli is a good journalist, no doubt. She has only one flaw: her investigations are one-sided: she always investigates upon rightists, and never on leftists.[62]*

The article goes on to show how biased Milena Gabanelli is. No need to say that *Report*'s investigations are anything but one-sided. The interesting point is the following: the director of the most important rightist newspaper, Sallusti, who, during my staying in Italy has given so much public evidence of his subjugation to the private interests of the owner of his newspaper, the Italian Prime Minister, by attacking beyond any imaginable sense of measure and decency any single person who dares to oppose Berlusconi – producing false dossiers, spelling anathemas based on homosexuality, and launching

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[61] In his playful Norton Lectures at Harvard, Umberto Eco said that the question "*whodunit?*", that every crime story asks, is the same metaphysical question that we keep asking ourselves, and nature, since the beginning of human history (in: Eco, Umberto. 1994. *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

[62] http://www.ilgiornale.it/interni/i_trucchi_off-shore_gabanelli/18-10-2010/articolo-id=480898-page=0-comments=4

public accusations of pedophilia and even murder, just to give a few pearls – and who, in the quoted article, is *publicly defending* the Prime Minister for the umpteenth time; even Sallusti, who practices a form of journalism that is miles away from *Report*'s, cannot but starting his attack by recognizing his opponent's qualities.

This chapter tries to give an answer also to this stunning occurrence as it were: according to what form of truth-telling a journalist – or a TV show – comes to earn such incontestable authority that even its fiercest opponents are forced to fair-playing when they attack them?


## 5. *Report*'s General Characteristics

As we already saw, in the course of any season, *Report*'s range of activities is limitless. One of the keys to *Report*'s success is its wise intermixing of local and global dimensions, small and big "deals", simple and complex traffics. As all of *Report*'s journalists told me, although their default approach is investigative, sometimes they might also end up producing *reportages*, because either they find out that no illegal activities are involved in the specific "case" under investigation, or because they do not find enough evidence to support their suspicions. In almost all of their investigations, *Report*'s journalists make an unprecedented lavish use of journalistic devices that are considered "ethically borderline": stolen images and declarations (taken without the interviewee knowing it), "deep throats", and top secrets documents. All this testifies not only to *Report*'s connection to certain institutional *milieux*, such as the Italian Central Bank for instance[63], which are not exactly the types of connections that an average journalist normally has or may be able to handle, but also to a journalistic excellence that has not equals in Italy and to the manifold ethical challenges that *Report*'s journalists undergo in their everyday activities. Interestingly enough, in spite of *Report*'s lavishness in the use of such dubious devices, very seldom the video-narrations leave the impression that the border of "ethical journalism" has been crossed, quite the contrary: *Report*'s journalists keep winning "ethical journalism" prizes and audiences become more and more fond of their aggressive – and humorous – journalistic style:

**Edoardo:** *I checked RAITRE audience-share, and I saw that Report scores among the top. This is obviously gratifying for you. When did you start to win people's support?*

**Milena:** *I will always be grateful to RAITRE because they always bet on us, and it was not an easy bet. At the beginning we were really not a good deal: we did 7-8% share. When we arrived to 9% we broached champagne [...] Let's say that our audience share increased 1 point per year. But it was in 2003 that we understood that things were growing more rapidly than ever before. Now we are at 17%... for a program such as ours!*

Naturally, one may say, *Report* wins popular support because it practices an honest form of journalism. Yet, again, *Report* practices a form of journalistic reportage that is

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[63] Personal communication from one of my informants at *Report*

anything but honest, if by that one means what is prescribed by the various theories and deontological codes of journalism: it shows top secret documents, it allows deep throats to provide their unquestioned revelations, and above all, *it mercilessly steals images*. But in this case – so a second objection might go – it must be that *Report* is so well respected because all of its ethically borderline actions are always unquestionably "on the side of the people", and they are always unquestionably finalized to let truth emerge. That *Report* is on the side of the people is certainly true, yet there are many other newspapers that may advance legitimate claims to that label in virtue of the accuracy of their reporting, but that did not earn the critical and popular acclaim of *Report*'s, and, most remarkably, that did not gain that kind of authority that is respected even by their fiercest adversaries as we have seen. Finally, with regard to the explanation that *Report*'s ethically borderline actions might be acclaimed because they are finalized to let truth emerge, I think that the case of Julian Assange and Wikileaks have demonstrated that, in the U.S. as well as in Italy, we are not always so ready to think according to the logic that "the goal justifies the means". So, I would say, this does not seem a valid argument to explain *Report*'s incontestable popular support.

The key to understanding *Report* lays somewhere else, and as I have anticipated in describing the concept of *parrêsia* I propose that we look for it in the relation between the form of engagement with reality and the form of truth-telling adopted. In order to illustrate this point, I now turn to my own experience as investigative video-journalist.


## 6. An Anthropologist as Investigative Video-Journalist

After assisting professional video-journalists in the making of their video-inquiries, in March 2010 I started to feel restless with myself: my experience had not been enough; something decisive was missing, something to which I still could not give a name but that made me unmistakably feel that my participant observation had been much more "observational" than "participatory." Why was I feeling so? In the end, I had really participated in all the activities, and I could go even as far as saying that I was carrying over one of the crucial activities of video-journalism: shooting, recording, documenting the facts. I had been "there" to shoot, I had helped with the analyses of documents, and, thanks to the kindness of the journalists, I had been more than a simple helper: I had been a confident. They would discuss their plans, their ideas, their investigative hypotheses with me… yet in all those interactions with the video-journalists I must have been absorbing something else, something that made us distant and that I did not fully understand. Something that, in spite of my enthusiasm and will to collaborate, and in spite of our open communication, was still *their* private experience, not mine.

This is perhaps the best reconstruction of the feeling that moved me to take a critical decision by the end of March 2010: no more collaboration, no more participant "observation"; I would conduct *my own*, self-determined, autarchic, video-investigation. I bought a video-camera from one of the journalists that I had collaborated with; a semi-random conversation with an environmental attorney provided me with the hook that I had been looking for, and almost overnight I metamorphosed from an attentive anthropologist in search for problems into an implacable bloodhound in search for truths.

The "hook" with which the environmental attorney, an acquaintance of a few months earlier, had provided me, could not have been more appealing. First of all, its set up was as good as it gets: the attorney suspected that 7 Oil Companies that were acting in concert to build various oil-related infrastructures in a "green" Italian region, Abruzzo, were committing environmental frauds. She suspected, specifically, that the companies were manipulating environmental data in order to carry over oil-related activities in off-limits areas: drilling near an artificial basin, constructing a pipeline in a highly seismic valley, building a refinery near an agricultural and eco-tourism center[64], all combinations that, as it is clear, could result in potential environmental and human disasters. The second reason that seduced me was the timing of the investigation, as thrilling as a time bomb: the newly elected Abruzzo Regional Government, which had already expressed its public support to the oil companies, was going to vote in 3 months its definitive authorization or denial for all oil-related activities in the regional soil. The authorization was going to be voted on the base of the so-called "Studi di Impatto Ambientale" (Studies of Environmental Impact) that private institutes paid by the oil companies had conducted on the areas under examination, and that my attorney/acquaintance suspected had been manipulated. Finally, another important factor that made this case appealing was that the main difficulties of any investigation, accessing reserved documents and having the expertise to interpret them, were in these lucky circumstances mitigated by two occurrences: my acquaintance/attorney had access to all the documents, and both her, and her environmentalist friends, had the type of expertise that I needed in order to navigate the very complex jungle of national and regional laws, political games, financial interests, and so on. So there I was: I had more or less the same time constraint as the professional video-journalists I had collaborated with, I had the opportunity to put into practice everything that I had learned in my apprenticeship, and I was walking with clear conscience in the solid terrain of some potential misdemeanors whose ethical and political relevance I could not possibly overestimate.

Little I knew that before I had even started, I had already made a critical mistake that had catapulted me miles away from the circle of truth.


## 7. The Mistake

This is how Milena Gabanelli, creator of *Report*, characterized the sociability appropriate to *Report*'s journalists:

**Milena:** *Often times some of my ethically-committed colleagues tell me: "You guys are lucky! You are the "happy few" that truly keep the flag of independent journalism high!" Every time, I feel the irremediable impulse to answer: "Lucky? Do you have the slightest idea of what we undergo in order to keep our independence? If you want to be professional you have to make costly choices up to the smallest details of your everyday life. And you can trust me if I say that the small details are those that bother you the*

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[64] The Italian environmental law prescribes that all the official documents shall be posted online no more than 30 days after being filed to the Ministry at the at the website of the Italian Ministry for Economic Development: www.ministerodellosviluppoeconomico.it.

*most. You decide that you do not want to spend your vacations with this or that person, or that you do not accept an editor's offer to publish your book, because you may have to investigate upon these persons in the future. You have to make these choices because otherwise you will fall in the trap of self-censorship. Self-censorship works much better than censorship: you limit yourself; you decide that you do not want to ruin your relationship with that person.*

*We are truly independent, people say. Yes. Do you know why? Because we do not have to give anyone account of what we do: we have no friends...*

Milena gave me this interview one month before I started my own investigation, but I did not understood what she meant until much later, and the moment in which I finally got her point is in itself revealing. I did not get the point at the beginning of my inquiry, when I had to decide what to focus on, whom to interview, and where to go. I started to attribute a very limited "sense" to it in the middle of my investigation, when I had to decide what "direction", what "cut", I was going to give my *reportage* − was I highlighting the financial or the environmental frauds? Was I going to focus on the damage to the environment or to the local economy? Was I including a political polemic or not? And so on −; but I really understood the full significance of her affirmation that *the most effective form of censorship is self-censorship* only at the very end, when I was editing my video-inquiry, that is, when I was "crafting the news" that was meant to be exhibited in public, and that was thus bypassing the private sphere to become a public statement, something *meant to bear traceable consequences* for the facts there presented, and, not less importantly, for me, for the people interviewed, and for our mutual relationships.

I started editing my video-inquiry at the very end of my investigations, after I collected all the interviews, and double-checked all the data. A professional video-journalist normally edits *in the making* because micro-narrative-sequences function as a sort of compass, helping journalists getting a better understanding of the types of questions, narrative situations, and images that they still need in order to effectively conveying the message and to narrow down the "field of the possible" so to speak. Three factors influence editing:

(1) The temporal distance, filled with acquisition of new knowledge and of new investigative elements, that separates the "I" who interacted with the real persons when collecting the interviews, which we shall call T1, from the "I" who sits on the editing table, "T2", and decide *what to do* with the clips. This temporal distance is filled with the progresses of knowledge that may intervene to change the *affect* that links the journalist to his/her interviewees, and it is at work, in different degrees, both if one edits "in the making", and if one edits at the very end.

(2) The journalist's understanding of her "mode of interaction" with her interviewee in T1, that is, the journalist's understanding of her interaction with her subjects in *the moment of the interaction's occurrence.*

(3) The journalist's understanding of her "mode of interaction" with the interviewee in T2, that is, the way *the journalist sitting at the editing table* understands or remembers her past interaction with the interviewee.

The schematization may seem a bit abstract but it is useful to understand the three axes that articulate the relationship between truth and ethics in the moment of the concrete making of a video-journalistic statement, that is always, in the case of video-journalism, *the process of editing*.

It was in fact at the editing table that I finally realized what I had lacked when I was simply collaborating with the video-journalists, what was the base for that inexplicable distance that separated us in spite of our strict collaboration. Retrospectively, I then told myself that what I had found in my own private investigations was nothing else than one of the decisive ethical affects of investigative journalism: the feeling of *responsibility towards truth and towards the others* for any single critical choice, for anything that was going to get discovered, said, covered, forgiven, left outside; and for any single interview and personal image that were going to get recorded, used, abused, and betrayed.

## 8. Responsibility

One cannot talk about *responsibility* as driving ethical affect without hearing some echoes from Weimar, as it was in the luminous and dark days of Weimar that Max Weber's celebrated essay <u>Politics as a Vocation</u> was conceived. Perhaps because of Weimar's exceptional public life, full of ferments of all kinds, and blessed and cursed with a radical political freedom that would have eventually led to Nazism, Weber was compelled to reflect on the political vocations that he could observe around himself, on the consequences to which they might have led, and on the most appropriate ethical modes that might match them. Weber distinguished between an orientation "towards the ultimate ends", and an orientation "towards responsibility"; he maintained that people's actions and ethical reflections were, in the former case, guided by the submission to the "greater scope", and, in the latter case, submitted to the expected immediate outcomes[65]. Leaving aside the debates about Weber's alleged neo-kantianism and about the goals and forms of social science, what interests me in Weber's formulation is that it allows one to think the feeling of "responsibility" as enrooted in the "foreseeable results of one's action" (126). It is precisely insofar as "foreseeable" that the results' of one's actions constitute an ethical dilemma.

It goes without saying that when one edits a video-investigation the problem of responsibility becomes very intricate. First of all, as we said, one's experience of one's interaction with the interviewees *changes over time* as new elements and new investigative clues come to the fore. While it is known that *every* experience is subjected to temporality, in investigative video-journalism the inherent instability of experience brings forth ethical dilemmas precisely because one's experienced interactions with

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[65] Weber. Max. <u>Politics as a Vocation</u>. In: Herbert Gerth and Wright Mills ed. 1953. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press.

people are first to be framed in a "narrative of truth", and then exposed to the public; both characteristics almost inevitably trigger relevant consequences for the people involved. Secondly, precisely insofar as an investigative journalist is, indeed, an investigator, s/he is subjected to the pressure of truth itself, and, most importantly, of a *kind of truth* that can bear direct consequences in preventing, stopping, or, on the contrary, encouraging actions; in other words, the investigative journalist is particularly suited to see herself as the *direct agent of change*. "I am the only one to know this thing. Shall I make this finding public or not? And what will happen if I make this public? What if not?" these are the questions that an investigative journalist inevitably asks him/herself at the editing table.

