Encounters with the Real in Contemporary Italian Literature and Cinema

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Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

CONTEMPORARY ITERATIONS OF REALISM: ITALIAN PERSPECTIVES

LOREDANA DI MARTINO AND PASQUALE VERDICCHIO

Contemporary thought is characterized by an increased and renewed preoccupation with reality. The expansion of telecommunications systems has fully confirmed Guy Debord's theory about a society where life is cannibalized by the logic of commodification as a result of its reduction into mediated spectacles (Debord 1977 and 1998). On the other hand, the geopolitical consequences of global capitalism have intensified the quest to transform a society of spectators into one of active thinkers and engaged citizens. Both in cinema and in literature this "hunger" for reality has led to the creation of hybrid art forms, works that propose to inject reality into fiction, or fiction into reality, in order to short-circuit and expose superficial or biased representations of the world, laying false claim to authenticity, and trigger the search for meanings that may empower both the individual and the collective. The present volume aims to explore the Italian contribution to the global phenomenon of a "return to reality" by examining a rich cinematic and literary production that, starting in the 1990s, has sought to raise awareness of the mechanisms that attempt to influence a received perception of the world, while prompting a more expansive engagement with the reality that lies behind the spectacle. We also aim to explore Italy's relationship with its own cultural past by investigating how Italian authors are dealing with the return of a specter that haunts the contemporary artistic imagination in any epoch of crisis, the specter of Neorealism. With the restoration of conservative powers following the so-called *Mani pulite* [Clean Hands] bribery scandals that led to the demise of the first Italian republic in the early 1990s, and the development of a political populism that bypasses antagonism in the political arena in order to conquer its electorship through media control, the memory of Neorealism has reemerged, calling on intellectuals to find

once again what Antonio Tabucchi has described as "la *parola* che si oppone alla *lingua* corrente" [a *parole* that can counteract the current *langue*] (Tabucchi 2006, 121). If Neorealism sought to rediscover the true faces of Italy and rebuild a political conscience after Fascism, today's realism strives to combat the most recent disguise of what Umberto Eco has defined as "Ur-Fascism" (Eco 2002, 69-88). It seeks to counteract the effects of the collusion between capital, politics, and the media which, in today's society of the "integrated spectacle," produces a manufactured democratic consensus by hiding the contradictions inherent to neoliberal democracy, and creating an audience of uncritical and conniving consumers of mediated information.[1]

The essays collected in this volume seek to engage in conversation with previous works on contemporary Italian realism, such as the collections edited by Martine Bovo-Rømæuf and Stefania Ricciardi (2006), Riccardo Guerrini, Giacomo Tagliani and Francesco Zucconi (2009), Hannah Serkowska (2011), and Luca Somigli (2013), to name a few; book monographs such as those by Alberto Casadei (2007), Stefania Ricciardi (2011), Raffaello Palumbo Mosca (2014), and Raffaele Donnarumma (2014), for example; and special issues devoted to this topic by periodicals such as *Allegoria* (Donnarumma, Policastro and Taviani 2008b), *Specchio* (Cortellessa 2008), *Fata Morgana* (Cervini and Dottorini 2013) and *Annali d'italianistica* (Vitti 2012), among others. Unlike most of the works noted—with the exclusion of *Allegoria*—, however, our volume, within the necessary space limitations, attempts to establish a dialogue between cinema and literature, with the understanding that through such interchanges we might more fully grasp the modes of expressions or "effects of reality" that art has devised not only to represent but also to intervene in contemporary life. Another one of our goals is to provide non-Italian readers with an opportunity to familiarize themselves with recent artistic and critical productions in Italy. The intention is to promote a cross-fertilization of ideas that may lead to a better understanding of how the global arts respond to on-going changes in our world while fostering cognitive transformations in order to encourage ethical intervention.

The Contemporary Discourse on Realism in Italian Theory and Literature

The recent debate on the "return to reality" has produced different and, at times, even conflicting perspectives among Italian thinkers and writers.[2] Maurizio Ferraris's *Manifesto del nuovo realismo* claims to be a manifesto

for those theories that seek to overcome postmodernism, and the type of "Deskantian" constructivism from which it derives, and to develop a new type of realism based on the foregrounding of ontology over epistemology (Ferraris 2012).[3] Ferraris believes that philosophy must shift the focus from the world of interpretation to the world of objects that precedes conceptual schematization if it wants to improve its ability to have a positive impact on current life. Specifically, it must renew its belief in the existence of an "unamendable" external world that precedes and resists subjective construction, and whose objects can be used to determine the truth even about that part of life, social reality, which, unlike the natural world, is subject to interpretation. Combining Searle's theory of "collective intentionality" with Derrida's "strong textualism," Ferraris has elaborated the theory of "documentality." According to this theory, inscribed social acts—acts that involve at least two people and have been recorded either in writing or in memory—and the objects that follow—from archival documents to banknotes, fines, messages, etc.—allow us to define social reality somewhat objectively. Therefore, they can help us rescue society from relativism and the dangers inherent to today's regime of media populism, the exploitation of communications systems to construct truths that legitimate the logic of those in power (Ferraris 2013a, 2013b, 2014). In Ferraris's view, by appealing to documents as if they were the "things in themselves," and following a theory of "weak textualism" according to which "nothing social exists outside the text," philosophy can reestablish a foothold in the external world that allows it to determine the truth and, thus, to foster social emancipation.

Like Ferraris and other philosophers of *nuovo realismo*, some literary critics have defended the theory of a return to ontology, arguing that, in today's "liquid" world, literature can regain an emancipatory function only by dismissing excessive skepticism, and appealing to a poetics of authenticity similar to the one that informs hybrid narratives which draw extensively on experiential materials such as journalism, historiography, and (auto)biography, among others. In an issue of *Allegoria* that examines the contemporary turn toward realism, Raffaele Donnarumma, one of the co-editors, argues that, unlike those authors who continue to rely on a postmodern aesthetics, writers such as Roberto Saviano, Antonio Franchini, Edoardo Albinati, Eraldo Affinati, and Aldo Nove, among others, are successful in overcoming relativism and conveying a clear ethical message (Donnarumma 2008c). This is because the non-fictional component of their works prevails over fabulation, making it possible for their stories to be "prese per buone, cioè per vere – anche se sappiamo bene che si tratta di finzioni" [thought to be good, that is, true—even

