

# MODELS OF REPRESENTATION OF THE RURAL LANDSCAPE IN THE TELEVISION DOCUMENTARY SERIES *QUESTA NOSTRA ITALIA* (1968)\*

DEBORAH TOSCHI

LINDA GAROSI

## I. RADIO AND TELEVISION AT THE SERVICE OF A COUNTRY IN TRANSFORMATION

As part of the television program *Sapere. Orientamenti culturali e di costume*, coordinated by Silvano Giannelli, the documentary series *Questa Nostra Italia*, written by Guido Piovene<sup>1</sup> and directed by Virgilio Sabel, was broadcast between November and December of 1968. The reports produced by RAI were part of a commitment to education and dissemination undertaken by Italy's public radio and television service. The program, one of the new productions of that year, was launched with the aim of taking advantage of the popularity enjoyed some ten years earlier by *Viaggio in Italia*, a radio program by Piovene that had been broadcast on the *Programma Nazionale* between 1953 and 1957, which was followed by the publication of a book «at the request of the listeners» (Piovene, 1957: 7). *Viaggio in Italia* had been one of the cultural initiatives sparking a renewed interest in

the real Italy in the years after the Second World War, when its depiction under Fascism as the cradle of the Roman Empire and classical culture was abandoned, as it became the object of serious research that offered clear, direct, and detailed images of the country, not distorted by the prism of the regime's self-aggrandising rhetoric that had sought to mask its underdevelopment and social problems. The program, as well as an eponymous book, existed in a «fervent climate of curiosity and desire to tell stories [...] that characterised the country's years of reconstruction, recovery and economic boom» (Tamiozzo Goldmann, 2009: 103-104), when new media products found fertile ground as a result of the convergence of the different media formats.<sup>2</sup> In addition to being popular with the public, the series consolidated a style of radio documentary that reached its peak in those years. The first television reports of the late 1950s, such as *Viaggio nel Sud* (V. Sabel, 1958) and *Viaggio nella valle del Po alla ricerca dei cibi genuini* (M. Sol-

dati, 1959), took Piovene's radio program as a point of reference (Bertozi, 2008: 183).

Piovene's series therefore offers a rather significant opportunity to explore models of representation of Italy's agricultural landscapes, which were associated with important transitions in 1950s and 1960s Italy, a country in the midst of a major transformation. The first of these transitions was the shift from the rural mythos of fascist propaganda to the excitement over the agrarian reform, along with the necessary modernisation of southern Italy and the recognition of its failure. At the same time, in any analysis of this topic it is essential to remember that television reports replaced film documentaries due to their informative capacity in a context of production and exhibition controlled by institutions that understood television as a public service and as a channel for the promotion of forms of cultural hegemony. *Questa Nostra Italia* is located at this crossroads, as at the end of the 1960s, it facilitated the exploration of the various discursive instances that connected seamlessly to the origins of the Italian rural landscape, while at the same time shaping an imaginary, once again, that served the country's new political and sociohistorical direction.

The yearning to discover and document social, territorial and human realities was programmatic and strongly motivated by the need to generate national cohesion and engage all citizens in the great leap forward that followed the country's reconstruction. Although far from the rhetoric of the dictatorial regime, these radio and television programs should be viewed within a political-institutional framework that on the one hand delimited the public service's renewed action, while on the other it would seem reasonable to assume that they also constituted «attempts to manage cultural life» (Forgacs, Gundle, 2007: 4).

During the age of radio's greatest popularity and the rise of television, RAI was a state monopoly that was submitted to increased government control by the Convention of 1952, going from

---

## EL NUEVO PAISAJE AGRARIO SOLO FUE ESBOZADO POR EL RÉGIMEN FASCISTA

---

being considered a technical agency for communication at the service of institutional action to playing a decisive role in the hands of the *Democrazia Cristiana* party and the Catholic hierarchies, which, through their political control of the apparatus, managed to reinvent «a model for shaping public opinion and mass cultural dissemination that has been considered too reductively as being merely instrumental, but which was actually part of an effective design of cultural hegemony» (Monteleone, 2005: 287). The introduction of public television broadcasting (on 3 January 1953) represented not only a technological achievement, but also «the initiation of a unifying action to construct a national identity that RAI, under the auspices of the political class of the time, was ready to carry out» (Piazzoni, 2004: 24). In the political context following the fall of De Gasperi and dominated by the figure of Fanfani, the public broadcaster was charged with a crucial role: «the mass media, from radio to cinema, from children's magazines to television, was recognised as having an indisputable function to educate and to guide» (Monteleone, 2005: 288). A few months after broadcasting had begun, there was a shakeup in RAI's top management in accordance with the new political balance and with a very clear vision of the media's potential (Grasso, 2004). It was necessary to enhance not only its technical and production infrastructure, but also its content, so that through its programs RAI could really become an instrument of teaching and knowledge, fulfilling the educational mission assigned to it. This was why intellectuals were engaged in the development of formats and mechanisms of mass dissemination placed at the disposal of a television service capable of influencing cultural and social

progress, as well as guiding the citizen/viewer in a renewed process of national unification in parallel with the country's profound transformation (Piazzoni, 2004: 28).