While, as we shall see, I was able to experience myself these moral dilemmas described above, what I did not get to experience was another dimension of the problem that instead does characterize the work of *Report*'s journalists, as the following exchange clarifies:

**Marianna:** *Now* I *would like to ask* you *a question. Why are you so interested in the way we construct our inquiries? I mean I do not understand who might be interested…*

**Edoardo:** *I am interested in understanding what role your self-reflexive attitude, let's say your ethics and your sense of responsibility, play in the truths that you convey in your investigations…*

**Marianna (laughing):** *Jesus that's terrible!*

**Edoardo:** *Terrible? How so?*

**Marianna:** *Because I try not to think about our "responsibility"! Watch out: I am not talking about the "normal" responsibility that a journalist has towards the public opinion. I am talking about a distortion: I am aware that today Report has become a point of political reference, and this is… how can I say… burdensome. Let me give you an example: my investigation on the Social Card. The Government decides to give a minimum wage to people below the poverty line. But instead of making a direct deposit to their bank accounts or mailing them a check, the government invents this "toy", a magnetic card charged with 60euros per month. In order to obtain the card people had to "declare" their poverty, exhibit it as they were standing in line in post offices… and 30% of the times the card did not work because of technical problem. Fabricating the cards and predisposing the post-offices cost millions of euros that could have been given to the people… The day after my episode people e-mailed us saying that they did not expect that we were against poor people… that accusation was very hard for me to deal with… In those occasions the only shield that you have is putting facts in line. Nobody is infallible, we make mistakes as anybody else, but we do not do it for ideological reasons…*

How does one deal with so many ethical riddles? I found my own way. *Report*'s way, as we will see, is quite different. What is important to bear in mind is that the feeling of responsibility is always double-sided: on feels responsible both towards the people

involved and towards the truth discovered. We shall see that what marks the uniqueness of *Report*'s truth-telling is precisely a very original solution to this ambiguity.


## 9. More Clues

The more I progressed in my investigations, the more it was clear that my attorney/friend's suspicions were completely groundless. Not only, as all the independent specialists that I had consulted told me, were all the environmental studies made by the oil companies impeccable in methods, technologies, and conclusions, but some of them were, on top, innovative and "eco-friendly", in the sense that they promoted the intelligent application of vanguard sustainable technology to drilling. It was not uncommon that, armed with my video-camera and with all my professional will to "nail" the oil industry engineers to their responsibilities towards the environment and the local populations, I would come out of the interviews completely dazzled, enthralled by the Faustian enthusiasm with which the engineers described the way the drilling industry was transforming itself to match the gigantic energetic and environmental challenges of the third millennium.

To be sure, oil companies use a double standard: they invest in the best technologies when it comes to build eco-friendly infrastructure within Europe, and they reserve their cheap old technology to devastate the environment in Africa, Asia, or South America.[66] The point is that, while I had no chance to interview the owners of the Oil companies (not that I would have made any difference: the Oil companies in question were so small that they did not have any activity outside of Italy) the people whom I had the opportunity to interview were precisely those who were committed to meliorate the drilling technology.

One of the most spectacular examples of eco-friendliness is perhaps the project of the oil rig "Ombrina". The company that projected it, *Mediterranean Oil and Gas*, asked the most prestigious Marine Institute in Italy, the Istituto Oceanografico Nazionale di Bologna, to conduct a costly, systemic study on the sea fauna, *before* starting engineering the infrastructure, in order to check the possibilities to construct an eco-friendly rig. The final project, on which the regional authorization was impending, and on whose alleged irregularities I was investigating, included a plan for re-populating the coastal sea fauna by hosting colonies of shellfish in the pillars of the oil rig, and the implantation of sea webs to counter fraudulent trawling…

It was in occasions such as this latter one that my irritation towards the environmentalists would reach peaks that I could not suspect I was capable of. The truth that I was finding out, in my video-inquiry that had started as in investigation on environmental frauds, was that the environmentalist's unavailability to change their points of view was turning their good intentions against themselves and the environment. But then, it would take only one meeting with the environmentalists for my irritation to vanish away as if it never existed, and to leave me with only a profound, inescapable,

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[66] The devastating effects of oil drilling in Nigeria are for instance documented in Michael Watts (ed.). 2008. *Curse of Black Gold: 50 year of Oil in the Niger Delta*. New York: Powerhouse Book.

systematic doubt. The local environmentalists were not full-blooded, all-experienced "ideological" activists, but private citizens of all ages, who had spontaneously aggregated to exercise the sacred right to question the central government's decisions about the territory to which they felt so intimately attached. Through their spontaneous activism they were acquiring a new sense of the functioning of the Italian democracy, they were acquiring expertise in a field – energy management – that was going to prove decisive for the critical political choices of the near future; above all, they were participating with passion, humor, and impassionate taste for friendship to the democratic life of their nation.

If I am providing so many details about my whimsical feelings during the investigations, it is because the emotive context is essential to understand the affect that was moving me when I was editing my video-investigation, to the extent that one does not understand the ethical stakes, the constrains that involved me in the game of truth-telling when I was "crafting the news", if one does not get a clear sense of the multiple bonds, of the manifold faithfulnesses that implicated me with the persons and the situations around me. To be sure, while I was so intensely participating, I was also at times observing myself participating, and the privacy of my fieldnotes reflects my restlessness with myself and the emotions that were guiding my involvement. One of them, in particular, is essential to the argument of this chapter. Before I introduce it, however, I beg your patience one more time, as one last contextual introduction is needed.

Precisely such as serious scholarship, serious journalistic investigation as well can drive one on unpredictable paths. All the Oil companies that I had investigated upon were crystal-clear, except one. The supposed misdemeanors of this one, however, were of a completely different nature than anything that I could expect.

To cut a long story short, the company, that I will call *Plumax*, and that was the smallest company investing in Abruzzo, belonged to Armando, who was the brother of a person in jail for Mafia money-laundry. Many elements – the financial budget of the company, the inexistent location of its alleged Italian offices, the lack of clarity on its ownership, its international ghostliness – induced me to think that the company might be linked to the criminal activities of the money-laundry man. I phoned the Italian magistrate who had sent Armando's brother to jail and he seemed interested in what I had to say about the company *Plumax*; at the same time, he also suggested that I did not partake of media's habit of "creating monsters"; all in all, he said – "just because one is the brother of a mafia's employee, that does not necessarily mean that he himself is an affiliate of the mafia". I respected the Italian Magistrate's point of view, but I also trusted my own ethical sense. My commitment to truth and my hate of demagogy would have prevented me from saying anything inaccurate or demagogical; at the same time, I could have done something important for the collectivity.

In a few days I fetched all the information needed, among which the phone number of the company's owner, Armando. After the preparatory work I was on the road again, and in just one day I obtained more thrilling footage than in 2 months of hard work: my cameramen and I went to film a deserted building that was supposed to host the companies' offices, and the old leaking oil wells that were put on budget as "the" money-generating activity of the company; at the oil wells we got to interview an old guardian, who we found out had never met either his employer, or any other maintenance engineer,

in the past 5 years. I asked my cameraman to take any shot twice: first the inanimate objects, then myself moving around in the deserted places. One of my informants had given me months earlier the following trick:

**Marianna:** *Sometimes you may find yourself in a completely unpredicted situation, let's say you witness an interaction between two people that you did not expect but that seems relevant and suspicious to you. You do not have any evidence or even any element to formulate any question because, again, you did not predict that that place and those persons were suspicious. In those cases it is important that you let your feelings drive the shooting, that you let your subjective experience speak by itself: in the final cut you may not say anything openly, but you can communicate a lot with just the right image…*

Thus I asked my cameraman to choose the camera angles that would better convey the uncanny mystery that I was feeling, and I thought I would do so by taking long shots of me moving around the various building that would communicate the sense of "solitude" and of "waiting" that could create the appropriate suspense.

In that same afternoon, I phone Armando with the mathematical certitude that he would not answer. I was wrong: as soon as I told him that I was a journalist making a documentary on the oil tribulations in Abruzzo, he demanded that I go interview him immediately because he had a lot to say on the matter – that, judging from his tone, promised to be extremely combative. With feverish exuberance I fixed an interview with him for a few hours later, with the intention of challenging him first on the environmental policies of his company, and then, eventually, depending on how the conversation would go, on his supposed fraudulent activities, of which I had now gathered many clues.

The day had bestowed on my assistant and me many gifts already. We had left at 7am that morning in a very good mood, and we had kept the mood all day as we had driven across some beautiful and unknown areas of central Italy, stopped in a cheap local restaurant, and shot everything in early summer's sun. It was 4pm when I fixed the interview for three hours later as we needed sufficient time to get to Rome: this would have meant finishing our day around 11 pm, but our enthusiasm and our hope to finally get what we were now coming to see as the center itself of the whole investigation were mush stronger than our tiredness. As we were approaching the place of our rendezvous with Armando, our animated conversation left room for the concentrated silence that enshrouds impending revelations.


## 9. Nobody could predict…

Needless to say, during the interview I never got to talk about Armando's alleged fraudulent activities. He disarmed me with his kindness and sympathy, and instead of talking about his brother, we had an enlightened conversation in which he firmly but politely objected to the environmentalists, whom he took I was championing, that they were conducting the wrong campaign, because, as I already knew at that point, the environmental damage caused by his and all other company's small drilling activities was literally non-existent.

On our way back, neither I nor my collaborator were disappointed for not asking "the" crucial question. Our immediate feeling was that Armando had told me many other interesting things that I could use to criticize the real responsible for the situation in Abruzzo: the National Government, which I could charge for lack of planning and incapacity to include local populations in decision-making.

Armando's interview was the last that I conducted: the Regional Government vote was only 1 month away and I now had to assemble all the materials. I had a far more complicate picture than expected, and this gave me the pleasurable feeling that I had done a good job because I had refused ready-made truths.

A question, however, I had left un-resolved. I had documents that could have surely embarrassed Armando and, with a bit of luck and the right communicative strategy, the whole front favorable to the Oil-drilling in Abruzzo. I did not have to state anything definitive about his brother, I just had to *arouse doubts* and ask questions, as I, as journalist, had all the right, if not the duty, to do. Not only *Report* many times does show embarrassing documents without necessarily discussing them with their interviewees, but one of *Report*'s journalist had given me, months before, the following clue:

**Mauro:** *Who is the most powerful person in your town? An architect? OK. What does a good investigative journalist of the local press do with him? A complete check-up of the architect's activities. Who is he? Has he committed some excusable put-up job? Well then, no need to grill him. But at the same time you made him understand that you keep him under control…*

I started to edit my clips with mixed emotions, and after a week of work, in an inspired moment of self-reflexivity, I took the following fieldnote.

*02/08/2010*
*As I am editing the clip of the interview with Armando, I am continuously tempted to cut on his company's budget. The push to do so comes from two considerations: (1) Armando may really have been doing money-laundry for the mafia over the years. (2) Most importantly, even if he is not a mafia employee, the documents show that he keeps his company's revenues offshore and thus that he defrauds the Italian Revenue Service. Doesn't this undercut all his objections to the environmentalists? He objected to the environmentalists that his company does not create a significant damage to the environment. OK, I see that, but why should people allow him to conduct his business if he does not even pay the taxes that could generate revenues? Aren't the environmentalists right, in spite of all their lack of self-critique, to suspect, suspect and always suspect the enterprises? Aren't they right in not wanting that oil companies ruin, if even to a minuscule extent, their territory? And yet, this temptation to intermix in alternate montage Armando's interview with images of his company's budget, struggles with another emotion that proves to be more powerful. This latter emotion could be called an impassionate preference for the concrete particular over the general abstract. I would feel a maggot if I took advantage of Armando's kindness. In spite of my will to recall myself to what I take to be my duty as an investigative journalist, I can't help but seeing him as a person who trusted me. I don't know what it is, but something tells me*

*that it would be wrong if I showed in my video-narration things that are so far away from anything that we talked about in the interview.*

After which I added:

*So this is how "truth" in video-journalism could be understood: editing a video such that it reflects as close as possible the expectations of those who, willy-nilly, participated in it.*

At the time I thought that with this last sentence I had finally gotten to the bottom, to the deepest understanding how one must think of "truth" in video-journalism. Now I am fortunately able to see just how lame this conclusion is. "Lame" is the right term, as this conclusion literally lames the understanding of the type of truth-activities that are implicated in video-journalism. The conclusion is naturally right: a journalist should craft his/her news such that s/he is not un-fair to the people interviewed, as any ethically-committed journalist, and any single ethical code of journalism, state. As I mentioned earlier, however, perhaps the value of anthropological research on journalism lays not in stating what is already known to everybody, but rather in identifying the practices that are transforming what is known and posing new challenges and new problems in the near future. In addition, understanding the problem of truth and fairness this way still does not explain *Report*'s success. So I shall now ask: what made me take up the ethical problem this way? What should have I done in order to take up the problem in a way altogether different? In other words I am asking:

(1) What ethical form of truth-telling was enabled by the way I took up my investigation?

(2) What other forms of ethical truth-telling are available in investigative video-journalism?

With these questions we are now at the core issue of this chapter.


**10. My Truth-Telling Strategy**

When my attorney friend came to talk to me the first time I acted as if "discovering the truth" was only a mental issue. In spite of my Ph.D. *theoretical* education on the influence of social interaction on mental activities, and on the enmeshing of reason(s) with social and historical factors, I was caught completely off guard by all the *practical ways* in which truth-finding, and consequently truth-telling, can be constrained by such natural things as positive inclination towards someone, acquaintance, friendship and so on. To be sure, when my attorney-friend talked to me the first time, I did commit to doubt any single word that she and her environmentalists friends would have told me, as in fact I did. What I failed to do, however, was *to communicate* my skepticism, showing my skepticism in my behavior, stylizing my skepticism in my acts and practices.

   This lack of frankness about my "real" thoughts, the thoughts and the mental processes that I was hiding away from my interlocutors as our interaction was occurring,

became *the* major problem when I had to edit my video: anything that I had experienced was undermined by personal doubt, but none of my interviewees, least of all the environmentalists, knew that "doubt" had been the dominant mode of interaction between them and the holder of the camera (me); thus, I could not help but feeling that all the clips that I was manipulating at the editing table were haunted by falsehood. I will touch upon the specific problems posed by the use of the camera in the next chapter; for now, however, I shall highlight that these preconditions left me very few narrative options if I wanted to be consistent with crafting my narration "ethically". My problem was: what narrative register enables me to convey the complexity of the overall picture and, at the same time, to respect the reality of my interaction with the interviewees *as I think they perceived it*? Which is to say: what narrative register would made me *faithful to truth and fair to people at the same time*?

Naturally the answer to this question did not come all at once, but was resultant from the practice of editing itself, as the aforementioned fieldnote testifies to. And the final result was that the only way I could reach both goals at the same time was by adopting an ironic distancing, a commentary and a style of narration that told a story *from above*, without ever enmeshing itself in the events narrated, while at the same time "subsuming" everybody's perspective view in the general picture. My narration showed understanding for all and contempt for none, as I successfully showed my sympathy towards everyone.