though we know they are fiction] (27).[4] According to Donnarumma, by appealing extensively either to the archive, or to "una testimonianza veridica" [a truthful testimony], literature can reestablish the pathos of truth and fulfill the present need for stability by helping readers overcome the confusion between fact and fiction generated by the condition of inexperience that characterizes the era of the virtualization of reality. Like Donnarumma, Vittorio Spinazzola has defended the hypothesis of a return to a more extroverted type of realism, while also claiming that it would be wrong to deny, as some have done, that there is a certain affinity between today's realism and the Neorealist and post-Neorealist narrative of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s; ultimately, in spite of their differences, they all share the quest to rediscover Italy and rescue the country from a time of cultural and political decline.[5] Yet, in Spinazzola's view, contemporary realism relies as much on "mimetic verisimilitude" as on "narrative inventiveness," and it is thanks to the "short-circuits" between these two elements that much of today's literature helps readers envision possible alternatives to hegemonic interpretations of reality. Alberto Casadei and the writing collective Wu Ming have further supported this rehabilitation of fiction (Casadei 2011; Wi Ming 2009). These critics concur with the view that literature should overcome postmodernist skepticism in order to have a positive influence on contemporary society. Yet they also stress the ethical role that storytelling plays in contemporary hybrid works, or "Unidentified Narrative Objects" as Wu Ming define them, that attempt to reinterpret reality. Casadei and Wu Ming, respectively, believe that contemporary fiction draws on an "allegorical" (or "expanded"), or "connotative" type of realism, which does not aim to merely provide readers with an objective representation of reality and a new version of the truth.[6] Rather, this new mimetic style uses narrativization as a way to decolonize the imaginary from hegemonic perspectives and open reality to the possibility of new critical reassessments, thus also reenergizing the reader's own ability to imagine ethical alternatives.

   In spite of their criticism of postmodernism, Casadei and Wu Ming's positions are not so dissimilar from those of the critics and theorists who defend the hypothesis of a certain persistence of postmodernism in contemporary cultural practices. According to these scholars, contemporary realism does not merely reject the linguistic turn, commonly associated in Italy with the philosophy of *pensiero debole* [weak thought], and the theory that social freedom does not rest on the notion that the world can be explained objectively, but, rather, on the premise that the community can democratically determine the truth by reaching a consensus on the interpretations of reality that are more ethically sound.[7] In an essay

collected in Ferraris's co-edited volume *Bentornata realtà*, Umberto Eco proposes a different way of interpreting the turn to reality that informs the current philosophy of *nuovo realismo* (Eco 2012). Mediating between Ferraris's position, and the position of supporters of *pensiero debole* such as Gianni Vattimo, Eco puts forward his own theory of "negative realism." This is a theory that Eco, as he himself claims, began to elaborate as early as the 1990s, if not before, and one that expresses the author's view on the turn that contemporary theory should take.[8] In spite of their differences, Eco shares Vattimo's idea that the truth rests on negotiation and agreement, and, ultimately, it is the community's task to come to an informed and democratic understanding regarding the paths of "good," yet revisable, interpretations of reality that society should follow.[9] Nonetheless, he also believes that if a theory of realism based on social consensus such as his and Vattimo's own does not seek to transform reality into pure "*flatus vocis*," it must accept the principle of the unamendability of Being, namely, the notion that the "hard core" of reality precedes and poses a limit to interpretation (Eco 1999, 47; Eco 2012, 102-103). According to Eco, philosophy must take an alternative route with respect to the two conflicting interpretations of Kant's thought that are conveyed, respectively, by Ferraris and Vattimo: the former being an advocate of a "positive" realism based on the *noumenon*, and the notion that Being gives us its meanings already "incorporated in the objects" without precluding us from the truth, and the latter claiming that Being exists as a "moth-eaten" entity whose meaning can be determined only historically, through the shared interpretation of the world's phenomena.[10] This third way consists in accepting that, while the outside world, unlike Ferraris contends, cannot help us define reality objectively, it can still help us distinguish the interpretations that are acceptable and that we should hold "*as if* [they] were true," from those that must be denied because they violate the sense of Being (Eco 2012, 108). In other words, Eco claims that while Being cannot help philosophers define the truth once and for all, it can still help them carry "the torch of truth," but only if they consider it the irreducible "limit" that perpetually challenges untruth while propelling the quest for critical reassessments. Being should act as a form of "interdiction" which, precisely by saying "NO" to bad interpretations or assumptions that no longer hold, prompts thinkers to renew the search for ethical answers, "ci incoraggia a cercare ciò che in qualche modo sta davanti a noi" [encourages us to seek what somehow stands before us] (111-112).[11] Unlike Ferraris, who believes that, ultimately, Being should be viewed as a "positivity of objects," Eco maintains that philosophy must continue to consider Being as "pure negativity" if it aims to inspire the

mind to continuously return to the outside world looking for answers that will help it reject or reassess old laws, while developing more plausible ones. Ultimately, in his view, it is this unamendable negativity, or limit, that engenders the positivity or certainty of knowing that we can correct mistakes and find "good" answers.

In another essay collected in *Bentornata realtà*, the Lacanian psychoanalyst Massimo Recalcati defends Eco's moderate line of *nuovo realismo* while showing the positive influence that such a theory can have on the individual, but also on the social psyche (Recalcati 2012). Similarly to Eco, Recalcati believes that the "linguistic turn" has not exhausted its ethical potential, but must open itself up to a higher degree of realism. This, in his view, would coincide with a renewed respect for the unamendability of the Real as defined by Lacan, that is, the irreducible core of the human psyche. The Real, which emerges through the experience of trauma, shatters familiar and conformist notions of the Self, and engenders the need for ethical reassessments precisely because it remains enigmatic: it cannot be reduced to the Symbolic and assigned an ultimate interpretation. According to Recalcati, psychoanalysis can play a major role in awaking people from the "sleep of reality" in which they dwell in the current era of hyperhedonism, and in transforming selfish *jouissance* informed by the death drive back into the ethical desire to find meaning through interaction with others.[12] This, however, can only happen if psychoanalysis respects the "hard core of Being" that inhabits the formless Real, and, instead of explaining its meaning once and for all, uses it as that "limit" that can prompt subjects to resist the reification caused by addiction to object consumption and become engaged in the ethical quest for their true object of desire. Translated into art, according to Recalcati, this means that authors must register the perturbing bumping into the Real that defamiliarizes the subject with the customary I without merely spectacularizing (and fetishizing) its formlessness, or reducing it into an idealized symbolic form (Recalcati 2011b). Rather, they must develop the "negative capability" to respect formlessness without being paralyzed by it. Like Eco, Recalcati believes that art should use the irreducibility of Being as a generative force capable of inspiring a continuous quest for ethical interpretations and possible ways to work through the trauma generated by the re-emergence of the Real.