Three important things, however, must be noted. First of all, that it was easy for me to show my sympathy towards everyone whom I had a direct exchange with, given that precisely the kinds of interactions that I had with them led me to see that "the real guilty" was the Government's inefficiency, and I certainly did not have the opportunity to interview the Government's inefficiency. Secondly, my manifested sympathy towards everyone, and my respect for the complexity of the picture, led me to really not engage with any of the "partial truths" that were uttered in the video, thus, from my godlike position, I never really espoused my own perspective. Thirdly, and somewhat consequently, while my video-narration might be seen as a balanced picture, it certainly failed to convey that there was a local problem that could be acted upon by people's political activism. Mine was, we may say, a narration more adapt to social science than to journalism, more adapt to reflection than meant to instigate a political-historical engagement with problems. Naturally, I think that both reflection, and active engagement, are equally important, therefore I am not dismissing the truth-telling style that I adopted in my investigation; I am simply noticing that there is an altogether different forms of truth-telling that seems more appropriate to the Italian politically instable contemporary insofar as, while it does not renounce to transmit a critical attitude, it also manifests a particular way of dealing with facts that *stylizes* both a will to actively participate in the making of the political present, and an agonistic, "virile", take on facts.

## 11. Alternative Forms of Truth-Telling

Is it possible to establish a mode of interaction with one's interviewees such that one feels entitled to take a wider freedom in editing, without feeling either false or unfair? In <u>Narrative Discourse: an Essay in Method</u>, Gérard Genette describes a rhetorical trope,

metalepsis, that instead of distancing the author from the characters of a narration, brings the author closer to the events by making both the author's voice, and his/her intelligence of the events, interact with the character's, and vice versa: "*Any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse [...]*"[67]. What makes metalepsis interesting is not that it blurs the boundaries between fiction and reality; metalepsis in fact can occur in a text without blurring anything. In Milan Kundera's novels for instance, the narrator is constantly commenting upon the events, addressing the readers in the second person plural, manifesting his feelings for the characters and so on; such manifest presence, however, reinforces, rather than blurring, the conviction that we are reading a novel[68].

What makes metalepsis interesting is that, beyond any specific contextual content, it is a way to manifest the author's inextricable enmeshment with, and profound interest in, the events narrated. If an author combines metalepsis with irony, s/he will be forced to provide the reasons for her irony, to lay bare her convictions, her values, and thus to allow readers to enjoy the same *freedom of critique* towards her that she enjoys towards her characters. Metalepsis is thus a way to implicate the author and the readers in the fate of the characters, a way to abandon one's godlike position and to throw oneself in the miserable, imperfect, meaningful world of human history. Naturally, if I am referring to metalepsis it is because my thesis is that the same mechanism is at work in *Report*'s truth-telling strategy.

In order to obtain metalepsis (or something similar to it), *Report*'s journalists have to refuse two equally problematic approaches to narration. One the one hand, as I have already discussed, they have to avoid *my* godlike enunciative position, always afraid to be unfair to people: they thus need to allow themselves and their subjectivities to be actively involved in the narrative. On the other hand, however, they have to prevent their subjective point of view from exercising too tight a control over narration.

In order to illustrate this second risk, I will now take a detour. First, I will critically introduce a strategy at play in American television show *Frontline*, and secondly, I will discuss a documentary that has (rightly) made the fortune of his author: Michael Moore's *Roger and Me*. In this documentary, Michael Moore is anything but detached from the facts narrated: he stylizes his subjective perspective from the very beginning by making the movie start with his own childhood's memory; the movie has nonetheless been criticized for its partisanship, and thus offers us the possibility to provide some thoughts on subjectivity and truth-telling.


## 12. *Frontline*

Premise: *Frontline* is characterized by a plurality of investigative styles and rhetoric strategies, of which what follows is by no means a fair picture. As a matter of fact, given the range of topics dealt with, from Syrian repression to Oil frauds to CIA – just to mention investigations of the last 3 seasons – *Frontline* could easily take a whole

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[67] Genette, Gérard. 1972. *Narrative Discourse: an Essay in Method*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
[68] Check any of Milan Kundera's novels with the exception of <u>The Joke</u>.

dissertation by itself. What I will do here is simply analyzing a small sequence of one episode (*Lost in Detention*, aired on October 18, 2011) in order to compare its rhetoric to *Moore*'s and *Report*'s.

Lost in Detention examines the Obama Administration's controversial get-though immigration policy. While other episodes have a more dramatic pacing, in this one the "take" is explanatory and didactic. The voiceover manages to remain "neutral": the tone is not colored by emotion. In 53 minutes, we hear the journalist's synchronized voice only twice, whereas the rest of the time it is the voiceover that leads the narration, with the interviewees helping the narration progress, without revealing anything of themselves. While, as I clarified in Chapter III, in *Report* interviews are constructed as dramatic peaks in which the journalist and the interviewee confront each other in an agonistic field, in this case interviews are instrumental to the narration, which on its turn is meant to illustrate rather than *staging* a problem.

For example, in minute 24:53 the journalist interviews an ex-detainee woman who wants to tell her story. A few seconds after she starts speaking, her voice fades out to the background, while the voiceover intervenes to quickly resume her story before the voiceover fades out and her background voice comes to the fore again. As she keeps narrating how she got stopped on the street by a police car and all the events that led to the discovery that she had been leaving in the U.S. for 15 years without a visa and on how she got deported, the film cuts first on a police car's lateral rearview mirror, then on a police car, then on a jail, and back on her.

Quite obviously, these cuts are meant to give vivid force to her narration. The idea is that if viewers see the police car, the jail, and so on, they will be get a clearer picture of the interviewee's lived experience. We may therefore say that, while the journalist remains neutral and attempts to understand the facts; and while the narration is somewhat polyphonic, montage in this investigation – I used this sequence to illustrate a constant procedure throughout the whole episode – accomplishes a critical function: by giving a glimpse of the character's lived experience, tries to bring the interviewee closer to the audience. By this I do not mean that the film emphasizes the sentimental aspects of the human situations, or tries to impose an emotional reading of an episode. In my example, the images of the lateral rearview mirror or of the police car are not charged with any sentimental value in themselves; they acquire meaning only insofar as they are interweaved with the interviewee's words. Thus, montage here does not "move" as Griffith would have it, and does not provoke any "synthesis" as Eisenstein would say, but rather provides the visual context of the lived experience of the interviewee.


## 13. Michael Moore

In 1985 General Motors was transferring its main line of production from the city of Flint, Michigan, to Mexico. Michael Moore sought to document the impact of GM decisions on the life of ordinary people, and after three years he finished what was going to become his life-accomplishment, _Roger and Me_. The documentary displayed a variety of narrative situations and registers as only masterpieces can do: humor, participation, drama, comic relief, and so on. Half way through the movie, the declared engine of the narration, the force that weaves all the different "pictures" together, is Moore's attempts

to meet GM's head Roger Smith. Moore wants to invite Roger Smith to come among the people of Flint and check with his own eyes the dramatic outcomes that his decisions were producing: crime, unemployment, social instability.

In 80 minutes, Moore builds up the narrative tension on these two poles: on one side, his attempts to meet Roger Smith; on the other, the desolating outcomes of Roger Smith's decisions, which both Moore and the audience come to appreciate better and better the more Roger Smith hides from Moore's video-camera. By the end of the movie, when Moore "had almost given up trying to meet Roger Smith", the sudden twist: Smith will deliver the Christmas Speech at the GM shareholders assembly. The event is open to the press, so that Moore, as a journalist, will finally have be able to meet him. Moore's voiceover anticipates that the shareholder's assembly will take place the day before the last eviction that the local Sheriff, one of the returning characters of the narration, has invited Moore to witness. With this simple information, Moore prepares the audience to the magisterial closing sequence that resolves the dramatic acme.

The final sequence starts with an establishing shot that brings us at the General Motor Shareholders' Christmas Dinner. A few seconds on the crowd, until a thundering applause announces that Roger Smith is on the podium. The camera remains for almost 30 seconds on Smith as he begins his opening remarks, but then cuts on the Sheriff's approaching the house where the people are about to be evicted. As the Sheriff moves the viewers realize that they do not hear the synch-sound from that scene, but rather that they keep hearing Smith's voice speaking about "human dignity", "compassion", "human ethics". After a few seconds the movie cuts back on the Christmas dinner, and the whole sequence moves forward in alternate montage, cutting back and forth, progressively reducing the shots-rates at any turn to increase the dramatic pacing, and skillfully alternating Smith's voice with the dramatic synch-sounds from the scene of the eviction, with abundant use of fades-in and fades-out, until the end. Black humor becomes *cupio dissolvi* as a black child of 5 years stares at the camera while the audience hears his screaming mother cursing the sheriff, and the voice of the invisible Smith saying: "the more effort we will put in preserving individual dignity, the more fully human, we will become".

In this remarkable composition, Moore makes some critical choices that place his aesthetics at the intersection of documentary and fiction film. First of all, he refuses to use his own voice to "comment" or "explain" the images, as the tradition of journalistic documentary in the U.S. in particular had always done, thus leaving the impression that images "speak by themselves."

That images speak by themselves, however, is indeed only an impression, as the artful alternate montage conveys Moore's *moral position*. The cuts in the middle of Roger Smith's discourse disaggregate Smith's voice from its iconic referent – Smith's image –; since, however, the viewers keep hearing the voice as the images of the eviction are displayed and as the voice interplays with the synch sound of the scene, the viewer's mind, in its automatic quest for the synthesis, pastes Roger Smith's voice onto the images of the eviction, and thus makes Roger Smith *directly accountable* for the Sheriff's actions. It follows that, while the images seem to speak by themselves, it is Moore's ultra-subjective point of view that we really see.

It is clear then, that Moore's position in relation to his narration is at the extreme opposite than mine: instead of operating as a godlike entity, he crafts the narrative so that

all the elements converge to convey *his* moral position, *his* point of view on the facts narrated. So much his narration is infused with subjectivity, that over the years Moore had to eschew various accusations of falsification, which he was forced to do, notably, by admitting publicly that in spite of the appearance he had not produced an accurate journalistic reportage, but his own documentary-like reflection on the events narrated. Moore's example functions as a yardstick: we can appreciate how the use of narrative devices typical of fiction film, such as alternate montage, can be curved to serve the purposes of subjective truth-telling. We are now ready to turn to *Report* to see how another truth-telling strategy is also possible.


## 14. Report's truth-telling

The difference between *Report*'s, *Frontline*'s, and Moore's, truth-telling, can be grasped as *a difference in the position of the author with respect to narration*. If there is a difference, then it will be revealed more fully in a moment of an apparent formal homology: for this reason, I choose a scene from one of *Report*'s episodes that has also been constructed in alternate montage.

European Union countries adopted the EURO in 2001. Few years after, an anti-European wind was sweeping Italy. Two kinds of allegations were made against the EURO: to begin with, people believed that the new currency was responsible for the 2004 inflation, the highest that Italy had had in the past 10 years; secondly the EURO was also held responsible for the crisis that the Italian quality food industry underwent in 2005.

*Report*'s video-inquiry Il piatto è servito (*Meal is Served*) focuses on the crisis of Italian quality food industry. The narration patiently dismantles anti-European arguments, and documents how the price-to-the-consumer of quality food is determined. In particular, the narration attracts the viewer's attention on the (abusive) quasi-monopolistic position of one Italian distribution chain, pointing to the decisive influence that such chain has on determining the price of quality food such as, for instance, *Parmiggiano Reggiano*.

By the end of the video-inquiry, the narration is articulated in alternate montage. *Report*'s journalist interviews the producers of *Parmiggiano Reggiano*, who illustrate the costly procedures required to comply with the cheese's quality standards. The producers remark that supermarkets' tendency to put *Parmiggiano Reggiano* "on sale" forces them to sell the cheese underpriced. The video cuts on an advertising leaflet showing that *Parmiggiano Reggiano* will be sold at 0.89 cents per Kg. A second cut brings us in front of the president of the *Consorzio Parmiggiano Reggiano* (the cooperative that reunites all the different entrepreneurs, from shepherds to artisans, involved in making the cheese):

**Coop President:** *In Italy, 72% of Parmiggiano Reggiano is sold "on sale", so it becomes a sort of "owl product", a product sold "on sale" in order to attract a considerable number of people to that specific supermarket.*

The video cuts on the president of the monopolistic distribution chain, and the following exchange takes place:

**Journalist:** *So you are guys are the real owners of the price?*

**Chain President:** *No, absolutely!*

**Journalist:** *Why is Parmiggiano Reggiano sold underpriced? What is an "owl product"?*

**Chain President:** *An "owl product" is a product that we sell on sale in order to sex up our sales.*

**Journalist:** *So you sell a product underpriced with respect to its real value…*

**Chain President:** *No, we do not sell a product underpriced; rather, we sell it according to what we deem is its real value.*

**Journalist:** *But Parmiggiano Reggiano producers cannot cut production costs otherwise the cheese will lose quality. So what shall they do?*

**Chain President** (gnawling): *They have to produce less.*

*Report*'s music slowly fades-in in these last words and the last cut brings us "in studio" where *Report*'s conducer, Milena Gabanelli, says:

**Gabanelli:** *I am tempted to say: if you want to sell a product underpriced, because by doing so you attract customers to your supermarket, do it at your, and not at the producers', expenses. A product such as Parmiggiano, in order to remain the healthy product that it is, cannot cut its production costs.*

This sequence illustrates Report's delicate balancing of the two tendencies that I illustrated before. On the one hand, the journalist refrains from intruding too much in the viewer's construction of meaning: the dramatizing "effects" of alternate montage that are at work in *Roger and Me* – the progressive decreasing of shot rates, and the voiceover crossing – are here refused, and this indicates that the journalist does not make use of the full "arsenal of persuasion" made available by alternate montage. However, if, on the other hand, viewers are given something less than a dramatized, quasi-fiction-film sequence, they are given something more than the free play of different opinions in which truth evaporates, and also something more than a glimpse into the characters' lived experiences as a way to make sense of what they see. The final impression in watching the sequence is that a finite meaning does indeed get transmitted.

The viewers are given different perspectives that open up "the fact" in its constitutive tensions – the interests of the producers, the interests of the distributors, the dynamics of the "price" – but, and this is the most important part, they are given the guidelines to overcome the perspectives and to arrive at an accurate truth. Once viewers discover that buying *Parmigiano Reggiano* underpriced levies a heavy blow to the industry that produces this natural artisan product, they are brought to ask themselves: what is really in our best interest – buying the cheese underpriced or keeping the Parmigiano industry going?

The adoption of an alternate montage tempered by the refusal of the over-dramatizing effects speaks of *Report* journalists' position with respect to the events narrated and to the viewers to which the narration is addressed. We may thus characterize *Report*'s style by saying that neither "only the facts themselves", nor "only the perspective of the authors", nor "the characters' lived experiences" are submitted to the viewers; rather, not unlike what happens with metalepsis, viewers are provided with *both* the facts *and* the position of the authors with respect to them, so that every episode of *Report* is really an invitation for the audience to participate in a critical discussion with the journalist.

**Mauro:** *An investigative journalist's task is also, incidentally, to arise suspicion in citizens. Please notice that I use the word "citizens" on purpose. I do not say "in the audience", but "in citizens", because I believe that you can craft your product so that you treat those who watch you as "citizens" not as "consumers", you involve them into a quest for a truth about something that touches them and their society directly. What do I mean by that? I mean that an investigative journalist has to enable citizens to pose to themselves the most unsettling, un-grounding questions.*

**Milena:** *No matter what people say, news is also a product, and as a product, is a part of our daily life: the more we have, more instruments we possess to modify ourselves and to make our behaviors compatible with living – which, as we know, is always a very complicated business. I think that this conclusion applies not only to the journalistic profession, but to more general problems, such as finding meaning to life: we live only once, let's try to do decent things; however, let's also try not to become too fond of ourselves: we are into a market in which everybody sells their products. I want my products to be watched, so I have two paths: either focusing on already known subject-matters, or finding new topics that intrigue us…*

We may therefore conclude that *Report*'s specific truth-telling strategy – that is: the particular form of engagement with reality that is recognized as truth-telling in contemporary Italy – is a staging of the journalists' self-aware, active, and self-critical, participation in the events narrated. Truth-telling is rhetorically constructed as the journalist's enmeshment with the facts narrated.

**Chapter VI**


**Media, Technology, Truth**
**On the Possibilities of Portable New Media**


In order to introduce the topic of this chapter, it is useful to chart the trajectory that my argument has taken thus far. In the introduction, I described two parallel tendencies, of opposite sign, that have characterized Italian journalism in the past 20 years. On the one hand, I described how, with the rise to political power of Media Tycoon Berlusconi, all the endemic contradictions of *mainstream* Italian journalism – its tight entanglement with political and economic power(s), its lack of aggressiveness, its failure in renewing its aesthetic codes – have exploded to such an extent as to dramatically undermine the possibility of truth-speaking (*parrêsia*) for journalists operating in the classical venues of mainstream journalism.[69]

On the other hand, I illustrated how various groups of talented journalists who, for various reasons, had been operating in the past 20 years at the margins of mainstream journalistic venues, have creatively taken up the possibilities offered by portable video-technology, and by a more general "digitalization" of news production, to lower the costs of news-making and thus to invent more commercially profitable forms of organization. I finally showed how such new forms of organization led to a partial renewal of aesthetic codes and truth-telling strategies.

I then illustrated how in one of such cases, Milena Gabanelli's investigative TV program *Report*, the renewal of the form of organization, and of the truth-telling strategies, met a particular *way of being* of both the creator – Milena Gabanelli herself – and of the freelance journalists working in the program, that led to the rare and lucky circumstance of enabling a new, thoroughly original, *parrêsia*.

What is the concrete attitude that made Milena Gabanelli a *parrêsiaste* in the context of contemporary Italian journalism? In order to answer this question we need to pause for a moment on how the diffusion of digital technology has changed, in the past 20 years, the *economy of truth* in Italian journalism. When I started examining the impact of digital video-production on Italian journalism, I realized that, while the lowering of the costs of video-production makes freelancing more profitable commercially, it also induces a de-professionalization of journalistic practices, insofar as the market forces freelance video-journalists to compete with amateur video-makers. By enabling a new aesthetic taste for amateur reality-images, technological innovations in both video-distribution (youtube) and video-production (HD I-phones, and so on) changes the *economy of truth in journalism*: the invasion of amateur, cellphone-recorded images, lowers both the commercial value, and the truth-value, of professionally crafted videos. This current phenomenon, however, is not entirely new in the story of video-production – it has at least one important precedent. In the 1980s and 1990s, with the diffusion of various evolutions of Super8 types of video-cameras, journalists and amateurs alike were

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[69] Such as newspapers *laRepubblica*, *Il corriere della Sera*, *Il Giornale*, *L'Unità*, etc; television news such as Tg1, Tg2, Tg3, Tg4, Tg5, and Studio Aperto; and magazines such as *L'Espresso*.

for the first time enabled to use extremely portable video-recording devices. My informant Milena Gabanelli maintains that, while she became immediately aware of the technical limits of the new portable instruments, she was fascinated by the inherent possibilities of bringing the camera in places where she could have never had brought it before. Her problem then became how to transform the technical limits in advantages.

Such problem, to be sure, did not fascinate Gabanelli alone: notoriously, a masterpiece of contemporary documentary – Agnès Varda's *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse* – was precisely an extremely successful bet on the aesthetic power of low-quality images.[70]

Both in the 1980s and 1990s, and today, the majority of mainstream Italian press reacted to the technological innovations by either ignoring it altogether, or indulging in an occasional amateur-like aesthetics that seems somewhat out of place in "classic" journalistic formats. Milena Gabanelli, with the invention of investigative TV program *Report*, was the only Italian author able to creatively appropriate the possibilities offered by the new portable technology. As I illustrated in the second chapter of this dissertation, she coevally transformed the practice of video-journalism to such an extent as to embody a thoroughly *new way of being a journalist*: rather than using amateur-like images as means of seconding the audience's taste, as mainstream press in Italy did, and still does, the challenge was *to justify* the use of amateur-like images.

During our conversations, Gabanelli insisted that the use of low-quality images on her program is aesthetically justified *only* if the journalist puts him/herself in situations of such objective risk, as to require non-invasive, or hidden, image-recording devices: slave-labor factories, illegal fishing boats, human-trafficking markets, mafia-controlled farmlands, and so on.

We may therefore observe that *Report*'s *parrêsia* derives from the productive meeting of (1) extremely self-reflexive and ethically committed journalists, and (2) some particular technological conditions that enabled *Report*'s truth-telling to assume precisely the historical form that it assumed. While the previous chapters explored point (1), I will now turn to investigate point (2): the aesthetic and ethical possibilities for truth-telling ensured by portable video-cameras, cellphones, and other digital gadgets have. In order to illustrate this point, I will draw from both personal experiences, and from interviews conducted with my informants in the course of my fieldwork in Summer 2011.


## 1. The Contemporary

Lev Manovich's pioneering work The Language of New Media (2001) can be seen in two ways: as the culmination of a certain discourse on media, and as the beginning of a new way of thinking about media. Both tendencies are clearly identifiable in the book (the former slightly predominant over the latter), as Manovich tries *to synthesize* what was, by 2001, the "traditional" American discourse on cinema – the psychoanalytically and semiotically informed critique of cinema and other "representative apparatuses" as the

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[70] This whispered, poetic meditation on dignity, aging, and modernity, weaved in images of such power as the death-evoking visual comparison between old Agnès Varda's frowned hands and the ticklish skin of potatoes, would lose much of its power had it not been shot in images whose low definition is a subtle metaphor of the precariousness of elders' dioptric and, by extension, of the precariousness of life.

articulations of a "scopic regime of modernity" – and what was, by 2001, the then emerging tendency, of Deleuzian inspiration, of conducting media analysis from the angles of "becoming-animal", "the living body", "de-territorialization", "concept-work", "desiring-machines", and so forth.[71] Manovich's intellectual debt to the line of inquiry that sees "screen media", and in particular cinema, as the discursive articulations of a "scopic regime of modernity" is evident for instance in the way he characterizes the relation between the body and the screen:

*In this tradition* [screen-based representational apparatus]*, the body must be fixed in space if the viewer is to see the image at all. From Renaissance monocular perspective to modern Cinema, form Kepler's camera obscura to nineteenth-century camera lucida, the body has to remain still. The imprisonment of the body takes place on both the conceptual and literal levels* (103).[72]

Manovich quotes Roland Barthes' essay *Diderot, Brecht and Eisenstein*: Barthes' idea that what founds "representation" is not human beings' desire of imitation, but rather the *perceptual act of seeing* ("the scene, the shot, the cut-out rectangle, here we have the very condition that allows us to conceive theatre, painting, cinema, literature, all those arts, that is, other than music and which could be called *dioptric arts*"[73]) is approvingly glossed this way:

*The act of cutting reality into a sign and nothingness simultaneously doubles the viewing subject, who now exists in two spaces: the familiar physical space of her real body and the virtual space of an image within the screen* (104).

As I said, however, Manovich, who is writing in 2001, observes that something is changing in the field of media, and his ambition is to renew the intellectual categories to think about this change. What is happening, not surprisingly, is the following:

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[71] It is obviously impossible to mention all the scholarly works in both lines of inquiry, I will therefore limit myself to the somewhat representative and ineludible works. Two compelling collections of essays of traditional theories of cinema are: Philip Rosen ed. 1986. *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*. New York: Columbia University Press; and Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath eds. 1980. *The Cinematic Apparatus*. London: MacMillian, and New York: St. Martin's Press. A richly detailed historical-philosophical account of the constellation of problems out of which the traditional American theories of cinema emerged, was provided by Martin Jay in: Jay 1993. Deleuze's minimally essential works that no contemporary post-Deleuzian theorist of media can ignore are: Deleuze, Gilles. 1986. *Cinéma I: L'image-mouvement*. Paris: Editions de Minuit; ----. 1989. *Cinéma II: L'image-temps*. Paris: Editions de Minuit; ----. 1975. *Kafka: pour une littérature mineure*. Paris: Editions de Minuit; and Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari. 1972. *Anti-Oedipe: Capitalisme et schizophrénie*. Paris: Editions de Minuit. Finally, relevant examples of Deleuze-inspired works are, among others: Bell, Jeffrey. 1998. *The Problem of Difference: Phenomenology and Post-Structuralism*. Toronto: University Press; Doane, Mary Ann. 2002. *The emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press; Massumi, Brian. 2002. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham & London: Duke University Press; Pisters, Patricia. 2003. *The Matrix of Visual Culture: Working with Deleuze in Film Theory*. Stanford: University Press; and the whole series *Deleuze connections*, edited by Edinburgh University Press, and directed by Ian Buchanan, Rosi Braidotti, Claire Colebrook and others.
[72] Manovich, Lev. 2001. *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge: MIT Press
[73] Barthes, Roland. 1977. *Image/Music/Text*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux

*All around us are the signs of increasing mobility and the miniaturization of communication devices – mobile telephones and electronic organizers, pagers and laptops, phones and watches that offer Web surfing, Gameboys, and similar handheld units* (114).

In 2001, at the dawn of the world invasion of objects such as Smartphones, mini-laptops, and so on, Manovich was still very pessimistic that a screen-based technology might exist which *does not necessarily foreclose* forms of communication and human interaction different from the mainstream "scopic regime of Modernity". As a matter of fact, he seems to think that so much, and with such manifoldness, the "scopic regime that immobilizes the subject" has been, over the course of history, ingrained in our everyday life habits, that, little by little, this scopic regime stopped being simply *a privileged form of representation*, and became a *dominant form of communication*:

*Although in the following I discuss the immobility of the subject of a screen in the context of the history of representation, we can also relate this condition to the history of communication. In ancient Greece, communication was understood as an oral dialogue between people. It was also assumed that physical movement stimulated dialogue and the process of thinking. Aristotle and his pupils walked around while discussing philosophical problems. In the Middle Ages, a shift occurred from dialogue between subjects, to communication between a subject and an information storage device, that is, a book. A medieval book chained to a table can be considered a precursor to the screen that fixes its subject in space* (103).

Thus, it is not surprising that Manovich, in 2001, thought the best scholarly analysis of new media could do, was reworking its concepts from within, that is, rethinking the traditional approaches to media in light of emerging practices.

We are today in 2011, and ten years, in the field of media, and even more in the field of "new" media, are, permit me a hyperbole, an eternity. The current commercial success of I-phones of various generations, blackberries, and smartphones of all kinds and brands; the imperious development of social networks such as Facebook, youtube, and twitter; and the restless launching of new models of digital cameras, constellated our lives, and, even more the lives of younger generations, with media-gadgets whose principal characteristic is: portability.

At the same time, contemporary academia seems to be growing more and more suspicious of such totalizing notions as "scopic regime of Modernity" – which seem to doom a whole epoch to a unified form of representation or communication – at least when they are hypostatized as ontological realities rather than as operative concepts. Precisely because Manovich's book is a daring attempt to synthetize two trends of thought, in fact, one needs to be extremely careful in managing its theoretical spuriousness if one does not want to fall in the trap of essentialism. One thing is to affirm that "the immobilized screened body" is a template, if a very influential one, of human communication, a way, that is, in which people organize *part of their experiences* of themselves, of their bodies, and of others, and at the same time a core metaphor of modernity; another thing is to say, or, as I think it is sometimes Manovich's case, to

unwillingly, nonetheless implicitly, maintain, that we live in a technological reality in which our forms of communication and interaction entrap us in the immobility of our position before the screen.

Please notice that I am not criticizing the latter view on the basis that *it is no longer true* because contemporary technology frees our bodies from their immobility before the screen (a position commonly, and derogatorily, referred to, as "California Ideology" as "*a deadly cocktail of naïve optimism, techno-utopianism, and new libertarian politics popularized by Wired magazine*" (Tribe 2001)); I am holding that the latter view, that is, that our technological forms of communication and interactions *inevitably entrap us* before the screen, *has never been true* i.e. it is a mistaken assumption about human beings because it attributes technology too much determining power. Technology is certainly an important component of our lives – in San Diego, or in the Silicon Valley, perhaps even an extremely important one – but it is not the whole thing – not even, I think, in San Diego and in the Silicon Valley.

What shall we do then? Which means: is there a way to work with some of Manovich's intuitions but at the same time to eschew the trap of totalizing? I think the answer is yes. We could start speculating by focusing not on what our scopic regime supposedly was or is, but rather what forms of interaction and communication contemporary "media practices" are enabling.