While it is not our intention to take a stand between Ferraris and Eco's positions, our analysis, nonetheless, suggests that a more moderate theory of realism such as Eco's may be more suitable for describing the approach used by many contemporary artists to represent reality. If most of the authors interviewed by *Allegoria* shy away from the label of realism, other

eminent writers of hybrid fiction, on both sides of the spectrum—nonfiction and autofiction—, also challenge the view that the truth can emerge merely through the positivity of facts, that is to say, by letting facts speak for themselves in a way that allows the author to develop a definitive interpretation of reality.[13] Rather, contemporary realism seems to be driven by the necessity to subject reality to continuous reassessments in order to liberate it from the prison of preconceived meaning. Whether it be news or history, this is done through the creation of stories that seek to expose interpretations of the world which foster disempowerment, while reconfiguring meaning in a way that will not deter readers from taking it upon themselves to further carry on the quest for ethical alternatives. Critics and writers such as Daniele Giglioli, Antonio Scurati, and Walter Siti, among others, have openly defended the theory of a return to reality by way of a return to the Lacanian Real, and thus, indirectly, by way of a "negative realism" (Giglioli 2011; Scurati 2012; Siti 2013a, 2013b). These critics believe that instead of further reifying the Real through a linear type of realism, such as the one used by the media, which reinforces dominant discourses, literature should respect its unamendability, and use it as a catalyst to expose conformist views of reality while promoting the quest for critical reinterpretations. Realism, Siti contends, is "l'anti-abitudine: è il leggero strappo, il particolare inaspettato, che apre uno squarcio nella nostra stereotipia mentale … e sembra che ci lasci intravedere la cosa stessa, la realtà infinita, informe e impredicabile" [the anti-habit: it is the slight tear, the unexpected detail, that opens a passage through our mental stereotypes … and seems to let us catch a glimpse of the thing itself, the infinite, formless, unpredictable reality], a formless reality which, however, the subject can never hope to "normalize" [Siti 2013a, 8].[14] This is why today's realist writing, according to Siti, should be viewed as a "conflict," or an "unresolved tension" with reality and, perhaps, contrary to what some of the supporters of *nuovo realismo* contend, as "quanto ci sia di più contrario al realismo" [something that could not be further away from realism] (65-66). As Siti suggests, even a nonfiction novel such as Roberto Saviano's *Gomorra* [Gomorrah], which many critics have used to support the theory of literature's turn to ontology and documentality, relies as much on journalism as on literature to reach its objective, namely, that of challenging reality as represented by the news in order to restore its amplitude of meaning and encourage readers to pursue the quest for alternative interpretations that can give agency back to the collective. As Siti maintains, "la qualità letteraria di Saviano si misura sulla capacità di tenere aperta la meraviglia squadernando la cronaca, e di condensare la verità saggistica in emblemi allucinatori. D'improvviso vediamo, come se

fossimo lì" [The literary quality of Saviano's work rests on the author's ability to maintain a sense of wonder by challenging the crime news, and the ability to condense essayistic truth into hallucinatory emblems. Suddenly we can see, as if we were there] (Siti 2010, VII). In other words, then, the goal of literary realism in the age of *Reality TV* is that of upsetting—or defamiliarizing, as Viktor Šklovskij would say—readers' habitual perception of reality in order to rekindle their desire to reconnect with the Real that exists beyond a superficial and often biased hyperreality, and restore their ability to do so by regaining the capacity to interpret the world critically.

As critics such as Wu Ming and Scurati, among others, contend, one of the main ways in which contemporary literature is achieving the task of defamiliarizing life as portrayed by the media, is through the recovery of storytelling in its original, epic form. Contrary to the type of storytelling used by contemporary politics and advertising companies to fictionalize reality for the purpose of propaganda, epic storytelling is always somehow, either directly or indirectly, grounded in experience and aimed at promoting community-building.[15] As Walter Benjamin has argued, unlike information, storytelling does not reduce life into bare and empty facts. Rather, it aims to contextualize experience into a narrative that respects the amplitude of the world's meaning while making use of its potential as an instrument that can help the community orient itself.[16] Since the Nineties, the image of the writer-witness, or storyteller, is a recurring presence in hybrid works of both fiction and journalism. The objective of these works is to rescue life from its reification into an object of fast consumption for unthinking spectators by sinking it into the life of a subject who attempts to critically reassess it albeit without explaining it.[17] The storyteller that went away in the age of mechanical reproduction, when, as Benjamin contends, the rapid flow of information began to hinder the human ability to reflect and learn from experience, has returned as a way of counteracting the cognitive and political paralysis generated by the contemporary explosion of the media. S/he has returned to reestablish the primacy of a critical perspective that seeks to rescue events from reduction into mere signs, and reconceptualize them in such a way that they can open new possibilities for ethical interpretation and future action.[18] As Raffaello Palumbo Mosca contends, unlike "documental novelists," whose goal is to represent the facts, hybrid writers (re)"invent" reality to provide "un tipo di conoscenza diversa da quella, degradata e semplificatoria, promossa dall'odierna società della comunicazione" [a type of knowledge that is different from the degraded and simplistic one promoted by today's communication society], critical reassessments that

aim to reenergize cognition and the desire to engage in ethical interpretation (Palumbo Mosca 2014, 12-13). This, Palumbo Mosca maintains, is an indication that, unlike David Shields' contention in *Reality Hunger* (2010), fiction has not gone away, but rather, continues to play an important role in contemporary society. Instead of surrendering to the monopoly of the media and leaving the discourse on reality at the mercy of the news or of *Reality TV*, fiction is finding new ways to regain a central influence on life. We could argue, then, that in the so-called era of the fictionalization of reality, literature has come to the fore to assert the ethical value and, thus, the primacy of its language, "true fiction," against the language of "fictionalized reality"—or "realitysmo" [realitism] as Ferraris defines it (Ferraris 2012, 24-32)—that is typical of *Reality TV*. As writer Marcello Fois contends, the difference between the two is that literary realism lays out the "percorso che produce senso critico e riflessione" [path that leads to critical thinking and reflection], while "realitism" "ha sempre più l'aria di assomigliare alla falsa verità del materiale non elaborato e spesso assolutamente superficiale" [seems to resemble more and more the false truth provided by a raw material that is often absolutely superficial].[19]

The last question to be addressed is whether a comparison can indeed be made between today's storytellers and the writers of Neorealism. There is no doubt that contemporary realist fiction carries on a critical discourse specific to current times, a time when writers and readers no longer share a "universality of content."[20] Unlike in postwar Italy, content is now conveyed through the mediation of a multiplication of messages and media. As a result, authors can no longer rely on the authority of their voice and authenticity of experience to gain the readers' trust. Nonetheless, one can still find a consonance of poetics between today's writers of the "age of inexperience" and the Neorealist writers who wrote from experience in their mutual quest for a style that might push readers beyond the reality of mere facts and engage them in a personal quest for meaning that can lead to the development of an ethical conscience. In his 1964 introduction to *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* [The Path to the Spiders' Nest]*,* for instance, Italo Calvino claims that the intention of Neorealist writers like himself, Elio Vittorini, Cesare Pavese, and Beppe Fenoglio, had been to help post-war Italy work through the collective trauma of Fascism and the war by transforming the "universality of content" that authors and readers shared into narratives that could promote a critical understanding of such content. "Music," Calvino maintains, was more important than the "libretto" because the goal was to find the language that would turn experience into a wisdom that could somehow be useful to