In what follows I will therefore present some empirical data that I collected during my fieldwork in Libya in summer 2011. I went to Libya to shoot a documentary on the war of liberation, and to follow-up my previous fieldwork experience as a freelance journalist. We may say that a main difference between my approach and Manovich's resides precisely here, in the very different "setup" that we chose as the starting point of our speculations. It is not difficult to notice that when Manovich describes people's everyday interactions with new media, he has in mind "domestic" uses of media, uses that "immobilize" human subjects in front of their computer screens in their offices or in their houses (the computer screen is in fact both the main "object", and the core metaphor, of Manovich's analysis).

I am, on the contrary, interested in freelance photographers and filmmakers shooting actual events, in political activists disseminating images of revolts, uprisings, military actions; in short, in situations in which *the body of the viewer is not, in fact, immobilized* in front of the screen, but rather interacts dynamically and dialectically with the little screens of portable video-cameras and smartphone in real time, in the busting reality of change, emotion, collective hysteria, politics, and risk.

I am intrigued by the idea of a certain degree of contact between the moving body, the images "represented" on the little portable screen throughout the whole duration of their real-time shooting (can we still talk about "representation" in this case?), and the subjects carrying over forms of historically, ethically, and politically engaged *actions*. What is that such images signify, what regime of signification do these images acquire in virtue of their being shot by a moving body that is participating in the action as it is taking place, exposed to the same risk as the other bodies and subjects that surround it? How are these images changing our aesthetic experiences?

I hope, with the following reflections, to lay out the empirical ground for a new understanding of contemporary media, and thus to contribute stimulating ideas to the field of media analysis.

## 2. On storytelling and cellphones used as audiovisual archives.

Throughout my whole journey in Libya, rebels showed me their private audiovisual archives, that is, their cellphones: documents of their own, or of their friends', and families', participation to the war. The number of such audio-visual archives, I suppose, is almost as large as the number of Libyans themselves, given that, as I could observe, every single rebel I interacted with showed me personally-shot-cellphone-images. These images complement, and at the same time document, the stories of personal adventure that people are rightly fond of telling.

Please let me recall your attention on an important detail. I said that the rebels were "fond" of telling their stories: the choice of the word is not casual, as I used it in opposition to "anxious". When I am "anxious" to tell my personal story of adventure what am I really anxious about? I suggest: I am anxious *to be acknowledged by my listener as the hero* of the story. The emphasis shifts from the story, to *me*.

In the large majority of cases, this *is not* the mood that surrounded war storytelling in Libya. That the rebels were *fond* of telling their stories means: in the economy of affects that characterizes storytelling, the fact that the storytellers were present in the stories, was not as important as the fact that *they wanted to exchange their puzzling experiences of the disruption of their ordinary lives*. Storytellers implicitly knew that their audiences had as interesting and worth telling stories as they did, so we may say that, contrary to the "anxiety of acknowledgment", this style of storytelling engendered the "fondness of shared experience".

What is the significance of such economy of affects for the present and future of Lybia? Since the war in Libya is barely finished when I am writing these lines, it is too early to speculate on the near future, but not too early to set thinking in motion and make a few considerations, in the hope that further research will provide more insight into the theme.

### 2.1 Problem-space 1

In The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublic, Charles Hirschkind, elaborating on Walter Benjamin's essay *The Storyteller*, observes that:

*First, effective audition, an act that enables the integration of the narrative into the listener's own experience, requires a subordination to the authority of the storyteller and thus, in some sense, a heeding to the story itself. This is Benjamin's point about the "naïve relationship" between speaker and listener. This is not simply a cognitive recognition of the storyteller's authority but the adoption of the dispositions – sensory as much as mental – that allow the absorptive process to unfold* (27).[74]

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[74] Hirschkind, Charles. 2006. *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublic*. New York: Columbia University Press. Benjamin's essay *The Storyteller* is in: Benjamin, Walter. 1968. *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books.

"Authority" here is not to be understood in an immediate political sense, but rather as the transient subjective position of the person in charge of the storytelling in a particular interaction. In order for storytelling to be successful at all, that is, in order for storytelling to trigger into the listener the integration of the narrative in his/her own experience, the storyteller must be granted a certain prestige, a certain authority. To be sure, this authority can certainly acquire a political character, but the link is not necessary. Hirschkind goes on to observe another important aspect of Benjamin's essay:

*Benjamin correlates the decline of the storyteller and the community of listeners with a shift in the conditions of knowledge and the rise of a new form of communication that he calls "information". Information is distinguished by the requirement that it be "understandable in itself", and subject to "prompt verifiability". No longer vouchsafed by the authority of tradition or grounded in accumulated experience or lengthy apprenticeship, information is fundamentally rootless and has the effect of undermining the forms of knowledge and practice that depended on processes of gradual sedimentation and embodiment* (27).

That the storytelling that I was able to witness in Libya took place in the mode of "fondness" rather than "anxiety" is perhaps explained by the fact that the Libyan war of liberation has been a war of the ordinary people, and therefore, as I stated before, by the fact that the people who would occasionally be in the position of telling their own story, implicitly knew that their audiences had as interesting and worth telling stories as they did.

Thus we can observe the dialectic between storytelling and everyday forms of authority. On one hand, a renewed prestige is bestowed upon storytelling, based on the prestige that Libyan people are willing to grant each other for their experiences of the war; on the other hand, due to the very form of storytelling understood as the concrete interaction that emphasizes the authority of the teller, storytelling enhances the affective openness of the listeners towards the teller, and therefore ensures a circulation of affective responses.

Since the circulation of affective responses is one of the forms of openness to alterity, it is useful to refer to psychoanalysis in order to understand both what are the limits, and what is at stake in the dialectic of storytelling. In her article The Burning: finitude, and the political-theological imagination of illegal migration, Stefania Pandolfo, in discussing a not very well known essay from Lacan's écrits, *Le temps logique et l'assertion de certitude anticipée*, thus characterizes "understanding":

*In his 1945 article "Le temps logique", Lacan discusses the question of understanding with reference to the experience of time. He addresses this through the positing of a logical riddle, which he demonstrates to be insoluble from the standpoint of classical logics* [the logical riddle is known as the enigma of the three prisoners[75]]. *Outlining the*

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[75] A director of prison tells 3 prisoners that he will hang 1 disk, either black or white, on each prisoner's back. He tells them that he has a total number of 5 disks, 3 black and 2 white. This said, the hangs the three *black* disks on the prisoners' backs. If a prisoner will be able to understand, without talking, and with a logical, rather than merely probabilistic, reasoning, what color the disk hanged on his back is, he will be set free.

*unfolding of a different solution, he distinguishes "a time for comprehending" (le temps pour comprendre) from the advent of resolution and utterance, which he calls "the moment of concluding". Understanding, for Lacan, is inclusive of both registers. It is not just the fact of "comprehending" the other – assimilating it into a pre-existing discourse and thus restituting coherence. It requires openness to alterity, a discontinuity of experience* (332).[76]

As far as two young male Libyan rebels are sharing their war-experiences, their mutual "understanding", though constitutionally opened to a dimension of alterity, may still be more a "comprehending" than anything else – an assimilation into a pre-existing discourse that reconstitutes coherence.

When, however, the dialectic of storytelling involves gender difference, or any other kind of difference (age, local identity, and so on), the dynamic becomes more interesting and fraught with positive consequences. As Pandolfo states:

*The temporality of understanding is not linear, and cannot be reckoned within the categories of classical logic. It is a discontinuous space-time of structural positioning in relation to the Other, imaginary identifications, and hesitations, which lead to a leap of performative affirmation: the moment of concluding.* (333).

Considering that, as I mentioned before, storytelling is only one of two forms of conveying war-stories, the other being cellphones used as audio-visual archives, the first problem-space will thus be conceived as follows:

1) Given that gender identity did play a role in inflecting the experience of the war, what *difference* does gender difference make in the dialectic of storytelling? How will such difference come into play in the construction of various "war narratives", from official media and other forms of popular entertainment?

2) Given that the rebels' age spanned from teenage to retirement age, and remembering, with Hirschkind, that storytelling is a "form of knowledge and practice that depends on processes of sedimentation and embodiment", how will storytelling impact the construction of democratic citizenship in Libya?

3) How do oral storytelling, and cellphones understood as "audiovisual archives", interact, in producing war-narratives?

It should be noticed that, insofar as the situation in Libya is still very opened – the country has to rebuilt its media, its state agencies, and most generally its sovereignty – to

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The solution is the typical one for riddles of this kind: Prisoner A has to think what Prisoner B is thinking of what Prisoner C thinks. The originality of this particular riddle, however, is that absolute logical certainty is obtained *only* if each prisoner takes into account *the other prisoners' hesitations*. Thus, the logical solution incorporates both the temporal dimension of hesitation, and the Other's response to my actions (The essay *Le temps logique* is contained in Lacan 1966.

[76] Pandolfo, Stefania. 2007. The Burning: Finitude and the politico-theological imagination of illegal migration. In: *Anthropological Theory* 7 3:329-363.

answer these questions in time, and to act pragmatically in constructing new *media-forms*, would mean to catch the opportunity to invent new, perhaps more human, media practices. In so doing, inquiry would humbly, and pragmatically, finds its point of intersection with a real historical process. At the same time, it would shed light on a remarkable new intertwining of bodies, media, and politics.


## 3. A Technology of Everyday Life.

It is August 26, 2011, in the middle of the afternoon. The photographer and I are leaning against the wall of a building – just one more anonymous building: in this area they all look the same – a photo-camera ready in his hands, a video-camera, ready in mine. All around us, the noise of heavy firing; occasionally, yet regularly, detonations as I have never heard before (I have never been at the frontline before). The Rebels are attacking Abu Slim. Green Square fell just two days ago, Bab al-Azizya 24 hours ago. We arrived in Tripoli this morning, and we paid a taxi-driver to take us as close as possible "to the frontline". He left us a few hundred yards before what he thought was the front. We waited a few seconds, and we caught a ride from one of the rebels' cars that took us a few hundreds yards forward, stopping in a square empty of people but full of green flags, the flags of Gaddafi's supporters.

"The frontline", to be sure, is quite a misleading word, as it suggests that there is a recognizable "line" of separation between two armies facing each other on the battlefield: this, however, is not the case when military operations are conducted inside a city, where advancing and withdrawing amidst buildings would be better understood as tactics of displacement, encircling maneuvers, and so on. Perhaps I can make use of an image from the myth to capture what it means to navigate a city with an ongoing war within it: imagine the city transformed in a colossal Minos' labyrinth, and the urban war as the lurking Minotaur, audible but not traceable, invisible until it attacks you (notice that the characterizing trait of the labyrinth is that your eyes are not very useful in it: your way out of the labyrinth implies a transformation of your approach to your body, to its movement through space, and to its sense of direction).

The photographer and I are here because we are *working*. The work consists in capturing some images – some stories – that could be sent to newspapers, magazines, televisions, and maybe – who knows? – to one of the many documentary film festivals around the world. The photographer is an Italian freelance; we have been travelling together for the past two weeks and I consider myself very lucky for meeting him randomly in Benghazi, because he taught me a lot about both the magic, and the commercial rules, of photography. Keep him in mind because in the next chapter I will use one exchange between us to illustrate how his continuous interacting with the specific technology available in his camera inflects *his perception of the visible*.

The area in which we are, was controlled by Gaddafi's troops just six hours ago. The attack is conducting us towards the hospital in which, tomorrow, one of Aljazeera journalists will find 84 dead people – the people died because withdrawing Gaddafi's troops left them without cures. But we do not know that yet – I may say, cynically, that we do not have *that story* yet – we are here, our backs leaning against the wall, hunting for images in the middle of the action. The rebels conquered the square, but they are not

in full control: they still do not know where, among the many buildings that tower over the square, the snipers are hiding.

So the photographer, I, and 4 other rebels are here, leaning against this wall. We are waiting for the signal to run towards three big red caterpillars that are parked right in the middle of a roundabout, a few feet away from us. One of the rebels told us that the caterpillars are blocking our view of seven corpses laid in the middle of the street. It is important that we go shoot the corpses because they are evidence of war crimes committed by Gaddafi's troops: their hands handcuffed behind their backs indicate that they have been *executed*. Before we move there, however, we still have a few minutes, so let me tell you how we arrived here, because it will reveal something about the cinematic value of my bodily reality.

### 3.1. Problem-space 2

We were leaning against another wall of another anonymous building of this area. We had to run through an open square, knowing that we were potentially going to be under snipers' fire. As we were preparing, the photographer and I decided to do what everybody in our place would do: to switch the cameras on, and record the running (the photographer's photo-camera makes HD video). We both knew that the cameras would shake; however, we also knew what every contemporary teenager knows, namely, that not only the shaking would not be a problem in this particular situation, but, in fact, this shot *requires* it. In fact, without the shaking that transmits the excitation of my body to the camera, I feel that the shot would simply be neither appropriate to the situation, nor faithful to my feeling. A fiction filmmaker has many options to shoot a scene such as this one – handheld camera being the most popular, but not the only, one; I however, do not: for obvious reasons I did not take with me anything else but my semi-professional video-camera, two mics, three batteries, and five MiniDvs.

Thus I do not have any aesthetic freedom of choice with regard the camera shaking – but, again, I am lucky enough to be in a situation in which Freedom and Necessity coincide perfectly. I do, however, have freedom of choice with regard another aspect: *the subject* of the shot. The question is: as I am running, should I try to keep the focus as much as I can on a human subject – the men that are running with me – or should I simply hold the camera in my hands and leave her "free" to capture anything she likes (I like to think of my camera as feminine, so from now on I will refer to it as "she")? While the shaking is appropriate in the contingency of being running under snipers' bullets, whether I should focus on a subject or not, opens up an interesting aesthetic dilemma:

1) I know that my handheld camera, through her shaky movement, captures the kinetic excitation of my body, and this is precisely what will make the shot realistic and appropriate to the situation. I know another important thing: the large majority of cinematic images betray a bias for human subjects.[77] If I try to keep

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[77] The works of Dziga Vertov (*Man with a Movie Camera*, *Kino-Pravda* etc*.*), San Brakhage (*The Act of Seeing With One's Own Eyes*, *Mothlight* etc.), and other more or less "vanguard" authors, are, notoriously, remarkable exceptions to the mainstream tradition of documentary, and fiction, cinema. It is worth noticing

the focus on the human subjects as I am running, I will obtain a shaky image of running men. *What is the meaning of this shot*? This shot means that in the middle of an extreme state of kinetic, perceptual, and psychological excitation, my eyes still *try to impose their legislation* over the visible: images of the running human figures may be shaky, but my viewer will still be seeing something visually familiar. In other words, my shot would manifest that I am doing my best not to lose my *visual mastery* of reality, even in the moment in which, we may say, vision is not as determinant, for me, as the kinesthetic excitation of my body, electrified by the intensity of death-threat.

2) I have another option. As I said before, I know that mainstream cinematic codes induce the audience to expect a shaky image of running human subjects in this shot. Rather than focusing on running human subjects, however, I can simply hold the camera in my right hand as I normally do when she is off – just more firmly. This way I will represent the pure kinesis/kinetic reality of my electrified body.

Since I am fond of exploring the possibilities that the manifoldness of bodily reality offers to cinematic expression, I happened to choose the latter option. This does not mean, however, that I consider option 1 inappropriate: it all depends, quite obviously, on the general aesthetic plan in which either shot would be framed.

What this aesthetic dilemma illustrates is that the extreme portability and miniaturization that characterize new models of video-cameras, photo-cameras, and other image-recording devices, is opening up intriguing new possibilities for filmmaking, and in particular, for documentary filmmaking, and for real-life filmmaking. On a first, superficial level, we may think that portable digital technology is producing a "socialization" of media that parallels, to a certain extent, the popularization of film-equipment of the 1960s, when lighter cameras and the appearance of synch sound enabled Fred Wiseman, Jean Rouch, and others, to revolution documentary making, and familiarized ordinary people with devices that they had never seen before. There is, however, a critical difference: portable digital technology is not simply *provoking a new vanguard aesthetic, but it is rather producing an actual shift in sensibilities*. The difference is critical because, in the former case, the aesthetic initiative is in the hands of the vanguard, which uses it to provoke orthodox aesthetic taste; in the latter, on the contrary, there is no initiative: the sensibility emerges "from the bottom", that is, from the everyday practices of social actors that are more concerned with the uses, rather than with the aesthetics, of filmmaking: from journalists, from political activists with their cellphones and amateur video-cameras, and even – as much as it cost me to admit it – from the horrifying tourists with their "videos of my last vacation". What these "categories" of people are *doing*, most of the time without realizing it, is simple: they are *practically anchoring the image to the living body*. When I say "practically" I mean that, in the first place, image-recording devices of all kinds are already, for many people, irreplaceable personal gadgets to be carried everyday on one's own body; I also mean, however, that this practical change in everyday habits has a profound impact on the

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that Vertov theorized cinema as an "education to a human perception" (see: Vertov, Dziga. 1984. *Kino-eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*. Berkeley: University Press).

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aesthetics of the image, an impact that we still do not fully appreciate – let alone conceptualize – yet that, in my opinion, will prove decisive for the emergence of new aesthetic forms in the near future: what this nonchalant everydayness of image-recording devices *does*, is nothing less than adding a new element to people's categories of appreciation of images: the element of the *actual presence of the body doing the shooting*.

With the expression "actual presence of the body doing the shooting" I am trying to describe the way new portable technology articulates the relation between body, image, and cinematic apparatus. Two caveats about the formulation. First of all, I am using the noun "presence" for lack of a better name, so to speak. I am conscious of its profound enmeshment in the so-called "metaphysics of presence", but I hope that in what follows it will be clear that my use of the term does not entail a metaphysics of presence. Secondly, I use "actual presence" instead of "bodily presence" because I want to distinguish it from the way that, according to Mary Ann Doane, mainstream cinema articulated the relation between body and image.[78] In her <u>The Voice of Cinema: the Articulation of Body and Space</u>, Doane argues that the introduction of sound recording technology in fiction film industry, enabled cinema "to represent a fuller (and organically unified) body, and of confirming the status of speech as individual property right."[79] Because the synchronization of the human voice to the image of the moving lips of the characters, as it is well known, was carried over in post-production, the familiar cinematic image of speaking actors is, strictly speaking, a fake, an *a posteriori* reconstruction that reaffirms the invisibility of the cinematic apparatus and thus a specific ideology of the visible (an ideology that postulates a human subject organically controlling his/her unified body). It is not a case, Doane argues, that vanguard artists such as Jean-Luc Godard and Marguerite Duras (we may add Trinh T. Min-ha today) use (among other means) out-of-synch sound to reveal the craftiness of cinema.

What I am pointing out here, then, is a very different articulation of body, sound and image. I am arguing that the portability of the new image-and-sound-recording devices enables amateur-filmmakers to ground camera-movements, and sound, on the movements and emotions manifested by the *living body immersed in concrete and interactive situations*.

If this is true, it follows that new technologies of the image are also reverting the tendency of mainstream cinema and television *to erase the presence of the cinematic apparatus*, thus de facto de-structuring and re-structuring the relation between body, image, and apparatus.[80] I am obviously not arguing that this new relation is any better or worse than the previous one: I am simply describing a shift in practices that demands to be met by a shift in concepts, i.e. that demands new concept-work.

While I am trying to spelling out the aesthetic possibilities opened by new technology, I am not blind to its other anthropological implications: that young people are able to shoot with their I-phones themselves and their friends partying, and then use

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[78] Mary Ann Doane, *The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space*. In: Rosen (ed.) 1986.
[79] Ib. 336
[80] Walter Benjamin theorized the invisibility of the cinematic apparatus in his world-renowned essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (in: Benjamin1968. Jean-Louis Baudry, in *Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus*, argues that the invisibility of the apparatus reinforces our belief in the "givenness" of the visible (in: Rosen (ed.) 1986).

Facebook or other social network to share the videos, calls for a renewed attention to the "microphysics" of the image. People are able to hear their voices, and to observe their bodily behavior "from outside", as never before happened in history. How might this change their understanding of themselves and others? People use amateur-videos to cement their friendships and even, as the cases of Libya and Egypt demonstrate, to cement their political alliances. What are the positive implications of these new practices? What are the contras? What new relation to images is opened by these remarkable new uses?

Michel Foucault once stated that change comes when "*critique has been played out in the real, not when reformers have realized their ideas*".[81] If this is true, than the most effective form of critique of mainstream media has already been practically carried over under our eyes, and, most likely, with the active participation of our bodies, without us fully realizing it. Anthropology, philosophy, and aesthetic, as usual, come later, to spell out *a posteriori* what already happened, how different we are from what we were just a minute ago. At the same time, I am convinced, social research should humbly propose wise ways of making use of such difference.


## 3.2. Problem-space 3

Let's get back on the scene of the action. Now the photographer and I are running, along with other rebels, towards the red caterpillars. As we are running, we obtain concrete evidence that someone is firing at us. It is acoustic evidence. Bullets *whistle a trajectory* (as awkward and ungrammatical as this expression may sound, it is the most appropriate to describe the phenomenon) from slightly above my right, to down to my left. It is the first time that I have been shot at. I do not actually know whether the bullets were directed to me, to any of my fellow runners, or whether they were fired randomly (now that I am writing about it, I become aware of the most unexpected of feelings: I would like to meet the sniper who fired those bullets. I cannot tolerate that the question of my life and death depends on a series of gestures automatically accomplished, on a faceless action). The bullets do not hit anybody, we are unable to see where they end, and where they come from; we are only aware that they were fired.

The acoustic trajectory opens up a philosophical problem. My sensory perception gives me concrete evidence, beyond any skepticism, of *a presence*. I could even add that my body *confirms that presence* with the urgency of its reactions: *it* starts running as fast as *I* never knew I was capable of. What noun does that *presence* deserve? "Sniper"? I am tempted to answer yes, immediately; doubt, however, insinuates itself: there is a lot of confusion in this area; many civilian rebel troops are fighting without being aware of each other, with very poor coordination and communication. We heard of accidental friendly-fire the past days. So maybe the acoustic trajectory deserves the noun "misdirected friendly fire?"

Because I am bringing a video-camera with me, the question does no longer *matter to me only*: I am responsible for what I show or say in my video. I am not certain of the noun that I should give to the acoustic evidence of the bullet, because I did not *see*

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[81] Foucault, M., Questions of Method: An Interview. *Ideology and Consciousness*, 8. 1981, p.13.

anything. If my previous running gave me the opportunity to question the preeminence that we always, un-reflexively, accord to seeing, over any other bodily reality (and thus induce me to re-establish the rights of the kinetic body over the rights of the eye), this running shows me just how much our inferential and interpretive processes are ingrained in seeing (and in fact the problem of the relation between signs, interpretation, and perception, is the classical problem of every more or less self-aware semiotics from Hume, through Kant and Pierce, to Eco).

My body, however, already manifested its own take on what happened. I am wearing my radio-microphone, so the camera records the unnatural acceleration of my breathing, and when I speak, my voice seems spoiled of its materiality: its sentences resemble a layer of meaning thinly settled on erupting horror. We may therefore say that what is reconstituted as a cinematic image is not my bodily presence as a unified whole, supremely mastered by an autarchic subject, but, rather, beyond the visible, *the actual presence of my body doing the shooting*, the un-unified, interactive, body, enmeshed in the action (please notice two things: first of all, that I was not aware that my voice manifested my terror when I was *using it*; secondly, that in spite of everything that I ever read on the importance of the timbre of the voice, I was never able to listen to other people's voices so carefully as I do now, after hearing my own recorded voice overflowing emotions).

There will be another case in which my eyes and my camera will be powerless, a much more dramatic one, just two hours later. The volunteers-rebels will take prisoners two of Gaddafi's soldiers. I will film the moments of busting excitation, and the terror in the faces of prisoners. Then two rebels will take them behind a corner and will disappear from my view. Since I will not try to follow them, I will never know if anybody would have prevented me from doing so. As they were turning around the corner, one of the rebels threw off one of the prisoners' hat, leaving the soldier' head laid bare. That gesture made me sweat cold.

How should I construct my narrative in such cases then? In the first case, the radio-microphone was obviously unable to capture the whistling bullets, but my fellow runners commented on them, and so did I – and again, the timber of our voices, and the look in our eyes, is sufficient to prove the existence of the bullets. Since I cannot be sure about the origin of the bullets, I should leave the comments open enough to insinuate in my audience the same doubt that I had.


## 4. The Possibilities of Portable Media

I have been speaking so much about media that I feel I am already loosing track of the essential. A healthy come back into the thickness of reality is the following comment by one of my Egyptian informants:

**Wael:** *All this talking about social networks, cellphones... It's nonsense. People did the revolution. People. Us. The morning of 19th of February (the crucial day of the Egyptian revolution), I saw a multitude of people on the street; I knew that they were going to Tahrir Square, and I decided to join them. Trust me I am not a fearless person, and to be honest I wasn't even desperate as many other protesters were. Simply, without thinking*

*about it too much, I thought that it was the right opportunity for us to get rid of Mubarak. One thing I can tell you for sure: I wasn't on the 6th of April Youth Movement's Facebook list; I did not receive any call about, or image of, the protests. I just saw from the window of my house people marching on the street, and I decided to go.*

I started this chapter by warning about the dangers of the so-called "California Ideology" ("a deadly cocktail of naïve optimism, techno-utopianism, and new-libertarian politics popularized by *Wired* magazine"). As any other "slogan" or "formula" invented for the purpose of critiquing theoretical positions that are not our own, this definition as well is filled with scorn, and therefore, unjust. I do not think that Manovich or any other theoretician of media is any more *techno-utopian* than any of their adversaries. Yet, if formulas are unjust, they also remind us what are the risks of focusing only on one pole of a dialectical dynamic. This is why, I think, an analysis of "portable video-technology" should take the form of an *analysis of possibilities*: the possibilities that subjects have to do something with portable technology (as Gabanelli openly stated); and the possibilities that new portable technology offers to subjects to *take up their subjectivity in new ways*. Taking up the analysis of new portable technology as an analysis of possibilities, in other words, entails recognizing the prominent place held by micro-reflexive practices.

<center>**Conclusions**</center>


<center>**Truth, Media, and the appropriation of Historical Time**
**Two Reflections**</center>


## 1. Politics

In the weeks in which I am writing these conclusions, the European Monetary Union is in its deepest crisis ever since the Euro became the unified European currency in January 2001. It is unpredictable whether Europe will come out of this financial crisis with more integrated financial governance (but under what conditions – would France accept German political supremacy? And with what agenda? Implementing neoliberal measures that will destroy what is left of the legacy of the twentieth century social struggles?) or whether, in a fatal encounter with the short-sightedness of the actual European leaders, this crisis will destroy the Euro, and therefore the equilibrium that was built on the ruins of World War II with the intent of preventing a new European catastrophe[82].

Since speaking about World War II may make our political imagination run too fast, prefiguring improbable scenarios, let's say that the good news is that, if the intent of the European Union, as it was built at the time of Adenauer and De Gaulle, was to prevent a new European catastrophe to happen, then we may say that the European political institutions have certainly absolved the function for which they had been historically conceived: on the one hand, European economies are much more mutually interpenetrated, and much less dependent on the power policies of the Sovereign Nation States; on the other hand, European national life-styles are much more de-militarized and "transnational" today than they were ninety years ago. Thus, something such as another continental war that would unleash Europeans' nationalistic hates against each other is, today, science fiction.

I may add that, in spite of the fact that many people may occasionally agree with Woody Allen's claim that every time that he listens to Richard Wagner he feels like invading Poland – thus pointing to the fact that European practices and cultural artifacts are still imbued with certain nationalistic "values" that are difficult to eradicate – the view that France will not need to build a new Maginot Line, and that Germany will not invade Belgium in the next decades, can de endorsed by pointing to another indicator – perhaps the sole indicator that never fails: the content of European hate speeches. It is a fact that contemporary radical right-wing parties and movements that have mushroomed all over Europe, from Italy to France, from Austria to Poland and Germany, have, indeed, given up twentieth century nationalistic closure, and have learned how to establish a truly transnational European fraternity under the gleaming flag of the hate for immigrants.

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[82] Literature on the constitution of the European Union is countless. Here are a few works by Italian historians that deal, among other things, with the EU vis-à-vis the Italian state and Constitution: Pombeni, Paolo. 1994. Partiti e sistemi politici nella storia contemporanea. Bologna: Il mulino; Ginsborg Paul. 1989. *Storia d'Italia dal dopoguerra ad oggi*. Torino: Einaudi; Scoppola, Pietro. 1991. *La repubblica dei partiti*. Bologna: Il mulino.

<center>98</center>

Noteworthy paradox of history: the European fraternity dreamt of by the European Lefts throughout the twentieth century, has been realized by the radical rightist movements.