project the community towards a different future (Calvino 2002, V-XXV). In this sense, according to Calvino, "neo-expressionism" was a more suitable term than Neorealism to define the work of postwar writers like himself. Hence also Calvino's decision to write a novel about the myth of the Resistance that would leave aside the monumental actions of its heroes, including the ideological standpoint of the writer-hero, in order to fully exploit the mythopoeic potential of such a myth, that is to say, its ability to actively engage readers in the "process" that leads to the development of an ethical conscience: "Che ce ne importa di chi è già un eroe, di chi la coscienza ce l'ha già? È il processo per arrivarci che si deve rappresentare! Finché resterà un solo individuo al di qua della coscienza, il nostro dovere sarà di occuparci di lui e solo di lui!" [What do we care about someone who is already a hero, and already has a consciousness? It is the process of getting there that we must represent! For as long as any single person remains on this side of consciousness, our duty is to devote ourselves to them and only them!] (XIV).[21] Likewise, in his Holocaust memoir, *Se questo è un uomo* [If This Is a Man], Primo Levi tells reality in the sober form of a private story because his goal is to amplify the power of his testimony by engaging readers in a process of reflection, or working through, that can help them co-construct the ethical meaning of the text while developing their own language of resistance. As Levi claims in his 1976 "Appendix" to the novel, the task of the writer-witness is that of preparing the ground for a judge that, ultimately, can only be the reader because s/he is the one in charge of translating the past into something that is useful for the future (Levi 2005, 158). Thus, we could argue that for both yesterday's Neorealist writers and the realist writers of today, the key is to find a way to evoke the formless Real that resists falsification and allow it to emerge, while transforming it into a story that respects and, therefore, does not exhaust or reify the endless power of the Real to inspire the desire to generate ethical meaning. And while the storytellers of the age of hyperreality cannot rely on the same authority or authenticity of experience as the Neorealist writer-witness, as Casadei contends, they can nonetheless still provide their readers with the same type of "relived experience" of reality, which is the "*primum* of any realistic narration." After all, the primary goal of realism is not that of providing a mirror image of experience, but, rather, as Primo Levi has shown, that of reflecting on experience in order to make it meaningful for the collective (Casadei 2007, 26).

The essays on literature collected in this volume analyze some of the most significant ways in which Italian writers have responded to today's increased preoccupation with reality. In spite of the multiplicity of

approaches, the contributors all agree on the impossibility of reading contemporary iterations of realism using notions of artistic mimesis that are either too dogmatic and therefore questionable in and of themselves, or, as in the case of a too close association with Neorealism (and, thus, a presumed return to a pre-postmodern poetics), are somewhat outdated in relation to current aesthetic practices, and the contexts to which they respond. The hybridization of genres and blending of factual and fictional that are key features of contemporary writing denote the need to address more openly, and perhaps also more closely, both a physical reality and a sense of collective belonging that have been quickly deteriorating under the weight of "pensée unique" [Single Thought]. Yet they do not imply that literature has altogether abandoned the realm of inventive creation in favor of the factual. The choice of crossing narrative planes and conventional stylistic borders may rather suggest that reality, filtered through the literary imagination, can acquire new meaning, therefore promoting a transformative experience that can lead to a renewed ethical praxis.

Narratives about labor and the environment are often considered two of the main examples of literature's increased engagement with reality in the current era of global capitalism. Such works attempt to reconstruct a collective engagement that neoliberal labor and economic practices have contributed to disintegrate, and to redefine our relationship with human and nonhuman alike. In "The Uses of Affective Realism in Asbestos Narratives: Prunetti's *Amianto* and Valenti's *La fabbrica del panico*," focusing on hybrid works by Alberto Prunetti and Stefano Valenti dealing with the traumas of labor—illness and death as well as precarization—, Monica Jansen argues that narratives such as these, which mix testimonial experience with storytelling, challenge the view that contemporary writing is informed solely by a poetics of factual realism. Prunetti and Valenti's narratives do not merely represent the outside world through objective reports. Through the encounter between imagination and the Real, they also attempt to intervene on reality by turning divisive feelings typically associated with trauma, such as bereavement and anger, into cohesive sentiments, such as solidarity and sociability, which may foster redemption and change. Drawing on Lauren Berlant's theory of "affective realism" and Marianne Hirsch's work on "postmemory," Jansen concludes that Prunetti and Valenti's works foster the transgenerational transmission of trauma in a way that builds a mediated prospective memory of protest. This memory may restore intersubjectivity and foster activism even among the offspring of the old working classes, that is, today's divided post-industrial and often precarious workers.

In "Toxic Tales: On Representing Environmental Crisis in Puglia," reading two of numerous works dealing with the human and environmental crisis produced by the Ilva steel plant in Taranto—Flavia Piccinni's novel *Adesso Tienimi* [Now Hold Me] and Giuliano Foschini's reportage *Quindici Passi* [Fifteen Steps]—through the lens of material ecocriticism, Monica Seger argues that the type of ontological narrative that characterizes contemporary ecological literature also relies strongly on narrative to reach the objective of calling readers to action. By narrativizing the nonverbal, works such as those by Piccinni and Foschini show the "permeability between identity, environment and industry," thus offering "an ecologically engaged point of entry for critical reflection and potential action on the world." While disseminating information about the spread of harmful and often imperceptible matter such as dioxin, thus making visible the invisible, these works also foster an awareness of toxic embodiment that challenges the separation between human and nonhuman. In this way, readers are provided not only with important facts that they can choose to act on, but also with new interpretive schemes that can aid them in reconceptualizing meaning and devising new modes of co-existence between humans and the environment which can restore agency to both.

Focusing on narratives from the 1990s to today that in different ways and degrees mix fiction with nonfictional genres such as journalism, the diary, and/or the personal essay—works by Sandro Veronesi, Eraldo Affinati, Antonio Pascale, Antonio Franchini and Andrea Tarabbia—, Raffaello Palumbo Mosca's "New Realism or Return to Ethics? Paths of Italian Narrative from the 1990s to Today" argues that the current turn toward reality should be read as a "return to ethics" rather than as a *nuovo realismo*. The latter label, Palumbo contends, risks undermining the uniqueness of contemporary writing because it "establishes a problematic connection with a time (from the 1940s to the late 1960s), and a literary movement (Neorealism), that are long gone." While contemporary literature shares with Neorealism the goal of rediscovering social and historical reality after a period of turmoil, it does so using a post-organic form of commitment, and with a transnational imaginary that reflects our interconnectedness in the global era. It also seems to experiment more extensively with hybrid narrative forms that blend fiction with fact. In Palumbo Mosca's view, this greater appeal to nonfiction, which is witnessed by Roberto Saviano's transformation of Pier Paolo Pasolini's famous indictment "Io so" [I know] into "Io so e ho le prove" [I know and I have proof], is emblematic of the contemporary writer's need to reclaim literature's centrality in the social and ethical realms, while finding a way

to rationally and emotionally engage today's disaffected readership.

Examining the work of another writer who often hybridizes fiction with journalism and autobiography, Antonio Scurati, in "Resisting Inexperience in the Age of Media Hyperreality: The 'Ends of Mourning' in Antonio Scurati's *Il sopravvissuto*," Loredana Di Martino argues that one of the goals of contemporary realism is to use fiction as an antidote to the ethical paralysis produced by the media's reduction of violence into infotainment. According to Di Martino, contemporary hybrid works such as those by Scurati that narrativize news events in an attempt to recover meanings castrated by the transformation of reality into an excessively explicit yet also overly superficial hyperreality, suggest that the expansion of global communications systems may have prompted writers to reclaim the role of Benjaminian storytellers. By reassessing events in the forms of stories, they seek to promote a critical understanding of reality that awakens readers from the "ecstasy of communication," and prompts them to work through trauma in a way that may turn violence from empty spectacle into an opportunity to find a path for redemption.