Immigration is by no means a new phenomenon in post-war Europe. While, however, before the 1970s it was still framed in the categories of understanding of the colonial period, post 1980s flows of immigration, and the correlative emergence of new rightist radically anti-immigration political parties all over Europe, demand new conceptual categories. Notoriously, the vast literature produced by the field commonly referred to as "postcolonial studies", is an attempt to forge new categories of understanding of the phenomenon.

Whether or not immigration is, or will be, the core issue of European politics – the critical historical movement destined to explode all European tensions and contradictions, or, on the contrary, the positive phenomenon that will enable Europe to keep its position within world politics – is a question beyond the reach of this dissertation. For now, it is sufficient to notice that (1) one of the main prerogatives of the "old" nation-state – capillary control of the borders – is challenged by the flows of illegal immigration[83]; (2) observers, politicians and common people alike are aware of that, so that people are able to observe this historical dynamic in the moment of its occurrence; (3) controlling borders, and keeping absolute sovereignty over immigration policies, are two of the main national prerogatives preventing further integration of the European states.

These observations are relevant in this dissertation because many of my informants asked themselves how to represent journalistically the condition of immigrants in Italy. They were concerned with the consequences that their representations might have on people's perception of immigrants. In light of these considerations – (1) on the consequences that the actual economic crisis might have on European political institutions; (2) on the new forms of organized hate-speaking that flourished within those same political institutions that might have already entered a state of irreversible crisis, and (3) on how my informants' reflections and practices might shape current perceptions of immigrants in Italy – the question: "what shall we do?" is impellent.

All the more so for this dissertation, insofar as its focus on *truth-telling* seems to make it well equipped to propose a remedy for *hate-speaking*. Truth-telling vs hate-speaking. Far from wishing a dismantling of the European institutions on the charge that they are technocratic agents of late capitalism, and that, consequently, new forms of hate-speaking have somewhat *naturally* flourished within them – but, on the contrary, convincingly endorsing European institutions' even more tight integration upon the condition of their radical democratization – I think that, notwithstanding other forms of political activism, the response to hate-speaking passes *also* through a renewal of European cultural politics agenda.

Reminding that in Chapter IV I argued that, in Italian contemporary journalistic practices, truth-telling means representing one's interviewee as *a subject in an agonistic field*, rather than overlapping the journalist's voice to the voice of another, or "telling the truth in the face of the tyrant", or "speaking for… a subaltern subject", we may conclude

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[83] For a reading of the phenomenon of immigration in relation to the Italian State sovereignty, see: Poggi, Gianfranco. 1992. *Lo stato*: *Natura, sviluppo, prospettive*. Bologna: Il mulino.

that a truth-telling response to hate-speaking would imply that, whenever a journalist or, for that matter, a film director or a European born novelist – decides to deal with immigration, s/he shall do so by abandoning any "complex of superiority", any pitiful indulgence, any bad conscience that may derive from one's "will to help", and rather show the complex, fascinating, virile, challenge of making a life in a different country *in its brute reality*. A journalist or an artist ought to do so at any cost, even when that implied showing seemingly repulsive cultural practices. Naturally, one needs to be capable of narrating the *minutia* of a persons' existence in all their mundane banality, while at the same time infusing them with some universal value that triggers the audience's mimetic will. Doing so, we may argue, requires genius, but we do not need to dream of journalists endowed with Quentin Tarantino's mesmerizing capacity to excavate the psychological and existential depth of idle talk: as I have already showed, many of my informants are already perfectly capable of representing their interlocutors as subjects *from within journalistic discourse*. We may perhaps try to *inspire other journalists* with this particular form of truth-telling.

There is a valid reason to do so: hate-speech is not effectively countered by trying to persuade people that the "targets" of hate are human beings as well; rather, it is most effectively countered when the people who are *seduced* by the life-adventures of immigrants outnumber those who are seduced by hate-speech. Victory against hate-speech amounts to no more – but no less – than that, and I think that a successful cultural politics should focus all of its energies to achieve this result.

One of the thinkers most sensitive to cultural politics – Fredric Jameson – writes in his encyclopedic analysis of postmodernism:

*To say that my two terms, the cultural and the economic, thereby collapse back into one another and say the same thing, is an eclipse of the distinction between the base and the superstructure that has itself often struck people as significantly characteristic of postmodernism in the first place, is also to suggest that the base, in the third stage of capitalism, generates its superstructures with a new kind of dynamic. And this may also be what (rightly) worries the unconverted about the term: it seems to obligate you to talk about cultural phenomena at least in business terms if not in those of political economy[84].* (xi)

One of Jameson's most celebrated insights in this book is that postmodernism is that phase of capitalism in which "culture" is commodified, that is, produced according to either the logic of the market, or *to reflexively different logics*. In the preface to Jameson's *The Geopolitical Aesthetics: Cinema and Space in the World System*, Colin MacCabe glosses:

*For Jameson, the moment at which cultural production is fully integrated into economic production opens out the possibility of a cultural politics which would fundamentally intervene in the economic. If the first cultural reaction to capitalism is a realism which attempts to provide forms of representation which will comprehend this new stage of*

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[84] Jameson, Fredric. 1992. *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.

*economic development, modernism is the appalled that any such representation is itself subject to social and economic forms which relativize its comprehension in relation to changing audiences. Modernism is the attempt, after a loss of innocence about representation,* **to invent forms which will determine their own audiences** [my emphasis E.Z.]*, to project an interiority onto a future unmediated by any form of commodity[85]. (vii-viii)*

The great lesson of Modernism is that any form determines its audience. As I wrote in chapter II, given what distinguishes journalistic texts from literary ones – the former is produced, consumed, and circulated differently than the latter – "form" in journalism shall not be understood in pure textual terms, and thus approached with conceptual tools forged to analyze literary texts, but rather it is more productively understood in terms of truth-practices involving the journalist's subjectivity.

Milena Gabanelli's example shows that a fundamental change in journalistic truth-practices determines *Report*'s aesthetics, and, thereby, forms *Report*'s audience. Remembering that *Report*'s fans many times actively collaborate to the investigations by suggesting cases, by recalling the journalists' attention on certain topics, and so on, we can agree with Jameson that working within the mechanisms of postmodernist cultural forms does not necessarily prevent cultural agents from forming communities of ethical-political commitment. Milena herself put it this way:

**Milena:** *Obviously I am glad that our audience appreciates us. But we do not need to romanticize what we do; most importantly, I do not think that we are doing something "truly unique", something "revolutionary", and so on. One needs to be realistic about the fact that one crafts a product for the market. News needs to be sold. What we can do, is trying to craft a decent product.*

That the "decency" of *Report*'s product formed, and still forms, communities of ethical-political engagement whose participants are willing to collaborate to effectively shape the reality in which they live, means only that evidently we already have some truth-practices that may help taking up a few problems, among which, perhaps, hate-speech. That we shall try to inspire more cultural operators to work with *Report*'s truth-telling practices might seem a slow and out-of-reach solution as a cultural politics. I, however, do not see many other solutions around.


## 2. Knowledge

It is by now widely known that the invention and commercial success of the television deeply affected the industry of entertainment, the news, and people's everyday habits. To begin with, the advent of television had the unexpected consequence of putting cinema in such a profound crisis as to induce a change of its conditions of production and

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[85] Colin MacCabe, preface to: Jameson, Fred. 1995. *The Geopolitical Aesthetics: Cinema and Space in the World System*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

distribution[86]. While today we take for granted that the television industry is more influential and more well funded that the cinema industry, in the 1950s the relation between the still small television apparatus and the humongous cinematic apparatus was inverted. Likewise, television changed the conditions of production and distribution of the news, setting in motion the profound change in the everyday practices of the printed press that I described in chapter II.

In the early 2000s, television moved from the center to the periphery of the stage, leaving the prominent position to "the twins" – the Internet and digital technology. As with television, the Internet and digital technology are changing cinema, the news industry, and a number of everyday life habits. I described the changes in the Italian journalistic practices induced by technology in chapters IV and V.

The answer to one of my initial questions – how is my informants' truth-telling influenced by digital technology? – points to the miniaturization and portability of new technology as the critical characteristics.

In chapter I I illustrated how the idea of creating a low-budget investigative journalism television program came to Milena when she became aware of both the potential, and the aesthetic limitations, of the new portable cameras, so that she started to ask herself how to justify the use of "low-quality" images. In chapter V I approached the question from a different angle. Both the size of contemporary video- or photo-cameras, and their handiness – the easy regulation of depth of field, shutter speed, lens, gain, interlacing, and so forth – enable and limit the video-operator's access to reality. It goes without saying that when video-operators regulate the technical parameters of their portable devices, for instance when they regulate the shutter-speed or the Gain according to the particular "cut" they want to give to the dramatic situation, they are conducting a quick reflection on the "formal" aspects of the shot. Regulating the technical parameters of the camera is in fact the way in which video-operators take critical decisions about whether movement will be emphasized or reduced; what subjects shall be left on the background; what elements will come to the fore; and so forth. Regulating the values of the camera is video-operators' way of determining the image's atmosphere, dramatic pacing, intimacy, and so on.

We do not need to add how important is the question of *how* to represent an event. We will only notice that an *experienced* filmmaker, or photographer, can be defined as one who is able to *see* events the way the camera sees them. Besides montage, in fact, the single most important practice of filmmaking is so-called *cinematography* (or *photography* in the European tradition) that is, the ability to regulate the camera's technical parameters according to the demands of the *mise-en-scène* (according to the "bodies", their movements in space, and their relations to light). The relations between elements within a single shots are as important as the relations between different shots.

During my fieldwork in Libya in summer 2011 I observed that my main informant, Filippo, an Italian freelance photographer with 10 years experience in photojournalism, used to take pictures not only without looking at the camera screen – which is not so unusual: I do the same when shooting video with my video-camera – but, and this was new to me, without even bringing the camera close to his eyes. Considering that angles, inclination, and distance, are among the main compositional elements of a

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[86] Bordwell, David and Kristen Thompson. 1997. *Film Art: An Introduction*. New York: McGraw-Hill

picture (notice that these elements are determined by Iris, shutter speed, focus, and so on), I asked him whether it was not a bit risky not to bring the camera close to the human eye, and he explained to me that he knew so well his camera that he could literally *see* what the camera was seeing from the angle that it happened to have at any moment. Three points can be made about this fieldwork anecdote. First of all, that when Filippo said that he knew the camera "so well that he could see through its angle" he meant that he was perfectly aware of the sensitivity to light, movement, color, and so on that his camera happened to have at any moment. Secondly, that Filippo's whole body participated to this sort of double vision, given that his hands performed the decisive task of orienting the camera, and his body position could augment or reduce the spatial relations between bodies. Thirdly, that the beauty of his pictures persuaded me that he did not lie. We can therefore observe, first of all, that the senses – vision, but, at least for video-makers, earing as well – of a professional photographer or filmmaker are trained to perceive events the same way that their technological devices perceive them; secondly, that the technology available on such apparatuses thereby influences professionals' sensorial access to reality. While I elaborated more extensively on this topic in chapter IV, here I would like to provide a few reflections of more general – perhaps playful – order.

The point is that, in light of these considerations, and given the inflation of etiquettes that constellate our scholarly practice, I find it revealing that nobody has still thought about attaching the prefix "post-" to anything that has to do with technology, and in particular with media. We live in a post-national constellation (Habermas copyright); our post-industrial societies, whose form of post-capitalist production is organized according to a post-fordist division of labor, entertain us with the endless games of postmodern signifiers, which luckily enough we are able to post-structurally appropriate in order to creatively make ourselves post-humans. Oddly enough, we still do all this overcoming of plain-humanity with the same boring old technology, or, at best, with new technology, but certainly not with a fancy *post-technology*.

I am myself not interested in coining a new post-term, but I find it interesting that nobody else did. Remembering that Jorge Luis Borges once wrote a critical review of a non-existent book in order to reveal something of the intellectual milieu of his epoch, we may perhaps reflect on a non-existent concept in order to reveal something of our own.

There are two possible explanations for the non-existence of the concept of post-technology. The first explanation is that, if nobody has as yet tried to claim that we live in the post-technological era, it must be because we do not, in fact, live in the post-technological era. It is obvious that the prefixes post- signals, at least in the intentions of their creators and users, a movement of differentiation of the present from the recent past; or, which is the same, a historical moment in which past practices are still close enough to be normative and to help us making sense of our current practices. Thus, the fact that nobody uses the term post-technology must mean that, at its most fundamental level, our technology is still not so different, in its operative logic, and in its significance for our lives, from what it was just 20 or 50 years ago. There are no clues that we are about to overcome technology, perhaps because everybody seems to agree that we are in fact witnessing a relentless technologization of more and more aspects of human life. Technology might be helping us making ourselves post-human, but we are not helping our technology to become post-technological.

There is, as I said, a second explanation. The last two post- terms in order of appearance, post-structuralism, and post-modernity, were meant to cluster together, as loose as generalizations always are, those styles of inquiry and practices that refuse totalizing visions and coherent narratives. If it is true that the styles of reflections and practices closest to our contemporary refuse totalizing accounts, then it is no surprise that such *epochal* term as "post-technology" has not yet appeared: contemporary thinkers in any field might not find it a viable theoretical option. There is no longer a normative center that irradiates its meaning in the peripheries (European modernity vs Third World backwardness), and there is no longer a normative future orienting current practices (future communist regime vs current capitalism). Thus, thinking about "an epoch of post-technological practices" different from the present, something similar to Martin Heidegger's coming back of "god", or a future that might orient our current politics as regards technology, is nonsensical, for the simple reason that there is not a unified "present" of technology: there are many different presents cohabitating simultaneously.