While both Jansen and Di Martino briefly touch upon Wu Ming's definition of "New Italian Epic," Clarissa Clò's essay, "Collective Transmedia Storytelling from Below: *Timira* and the New Italian Epic," gives an in-depth analysis of the writing collective's theory while examining also their aesthetic practices. Her findings are that not only do they challenge dogmatic definitions of *nuovo realismo*, but they also point to the emergence of a postcolonial sensibility within the current phenomenon of a turn toward reality, whose affinity with and debt to the work of multicultural writers should be openly recognized. Focusing on Wu Ming 2 and Antar Mohamed's *Timira*—a hybrid meta-historical novel that recalls the life of Italian-Somali Isabella Marincola/Timira Hassan, while reassessing Italy's history from Fascism and colonialism to today's postcolonial times—Clò contends that New Italian Epic (NIE) such as this challenge the view that contemporary realism should be understood solely in terms of a return to a poetics of objective mimesis, and, as a result, of an ideology similar to the one that inspired the nineteenth-century European novel. In spite of the novel's own shortcomings, and those inherent in the very definition of NIE—if *Timira* fails to acknowledge its debt to the postcolonial works of Italian women writers of African descent, Wu Ming's "memorandum" also fails to contextualize NIE outside established parameters of Western culture—*Timira* shows that one of the intents of NIE is to challenge notions of realism that may reaffirm hegemonic and ethnocentric discourses. The novel's use of the transformational power of storytelling, as well as its transmedia manifestations, seek to decolonize

the imaginary and prompt readers to participate in a "grassroots creative laboratory from below" with a view to "offering alternative collective histories as a way to imagine a different future."

Finally in the writer's interview that closes the section on literature, Antonio Franchini claims that whereas realism should not be viewed as a hegemonic thread within current literature, it is without doubt that contemporary writing holds the important task of "truly probing reality." It does so unlike other media, which, in spite of their claim to universality, only skim the surface of reality. Franchini claims that the hybrid style of works such as *L'abusivo* [The Unlicensed Journalist] is based on his need to speak through a testimonial and pre-Freudian *I* which resembles that of ancient historiography. This goes to support his belief that storytelling is far superior to any other forms of thought or strong ideology as a way of gaining a deep understanding of reality.

Reality through the Lens of Contemporary Italian Cinema

When we shift our attention to the visual realm, representing reality tends to be quite another matter. Not only does one have to deal with its material differences but also with the diversified arrangement and organization of information: how it is sequenced and formed within various media. Nonetheless, we believe that, much like in literature, the current emphasis on realism that has come to characterize the world of visual arts does not mark a return to linear forms of it if, indeed, that was ever the case. Visual representations of objects have always stood for an attempt to reinvent what has been perceived as being real or a necessity to define "reality" against other systems that have restricted its bounds, as for example during the Italian Fascist *ventennio* or during Silvio Berlusconi's "videocratic" reign.[22] The end of Fascism generated a renewed sense of freedom that for some suggested the possibility of gathering, under the eventually restrictive label of Neorealism, the ideologically diverse (and often divergent) works of De Sica, Visconti, Fellini, and Antonioni, to name only the most often cited directors. If anything, so-called Neorealist works might be said to find their common ground in what Deleuze calls an

> "inventory" of a setting—its objects, furniture, tools, etc. So the situation is not extended directly into action, it is no longer sensory-motor, as in realism, but primarily optical and of sound, invested by the senses, before action takes shape in it, and uses or confronts its elements. Everything remains real in this neo-realism (whether it is film set or exteriors) but, between the reality of the setting and that of the action, it is no longer a

> motor extension which is established, but rather a dreamlike connection
> through the intermediary of the liberated sense organs. (Deleuze 1989, 4)

As such, Deleuze even extracts a useful sense of Neorealism from its acknowledged champion, André Bazin, a sense that approximates our view of realism, as elaborated in the pages of this volume, as an artistic language where the "real [is] no longer represented or reproduced but *aimed at*" (Bazin in Deleuze 1989, 1). Although Catherine O'Rawe and others have named Deleuze among those who are said to have elaborated and maintained a sort of hegemony of Neorealism as a master narrative, we would suggest that, on the contrary, Deleuze isolates from Neorealist cinema elements that actually resist the formation of a cinematographic and ideological *vademecum*.[23] Subjective perception, and the eventual re-presentation of what is perceived, involve the search for new object codes that can disenfranchise reality from the monopolizing actions of uncritical media and doctrinaire scholarship which tend to propose superficial, generalized and therefore partial versions of the real.

A concern with the disappearance of *cinema impegnato* [engaged cinema] has recently seen much dialogue, especially in light of the social influence of television on our general psyche and culture. While the terms by which "engaged" is defined do not necessarily directly involve a discussion of realism, such concerns, for cinema as for literature, cannot but form part of underlying considerations. The title of the 2009 volume *Lo spazio del reale nel cinema italiano contemporaneo* is an explicit reference to the role of the real in cinematographic discourse. A collection of essays resulting from a conference on contemporary Italian cinema by the same title held at the Università degli Studi di Siena in 2007, the work is an attempt to come to grips with the traceable terms of engagement with the social and political dimensions at work in Italy. While the editors of the volume take pains to carefully disengage cinematographic discourse and its constituting images from literal, linear readings, and the lazy rapport with visual narratives that television has come to offer, they are also careful not to suggest a predetermined approach to reading contemporary film production:

> Trattando del "reale" - e dei modi in cui questo viene "testualizzato" - oltre a collocarci all'interno di un approccio di ricerca empirico e analitico - abbiamo rinunciato a trovare una definizione teorica preliminare, moltiplicando piuttosto le angolature e gli esempi per rendere un minimo di giustizia alla complessità e inesauribilità di tale concetto. (Guerrini, Tagliani and Zucconi 2009, 10)

[In dealing with the "real"—and the modes in which it is "textualized"—besides situating ourselves within an empirical and analytic approach—we have decided not to work within a preliminary theoretical definition, thereby multiplying as a result the points of view and examples so as to do a little justice to the complexity and breadth of the concept.][24]

To further testify to our multifaceted relationships with images and the opportunity that cinema offers to further wonderfully complicate, unfold, and expand our understanding of images, representation, production and reproduction, the editors of *Lo spazio del reale* go on to observe that:

Tra fenomenologia ed epistemologia, l'immagine non è semplicemente un supporto sensibile per l'attestazione del mondo esterno, ma si costituisce in quanto costrutto culturale complesso e stratificato, corrispondente ad un universo di attese e credenze ampio e condiviso all'interno di un determinato spazio sociale: la messa in forma della rappresentazione si definisce così come occasione di continua "diagnosi della civilizzazione", mentre il racconto cinematografico manifesta le proprie potenzialità critiche e analitiche nei confronti del "campo del reale" corrispondente, operando una "testualizzazione" e un montaggio dei discorsi sociali e delle "forme di vita" che inquadrano una società in un determinato momento storico. (13)

[Between phenomenology and epistemology, the image is not simply a sensible support for the confirmation of the outside world, but is constituted in as much as it is a complex and stratified cultural construct that corresponds to a wide universe of expectations and beliefs shared within a particular social space: the forms that representation takes can as such be defined as an occasion for a continuous "diagnosis of civilization," while the cinematographic story manifests its critical and analytic potentials vis-à-vis the corresponding "field of the real," undertaking a "textualization" and montage of social discourses and "forms of life" that frame a society during a specific historical moment.]

These citations suggest that if a real can be tracked, it may likely be found somewhere other, and beyond, a direct literal meaning of images as representative of the world. Such a rigid textualization might be taken to suggest an intimate relationship between cinema and literature, and the possibility of collapsing the approaches to both media into each other. This is also the conclusion that one might draw from some recent conferences, essay collections, and special issues of journals on the subjects of realism, reality and the real, such as the previously cited *Allegoria* 57 and *Fata Morgana* 21, which contribute to the dialogue on *nuovo realismo*. In the first, interviews with writers, and essays by them, discuss New Realism in

the context of literary texts as well as cinema. The latter opens with an interview with Walter Siti entitled "L'inganno della realtà" that suggests a connection between cinema and literature by pointing to the limitations of language in communicating visuality (Siti 2013b, 10). The terms by which cinema (among other visual arts) is discussed remain necessarily linguistic, pointing directly to the difficulties involved in defining a difference of the real in relation to the different modes by which it is represented.

Film, however, not only plays with our perceptions of narrative but also with our sensorial relationship with what is represented. Two recent films, *Via Castellana Bandiera* (2013) and *La mafia uccide solo d'estate* [The Mafia Only Kills in Summer] (2013), contemporaneously involve our storytelling, historical, and visual skills, and other perceptive and imaginative abilities in shaping a narrative that will vary greatly from individual to individual. That we all might interpret the events and their outcome differently goes against Ferraris's and others' "necessità teorica di un rinnovato rapporto tra il soggetto e la percezione del reale. Basta con … la decostruzione del mondo che ci circonda, basta con l'esaltazione dell'intepretazione e basta con la continua e lacerante negazione del fatto in sé" [theoretical necessity for a renewed relationship between the subject and its perception of the real. Enough of … deconstructing the world around us, enough of the exaltation of interpretation, and enough of the continuous and wrenching negation of the *thing* in itself] (Perniola 2013, 114). Marco Bertozzi's theoretical and practical approaches to film can be useful in our understanding and determination of the inconsistent and unstable notion of "il fatto in sé" [the thing in itself] (Bertozzi 2012, 18). Recontextualizing narrative and discourse, reshaping narrative and meaning, opens to potential, previously unimagined realities. Both films mentioned above unfold in a fairly linear and conventional manner. Both depend on their characters' cultural imaginary for the various states of the real that they elaborate. In the first it is a contrast between cultures (regional, ethnic, gender and sexuality), while in the second the narrative spins from a child's interpretative imagination. As a result of the diversity of points of reference and participation represented, in both cases "the thing in itself" cannot in any way be determined. To suggest otherwise would be a negation of agency for one or more of the involved societal and cultural portions of the equation, including the films' viewers. If we were to relate these more recent films' representation of, or engagement with, reality to what has become the obligatory reference to Neorealism, we would be hard-pressed to identify a stable point of reference or even correspondence. And we do not have to go much further than Neorealism

itself and one of its "fathers," Roberto Rossellini, to find the contradictions inherent in that misnamed "movement." Rossellini's declaration that Neorealism "is nothing other than the artistic form of truth" defines any representation of "the thing itself" in relation to an individual's creative and imaginative disposition.[25]

In the afore-mentioned issue of *Allegoria*, Giovanna Taviani describes the current wave of cinematic realism as marking a shift away from both what she terms "introverted" films such as Salvatores's *Mediterraneo* (1991), Virzì's *Ferie d'agosto* [Summer Holidays] (1995), and Muccino's *L'ultimo bacio* [The Last Kiss] (2000), and the "neo-Neorealist" films of the '80s and '90s exemplified by the works of Marco Risi (Taviani 2008, 90). Under the conditioning influence of television, doubly insidious due to its intimate ties with magnate and politician Silvio Berlusconi's media empire, Italian culture and society suffered a veritable indoctrination into neoliberal ideology and a notion of "reality" defined by entitlement and illusion. In such a context, a number of younger filmmakers (Comencini, Crialese, Garrone, Marra, Munzi, Sorrentino and Vicari, to name a few) work to generate a connotative cinematic language in order to problematize current notions of "reality" and defamiliarize readers with the image of the world conveyed by the TV screen. Their works, however, also avoid the more fragmentary outlook on reality that is associated with a certain type of early postmodernism, and appears to disorient spectators from a clear ethical path (works such as Michelangelo Antonioni's *Zabrieske Point* or *The Passenger*). While postmodernism inscribed its own readings of the world, the fragmentary realities of migrations, gender, culture, ethnicity, and race are, in our view, responsible for preparing its ground. And, since the postmodern then aided these realities in pronouncing their own expressive terms of agency, it also came to define its failure (in a positive sense) as a normative category. Hence, the shift to what we could define as a new *real*ism that stems from the language of a postmodern *impegno* [engagement], while developing an aesthetic practice that can have a transformative experience in the era of the post-real. Taviani follows Crialese's lead in claiming that today's cinematic realism might be considered an "allegorical realism" not dissimilar to the poetics of realism that we find at work in contemporary literature[26]:

> Ancora una volta siamo ben lontani dal ritorno ad un neorealismo naturalistico di tipo bozzettistico. Non vi è niente di più diverso da un film di Garrone, Crialese, o Sorrentino, di un film di Marco Risi, per fare solo un esempio di quel che è stato definito il "neo-neorealismo" italiano degli Ottanta-Novanta. E, anche questa volta, la differenza sta nella nuova forza del linguaggio. Si prendono degli elementi realistici – un fatto di cronaca,

una storia di clandestinità, un giro di malaffare – e li s'immettono in un contesto linguistico fortemente connotato a livello espressivo: il gusto per il décor dell'inquadratura in Sorrentino; il ricorso ad un montaggio serrato e contrappuntistico in Vicari; l'uso straniante della Colonna sonora in Marra, che allontana l'hic et nunc del presente e trasforma, a poco a poco, il rumore di fondo dei motori in un rimbombo straniante – una metafisica dello strazio e della fatica umana –, dicono di un approccio nuovo e non naturalistico alla rappresentazione dei fatti. Stare addosso alla realtà, spalancare l'occhio della cinepresa sulle cose, significa anche rivivere quella realtà – e quegli spazi – attraverso una propria, viscerale soggettività e trasfigurarla in modo epico, metafisico o surreale. Significa esplorare il reale, ma anche le sue crepe, le sue interruzioni; indagare sotto la realtà e rivelarne l'assurdo, nei bagliori improvvisi del rimosso.… Il realismo, se c'è, è straniato, raggelato, pietrificato. Una macchina da presa ferma, fissa, si oppone alla frantumazione postmoderna; rattiene l'immagine e osserva gli eventi in lunghe sequenze interrotte da improvvisi tagli di montaggio decisi. Contro un orizzonte temporale a scatti, il tempo si umanizza, si fa tragitto, percorso, per un nuovo "realismo allegorico" (la definizione è di Crialese). (Taviani 2008, 90-91)