There is more. We know that we do not need to project our practices onto any future scenario in order to live the present meaningfully: this is valid for our bodily existence, for the small world of our individual lives, and even for our collective national and international existence. As a matter of fact, as Nietzsche with the myth of the eternal recurrence of the same, Hannah Arendt with her separation between history and politics, a number of novelists in the twentieth century, from Milan Kundera to Jaroslav Hašek, from Robert Musil to Carlos Fuentes and Gabriel Garcia-Márquez, and countless other thinkers, have showed, inscribing our lives in a "master narrative[87]" is *dangerous* both for our own existence and for the existence of others. Glossing Arendt's reflection "What is Politics?"[88] Hans Sluga writes:

*Western thought, specifically in its Hegelian and Marxist forms, had tried to turn politics into history. Through envisaging a world-historical process determined by set of necessary laws, such thinking has reduced the plurality of human beings to a single, undifferentiated humanity. "Hence the monstrous and inhuman character of history which only at its end comes to prevail fully and brutally in politics," Arendt wrote in her note, with an eye to her just finished book. Asserting that freedom exists only in the peculiar In-between area of politics, she accused Hegel and Marx of an "escape from freedom into the "necessity" of history. A detestable absurdity[89]. (93)*

Thus, if we abandon the historical narrative "which only at its end comes to prevail fully and brutally", one of the present challenges of thinking is *how to make politics differently*, that is, how Rehinardt Koselleck would have it, how to invent new ways of

[87] The term is Lyotard's in: Lyotard, Jean-François. 1984. *The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge*. Manchester: University Press.
[88] Published in: Hannah Arendt, *Denktagebuch: 1950-1973*, ed. Ursula Ludz and Ingeborg Nordmann. Munich: Piper, 2002
[89] In: Sluga, Hans. 2008. The Pluralism of the Political: From Carl Schmitt to Hannah Arendt. *Telos: A Quarterly Journal of Critical Thought*. 142 3:91-109.

political appropriation of time[90]. A question that anthropology practiced as historical critique, could address productively.

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[90] Koselleck, Reinhardt. 1979. *Futures Past: On the Semantic of Historic Time.* New York: Columbia University Press

**Appendix**

## 1. A Critical Appropriation: John Dewey

In his celebrated short book *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, John Dewey urged philosophy to abandon its habit of speculating on such a-temporal entities as Being, Truth, Reality, and so on, to rather focus on the temporal, historical, and everyday problems out of which philosophical and scientific insights and procedures *always* emerge:

*The basic postulate of the text… [is] that the distinctive office, problems and subjectmatter of philosophy grew out of stresses and strains in the community life in which a given form of philosophy arises, and that, accordingly, its specific problems vary with the changes in human life that are always going on and that at times constitute a crisis and a turning point in human history*[91]. (vi)

Accordingly, the first task of reconstruction in philosophy is "*to arrive at a hypothesis as to how this great change came about so widely, so deeply, and so rapidly*" (xxi). By the "great change", Dewey means nothing less than the following:

*The present reach and thrust of what originates as science affects disturbingly every aspect of contemporary life, from the state of the family and the position of women and children, through the conduct and problems of education, through the fine as well as industrial arts, into political and economic relations of association that are national and international in scope.* (xx)

While Dewey is not the only thinker who assumed that the task of philosophy were to understand modernity as the period in which forms of rationality unfolded so to encompass more and more aspects of life[92], it is particularly inspiring for this dissertation his stress on the "worldly" origin of philosophy and, thereby, of self-reflexivity. If, in fact, one approaches self-reflexivity as an activity that does not happen in the void, but that is rather shaped by the conditions of its occurrence, then one may focus, among other things, on the material and aesthetic conditions enabling a particular kind of self-reflexivity. Aesthetic self-reflexivity (that is: self-reflexivity meant to produce an aesthetic message i.e. a video of an event, a photo, and so on), dealt with in this dissertation is one of such kinds.

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[91] Dewey, John. 1957. *Reconstruction in Philosophy*. Boston: Beacon Press. Dewey's theoretical privileging of the temporal over the eternal, this time referred to the structure of experience itself, is restated in the introduction to the *Essays in Experimental Logic*: "*The key to understanding the doctrine of the essays which are herewith reprinted lies in the passages regarding the temporal development of experience*" (in: Dewey, John. 2004. *Essays in Experimental Logic*. New York: Dover Publications).
[92] Max Weber is the most obvious reference. Rabinow (2003) suggested a parallelism between Dewey's idea that situations have "needs", and Georges Canguilhem's idea that situations are normed. Less convincing is Okrent (1988)'s parallelism between pragmatist Dewey and anti-rationalist Heidegger (in: Okrent, Mark. 1988. *Heidegger's Pragmatism. Understanding, Being, and the Critique of Metaphysics*.

If we assume, with Dewey, that what characterizes mankind in the 1900s is "*the entrance into the conduct of the everyday affairs of life of processes, materials, and interests whose origin lies in the work done by physical inquirers in the relatively aloof and remote technical workshops known as laboratories*", then we may, today, add one more key term to the list of scientifically-born entities that changed the everyday life of people, and say that "processes, materials, interests, and *technological devices…* entered into the conduct of everyday affairs". The Internet is obviously the most ready-at-hand example, but new digital technology provides another brilliant example of a "technology" that entered into the conduct of everyday affairs – in various degrees, for different kinds of people.

## 2. A Critical Appropriation II: Jacques Lacan

It is known that Jacques Lacan's seminars meant to illustrate what psychoanalysis would gain, at both the epistemological, and the therapeutic level, if professional psychoanalysts afforded to work out thoroughly, in both its conceptual, and practical, consequences, the idea that human beings, *because* they possess language, are *constitutively* opened to alterity.[93] What was scandalous about Lacan's thesis was not that human beings' are constitutionally open to alterity – after all, Blaise Pascal's motto that no man is an island is just one of innumerable historical incarnations of this idea – but the fact that this thesis was framed, for the first time, in a specific conception of language, and of its functioning, that undermined the centrality granted by French phenomenology to the meaning-donator subject. We may say that the scandal of Lacan's thesis can be thoroughly appreciated in the following passages:

*De nos jours, au temps historique où nous sommes de formation d'une science… à savoir, la linguistique, dont le modèle est le jeu combinatoire operant dans sa spontanéité, tout seul, d'une façon présubjective, – c'est cette structure qui donne son statut à l'inconscient. C'est elle, en tout cas, qui nous assure qu'il y a sous le terme d'inconscient quelque chose de qualifiable, d'accessible et d'objectivable* (29).[94]

[…]

*Vous verrez que, plus radicalement, c'est dans la dimension d'une synchronie que vous dovez situer l'inconscient – au niveau être, mais en tant qu'il peut se porter sur tout, c'esta-à-dire au niveau du sujet de l'énonciation, en tant que, selon le phrases, selon les modes, il se perd autant qu'il se retrouve, et que, dans une interjection, dans un*

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[93] The most explicit reference is the following: "*Tout mon effort a été nécessaire pour revalorizer aux yeux de ceux-ci cet instrument,* la parole – *pour lui redonner sa dignité et faire qu'elle ne soit pas toujour  pour eux ces mots d'avance dévalorisés…. C'esta ainsi que j'ai pu passer, au moins un temps, pour être hanté par je ne sais quelle philosophie du langage, voice heideggérienne, alors qu'il ne s'agissait que d'une reference propédeutique*" (in: Lacan, Jacques. 1973. *Les quatres concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*. Paris: Éditions de Seuil, p. 26).
[94] Ib.

*imperative, dans une evocation, voire, dans une défaillance, c'est toujours lui qui vous pose son énigme, et qui parle* (35).[95]

First of all, Lacan drew from Saussure the idea that linguistic meaning is by no means rooted in any correspondence between the mind and the world, but it is rather *an effect* of a rule-governed combinatory play of linguistic signs – signifiers – per se meaningless and unnecessary.[96] Secondly, he combined this idea with his interpretation of Freud's concept of the unconscious as something where *"il y a quelque chose en tous points homologue à ce que se passe au niveau di sujet – ça parle, et ça fonctionee d'une façon aussi élaborée qu'eu niveau du conscient, qui perd ainsi ce qui paraissait son privilége* (32)." Hence, Lacan concluded that, insofar as structured as a language, the unconscious could no longer be considered as a secluded, "nocturnal" sphere, isolated, and pushed away, from the meaningful, "normal" functioning of the human psyche, but rather had to be seen *as constantly at work* in all and every human linguistic manifestation.

    The unprecedented prominence attributed to the unconscious over *linguistic consciousness*, however, should not induce to overlook the complementary importance that Lacanian psychoanalysis attributes to the unconscious over *sensory perception*, and, of particular importance for the present dissertation, over *visual* perception. Aside from the classical "paper" on the mirror-stage, which became the single most influential writing in film theory (at least in the American academia), Lacan dealt extensively with visual perception in other writings and seminars[97]: in all cases, Lacan set out, through a critical appropriation of both Merleau-Ponty's investigations on the phenomenology of perception, and of Sartre studies of the dialectic of the gaze, to free the complex interplay of desire, (visual) perception, and the body, from its imbrication with theory of the meaning-giving activity of the subject[98].

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[95] Ib.

[96] In the *Cours de linguistique général*, Saussure distinguishes between a synchronic and a diachronic approach to language, and maintains that structural linguistics shall approach language synchronically. With this idea, Saussure puts in crisis French phenomenological accounts of the relation between mind, language and the world (Michel Foucault will provide the following account: "je me souviens très bien des cours où Merleau-Ponty a commencé à parler de Saussure… Alors, le problème du langage s'est fait jour, et il est apparuu que la phenomenology n'était pas capable de rendre compte, aussi bien qu'une analyse structurale, des effets de sens que pouvaient être produits par une structure de type linguistique, structure où le sujet au sens de la phénoménologie n'intervenait pas comme donateur de sens (in: Foucault, Michel. 2001. Dits et écrits. Paris: Gallimard. P. 1252) Practically, this means, for instance, that I do not need to know the history of how the letters h-o-u-s-e, and the corresponding sounds, came to designate a house in the English language in order for my mind to be able to operate with its meaning; rather, according to Saussure, the word "house" is able *to transmit the meaning* house because when someone utters it, my culturally-trained ears are able to distinguish its sound from the sound of "mouse" (and of "horse", and of all the other words that are similar but just slightly different). Thus, the fundamental linguistic structure of all is "/", an opposition generating a difference. (Saussure, Ferdinand. 1972. *Cours de linguistique general*. Paris: Payot).

[97] The original title of the mirror-stage essay is: *Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je* (in: Lacan, Jacques. 1966. Écrits. Paris: Éditions du Seuil).

[98] Commenting on Merleau-Ponty's <u>Le Visible et l'Invisible</u>, for example, Lacan states: "*Mais c'est ne pas entre l'invisible et le visible que nous allons, nous, avoir à passer. Le schize qui nous intéresse n'est pas la distance qui tient à ce qu'il y a des formes imposées par le monde vers quoi l'intentionalité de l'expérience phénoménologique nous dirige, d'où les limites que nous rencontrons dans l'expérience du visible. Le regard ne se présente à nous que sous la forme d'une étrange contingence, symbolique de ce que nous*

Lacan's efforts in this direction found their culmination in his lecture on *anamorphose*, where he challenged what he saw as the Cartesian tradition's reduction of "seeing" to perspectival geometrizing ("*Mais qu'est-ce que le regard?*" asks Lacan at the opening of part 2 after paying homage to Merleau-Ponty's *Le visible et l'invisible*)[99]. Suggesting that perspectival geometrizing is not a real representation of how we see the world, but rather a *Gestaltic* manifestation of phallic desire, Lacan interprets the skull painted in the diagonal of Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* as the "incarnation" of the fear of castration at the core of phallic ghost[100]. Accordingly, the skull is painted on the diagonal in order to show how, in spite of its manifest presence, it is cannot be seen according to the visual logic of perspectival geometrizing. Arguing that Holbein made manifest the fear of castration – and therefore the play of desire – that *at any moment* haunts our vision culturally trained to see "geometrically" – i.e. our vision imbued with Cartesian prejudices about the mind and body, the Self and others, the I and nature – Lacan urges his listeners to take into account the play of desire in seeing.

In his own theory, this happens through a critique of the theory of the gaze that Sartre puts forwards in *Being and Nothingness*. In particular, Lacan accepts Sartre's claim that sometimes we are able to see other people's *gaze*, rather than merely their eyes. While, however, Sartre explains that the unpleasant character of this experience derives from the fact that what we are experiencing in those moments is other people's *objectification* of our subjectivity, Lacan argues that Sartre's explanation is misguided, insofar as it does not take into account that, if we are able to experience other people's gazes at all, it is because we are able to experience other people as *other* in the first place:

*Un regard le surprend dans la fonction de voyeur, le déroute, le chavire, et le réduit au sentiment de la honte. Le regard dont il s'agit est bien présence d'autrui comme tel. Mais est-ce à dire qu'originallement c'est dans le rapport du sujet à sujet, dans la fonction de l'existence d'autrui comme me regardant, que nous saisissons ce dont il s'agit dans le regard? N'est-il pas clair que le regard n'intervient ici que pour autant que ce n'est pas le sujet néantisant, corrélarif du monde de l'objectivité, qui s'y sent surpris, mais le sujet se soutenant dans une fonction de désir?* (98)

Thus, as it is the case with language, the main task of analysis is to understand, once again, the subtle constitution of the field of the Other. We can easily see that in Lacan the play of desire presides not only our speech, but our visual perception as well. If we remember that in Lacanian psychoanalysis the play of desire structures all our semiotic activities[101]; and if we remember that classical semiotic theory, as put forwards by Umberto Eco for instance[102], does not allow to go any further than looking at the

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*trouvons à l'horizon et comme butée de notre expérience, à savoir le manqué constitutive de l'angoisse et de la castration*" (in: Lacan (1973)). More generally, on Lacan's relation to Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, see: Jay, Martin. 1994. *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

[99] In: Lacan 1973

[100] "*Comment ne pas voir ici, immament à la dimension géométrale – dimension partiale dans le champ du regard, dimension qui n'a rien à faire avec la vision comme telle – quelque chose de symbolique de la fonction du manque – de l'apparition du fantôme phallique?*" (Lacan (1973), p. 101)

[101] As in the theory put forwards in the essay on the mirror-stage (Lacan 1966).

[102] In: Eco, Umberto. 1997. *Kant e l'ornitorinco*. Torino: Bompiani.

dialectic between semiosis and perception in order to understand the way the subject negotiates meaning in various perceptual situations; then we may say that the added value of post-lacanian approaches to visual perception, that is, the type of interrogation of images for which Lacan-informed approaches prove to be the best-suited, is the interrogation of the epistemological, political and ideological significance of the semiotic codes of the visible[103]. The dialectic of *real-life camera-shooting* presented in Chapter V, provides a good example of the multi-layered codification of the visible.

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[103] For instance, as far as epistemology is concerned, see Jane Gallop's interpretation of the mirror stage as the critical opening to temporality (Gallop, Jane. 1985. *Reading Lacan*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.) The leading authority of lacanian-oriented political explorations of the visible is Slavoj Žizěk (for instance in: Žizěk, Slavoj. 1989. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. New York: Verso; whereas for his contributions in Lacanian theory see: Žizěk Slavoj (ed.) 2006. *Lacan: The Silent Partners*. New York: Verso

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