[We are, once again, fairly distant from a return to that Neorealism of naturalistic "sketches." There is nothing more different than a film by Garrone, Crialese or Sorrentino, or a film by Marco Risi, for an example of what has been called the neo-Neorealism of the '80s and '90s. This time too, the difference is found in the very strength of the language. Some realistic elements are selected—a newspaper article, a story of illegality, a shady deal—and situated within a highly connotative and expressive linguistic system: Sorrentino's preferred framing décor; Vicari's recourse to a serrated and contrapuntal montage; the alienating effect of Marra's soundtracks, which creates a distance with the *hic and nunc* of the present and gradually transforms the underlying sound of motors into an alienating boom—a metaphysics of human labor and agony—, these all suggest a new and non-naturalistic approach to the representation of things. To stay on top of the real, to open the camera's eyes wide on things, also means to relive that reality—and those spaces—via one's own visceral subjectivity and transform it in an epic, metaphysical or surreal manner. It means exploring the real and all its fissures, its interruptions; to investigate beneath reality and reveal its absurdity, in the sudden flashes of its absences .... Realism, if it exists, is alienated, frozen, petrified. An immobile, fixed camera counters postmodern fragmentation; it holds the image and observes events in long uninterrupted sequences broken by sudden and decisive editorial cuts. Against a flashing temporal horizon time is humanized, becomes a path, a route toward a new "allegorical realism" (the term is Crialese's).][27]

Emblematic of the perceived loss of strong reference points and an attempt to regain a sense of once definable social and cultural parameters is Giuseppe Tornatore's *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso.* Produced in 1988, the film precedes a number of momentous events that announce yet more disintegration. The two major parties in Italy since the end of World War II, the PCI (Italian Communist Party) and the DC (Christian Democrats) fragment or disappear, and in 1989 the bringing down of the Berlin Wall undoes what had defined the world order up to that time. Considered in that context *Cinema Paradiso* becomes a transitional film, with its explicit outlining of the details of the trauma and deprivations that marked the period of transition between WWII, the "economic miracle" and beyond. The atmospheric nostalgia that drives *Cinema Paradiso* is steeped in the absence and continuous search for assumed certainties, among them the figure of the father. The sometimes heavy-handed nostalgia is situated among the trappings of success and development that are only a superficial gain and in fact signal a deeper, almost spiritual loss. The absence of the father figure, or at least the impossibility of situating the father in a single recognizable representation, is negated twice: once in the fiery destruction of the only photograph of Totò's missing-in-action father, and a second time in the inferno that engulfs the cinema, blinds and scars Alfredo and, in a twisted sort of Oedipal situation, nullifies his position. Along with the disfigurement of these sought-after figures, the censorship of the church and State, and the lingering normative reactionary social practices inherited from Fascism, all contribute to a negation that is only partially restored by Tornatore in the final sequence of the film. After the cinema has been razed to the ground to make room for a parking lot, Salvatore's mother passes on to him a gift from the long-deceased Alfredo. In a wonderful indirect citation of Pier Paolo Pasolini's "Teoria delle giunte" the gift is a montage of scenes cut from the films of Salvatore's youth as indicated by the priest-censor.[28] Those rescued scenes, intimate moments of human relationships, become Tornatore's attempt to return traces of a more real, rather than simply remembered, world to both cinema and contemporary life. *Cinema Paradiso* in effect nostalgically illustrates a period that cannot be considered the "good old days," just as the films of Neorealism are far from the depiction of a golden age as some like to suggest. Cinematic Neorealism offered very few if any conclusions or resolutions, which is in fact in keeping with its mandate to simply bring testimony to and protest against social problems. With the closing sequence of *Cinema Paradiso,* Tornatore takes it upon himself to resolve the crises exposed by post-WWII Neorealism. The adult Totò, cynical, defeated and profoundly immersed in conventionality, views his mentor

Alfredo's gift, a montage of all the frames and sequences censored from the films he had helped screen as a child. Tornatore seems to suggest that these missing elements provide the missing pieces of a cultural puzzle that situates a film like his as a rightful descendant and promoter of an idealized sort of realist cinema.

In their article "Against Realism: On a 'Certain Tendency' in Italian Film Criticism," Alan O'Leary and Catherine O'Rawe lament the engagement of Neorealism as the "insidious common sense of Italian cinema studies, a common sense that is underpinned by a notion of auteurist 'paternity' as the default explanatory metaphor of Italian film history, and which leads to a dismissive tone in the discussion of genre films, not to mention a disdain for the audience for such films" (O'Leary and O'Rawe 2011, 109). The authors are also rightly critical of a use of Neorealism tinged with the moralizing intent of following (an instrumentalized notion of) Gramsci's ideology of the national popular as adherence "to some scriptural ideal of neorealism's ethical or aesthetic superiority" (120, 125). While we concur with the notion that the label of Neorealism may all too often be used in Italian studies to promote an ideal of "ethical or aesthetic superiority," we also believe that Neorealism, if understood as a practice of looking at the real against dominant discourses as opposed to an aesthetics that presumably defines a nationalist discourse, cannot be cut out of the discussion of contemporary cinema for O'Leary and O'Rawe's proposed "at least five year moratorium." A comparison between today's realist practices and those of Neorealism may help us understand how certain historical, social and political events and turns call for an evaluation and re-evaluation of proffered notions of the real and reality. Ultimately, we concur with an hypothesis that O'Rawe has made elsewhere (O'Rawe 2008), also supported by critics such as Pierpaolo Antonello (Antonello 2010 and 2012b), that in order to best theorize the effects and suggestions of Neorealism, the latter might be intended "as a phenomenon or mode that spans texts and genres, ... as a mode which predominates in certain historical and industrial moments and contexts" rather than a style associated "in the persons of great directors, or … as a legacy or cultural patrimony" (O'Rawe 2008, 184).

Under this proviso, Tornatore's presumptive rhetorical stance can be seen to clearly overlook the fact that one possible solution could be found in the *real*ization that the father is contained in our decisions to take action and put them into effect toward the potential consensus founded on the inter-relational dimensions of practices and images that appear to be disparate and often irreconcilable. We might find a hint of the diversion that continues to mark the misreading of the real in Neorealism in what

André Bazin has described "as its paradoxical intention not to produce a spectacle which appears real, but rather to turn reality into a spectacle…" (Bazin 2005, 67). Pasolini's "teoria" finds a degree of correspondence in both Eco's "negative realism" and Recalcati's notion of the Real because it de-emphasizes film's assumed positive representation of reality:

> tutto ciò che ho descritto e analizzato linguisticamente e grammaticalmente non è che "apparenza" in cui si "incarna" un'altra lingua e un'altra grammatica, che per essere, ha bisogno, come lo spirito, di discendere nella materia. Ciò che conta non è il rapporto tra l'inquadratura con l'altra inquadratura: rapporto, diciamo, logico-sintattico. Ciò che conta è il rapporto dell'*ordine* delle inquadrature con l'*ordine* dei cinemi, e il rapporto dell'*ordine* delle inquadrature con l'*ordine* delle inquadrature.[29]

> [everything that I have described and analyzed linguistically and grammatically is only "appearance" that "embodies" another language and another grammar that, in order to be, needs, like the spirit, to descend into matter. What counts is not the relationship between frames, a logical-syntactical relationship. What is relevant is the relationship of the *order* of the frames with the *order* of the cinemes, and the relationship of the *order* of the frames to the *order* of the frames.]

We would suggest that indeed, when considering the realms of the real and realism in relation to cinema, we are not simply referring to a cinematic or narrative genre, but rather to an adaptive and contestatory response or strategy. To this end, the chapters collected in the second half of the present volume specifically address the role of film as a visual medium that, while usually associated with fiction, doubly carries, by virtue of its modality of representation, a burden of verisimilitude that seduces viewers into fully accepting its contents as being real.

Pasquale Verdicchio's contribution to this discussion, "Revelatory Crises of the Real: *Before the Revolution* and After *Reality*," identifies moments of crisis that may have served to stimulate cinematographic reactions as both explanations of the origins of crisis and as strategies by which the notion of crisis might be challenged. With a cursory look back to some of the terms by which post-W.W.II cinematographic Neorealism might have been (or might continue to be) proposed as the approach by which to address social, political and cultural issues par excellence, Verdicchio engages Pier Paolo Pasolini's reading of it as "only a vital crisis" in order to tease out its potentially useful traits without glorifying either its directors or products as possessing uniquely privileged insights into the representation and interpretation of reality. The brackets selected to illustrate the elusiveness and shifting attempts at defining notions of

"reality" or "realism" are Bernardo Bertolucci's film *Before the Revolution* (1964) and Matteo Garrone's *Reality* (2012). Verdicchio considers this post-Neorealist period of bracketed time as all-important for the understanding of the pitfalls of realist assumptions, as well as for the shaping of a national "common sense" as was the case during the years of Berlusconi's governments (also contained within those brackets). It could almost be said that the strongly normative notions of reality that became current during Berlusconi's era are akin to Neorealism's renovative but normative drive which, in its time, benefitted from the two decades-long crisis of Fascism.

Fulvio Orsitto's piece, "Emanuele Crialese's Allegorical Realism in *Respiro* (2002)," engages Massimo Recalcati's (Lacanian) distinctions between "reality" and the "real" as manifested in Emanuele Crialese's film *Respiro* in order to trace out an alternative path by which more recent Italian cinema has enacted what Crialese himself has called "allegorical realism." The choice of *Respiro* isolates the film (a film that is itself isolated by being filmed on an island) as a departure from both neo-Neorealist approaches to film that either emulate or closely follow the example of that post-W.W.II set of engaged films, and the "claustrophiliaic attitude of many 'introverted' Italian films of the 1980s and 1990s." *Respiro*'s conscious and constant move away form steady points of unequivocal "filmic reality" is again reflected by its location and the fluidity of the water surrounding the island; the film "oscillates between the tendency toward *mimesis* and the propensity towards the fantastic mode." The combination of these modes, the contrast they create, and the expectations they undermine as the narrative is constantly undone, compel viewers to take notice of "the infiltration of the 'real' and the consequent lacerations in the fabric of cinematic 'reality'." As the camera represents these lacerations via long sequences containing intermittent startling cuts, we as viewers are called to participate in the unfolding of that "allegorical realism" that requires a recognition of what defines, distinguishes and expands the conventional terms of the real and reality.

In her contribution "The Quest for Identity and the Real in Crialese's *Terraferma*, Dionisio's *Un consiglio a Dio*, and Martinelli's *Rumore di acque,*" Gloria Pastorino provides a trans-genre analysis in order to illustrate how recent migrations might challenge notions of identity strictly tied to nationhood and citizenship. Recently, many films, documentaries, and theatrical plays have dealt with the subject of migration; Pastorino suggests that the three works named in the title are singularly effective in representing migration as an opportunity for encounters with other cultures that enrich notions of self. The author argues that "[i]dentity is shaped by

experience; if coming to terms with the Lacanian "Other" may prove unsettling, the end result may also be a new awareness and a reassessment of one's character, which ultimately leads to growth both as individuals and as a nation." Further, Pastorino's blended analysis of feature film, documentary, and theatre suggests that "the 'real' in fiction is more effective when transformed and re-elaborated than when offered as evidence of veracity." Such a contrast of forms may in fact also represent a contrast in their effectiveness in dealing with certain discourses. It is Pastorino's contention that *Terraferma* and *Rumore di Acque* are successful in eliciting a critical engagement on the part of the audience through an evocation of the "real," while *Un consiglio a Dio* is less successful as a result of its transformation of the "real" into a detectable spectacle of mediatic hyperreality. In conclusion, art is most effective in "awaken[ing] consciences to facets of reality otherwise unexplored or not fully understood" when it "departs from realism and transcends it to make its message universal."

Monica Facchini's "A Journey from Death to Life: Spectacular Realism and the 'Unamendability' of Reality in Paolo Sorrentino's *The Great Beauty*" offers a reading of Sorrentino's Academy Award-winning film. The film supposedly foregrounds Rome's magnificent beauty via images and contexts that have been hailed as Felliniesque; yet these are only superficial elements of a reality that the film takes care to plumb to greater depths. The film is set against a sacred and corrupt Rome, where the excesses and artificialities of the city's high society thrive during the dark hours of the day and move in well-defined environments that exclude its other more vital but common aspects from sight. Facchini's piece approaches *The Great Beauty*'s circus-like spectacle as representing the illusory surface of contemporary Italian society, which the film slowly unveils to reveal a more intimate, fragile, fearful and graceful reality. The protagonist, Jep Gambardella, guides viewers along what could almost be regarded as a Dantean path of recovery during which Jep becomes able to tear away and investigate the folds of the veil of spectacle that he and his cohorts live as a reality. Facchini suggests, through what Maurizio Ferraris calls the "unamendability of reality," that Jep attains the possibility of action in his sudden confrontation with mortality. By referencing Walter Siti's notion of a fictional narrative that can transform chaos into a "controlled and determined reality," Facchini then explores how Pier Paolo Pasolini's concept of death, as a montage that orders life's truly significant moments, is used by Sorrentino's film as an aid toward the discovery of a possibly authentic self and a repurposed narrative sense.