At a crucial moment for the reconfiguration of the narrative of Italy's national-popular identity, public communication strategies were employed once again to trigger the evolution of the collective consciousness. It is worth noting that even before the Second World War, media products had contributed to the fact «that Italian society could be seen and heard by its own members» (Forgacs, Gundle, 2007: 5). The need to make the country known to Italians, which had made radio documentaries so popular, had not disappeared in the short period of time since the rapid rise of television:

These were years in which social documentaries and investigative reports on television, often by young directors trained during the years of neo-realism, were able to produce in-depth and detailed documents of a country that had been united only a century earlier and was almost entirely unknown to most Italians; not only were there profound differences between the North and South, but also a heterogeneous wealth of traditions that they sought to reveal to the widest possible audience through the audiovisual medium. (Di Marco, 2014: 142)

In this context, this study proposes to explore how television reports on contemporary issues would prove especially well-suited to narrating the reality of the country and its changes, while also playing a key role in introducing innovations to the documentary genre. To this end, an analysis of the configuration of the rural landscape is particularly important, as will be demonstrated below.

The methodology used is mainly qualitative, in that it seeks to describe processes of creating meaning in society through mass media, employing as a principal technique the analysis of these reports in relation to the rural imaginary, examining the relationship between text and context based on the concept of the landscape as an au-

diovisual construction and its cultural and historical dimension. This research takes a multidisciplinary approach to the object of study, analysing the representation of the rural world on both the radio program of the 1950s and the television program of the late 1960s.

## 2. THE LANDSCAPE, BETWEEN OLD AND NEW MODELS

---

It was between 1925 and 1930 that the idea of the rural landscape began to be perceived as a geographically defined space and to develop its own visibility, thanks in part to the Fascist regime's major investment in it, which led to the projection of a new identity and a new social imaginary. It is no coincidence that in these years two important institutions, the Opera Proiezioni Luminose and the Istituto Italiano Proiezioni Luminose, were replaced by the *Istituto Luce*, and that the period was marked by a process of transition towards new modes of representation (Toschi, 2009: 156).

The narrative of the rural landscape began to be codified in the framework of the impressive machinery of the *Istituto Luce*, which used photographs and documentaries to record many of the transformations to the countryside from a decidedly oblique perspective closely tied to the regime's ideology. Indeed, as Italo Insolera (2009) points out, these visual documents rarely reflected the everyday dimension, focusing instead on events, inaugurations and the presence of the authorities. The purpose was to underscore the regime's role as a driving force, its commitment to improving the country's situation, and its capacity to mediate between the industrial world and the agrarian economy, all of which had the effect of relegating rural landscapes and local populations to the background.

Piero Bevilacqua stresses that the new agrarian landscape was really only vaguely sketched by the Fascist regime, as it was not until the post-war period, under the administrations

of the Italian Republic, that the country's widely celebrated changes were clearly portrayed (2002: 19). The *Istituto Luce's* collection of institutional images had captured part of the modernisation that had begun, focusing on the transformation of well-known landscapes, especially marshes and the country's epic efforts at land reclamation, but had not placed enough emphasis on the important modernisation of the country's infrastructures and their consequent metamorphosis (Bevilacqua, 2002: 188). These elements would be better reflected in the shorts, in both black and white and colour, produced by the *Centro di Documentazione* of the Presidency of the Council of

---

### EL PROGRAMA DOCUMENTA UN TERRITORIO EN RÁPIDA TRANSFORMACIÓN, EN EL QUE CONVIVÍAN HERENCIAS RURALES Y NUEVAS REALIDADES INDUSTRIALES

---

Ministers between 1952 and the early 1960s (Frabotta, 2002). In addition, some elements neglected or only partially recognised by the regime in the films of the *Istituto Luce* seem to resurface after the Second World War. For example, the well-established didactic-scientific documentary formula lent itself well to conveying the changes to Italy's infrastructures and economy, particularly in the industrial sector, and was deployed with remarkable success thanks also to the synergy between business leaders and filmmakers (Pierotti Pitassio, 2019). Important companies, such as Montecatini (Petrini, 1999), Edison (Bruni, 2008; Mazzei, 2004) and Eni (Latini, 2011), would play a complementary role to that of state institutions in the visual narrative of Italy and its transformation, while Olivetti's "techno-films" (Pierotti, 2019: 129-153) merit separate discussion.

The genre's transformation is evident, in aesthetic terms, in the diversification of its subjects,

the hiring of prestigious directors and, of course, the major investments in production, resulting in films of great artistic value. Out of these corporate filmmaking departments, firmly tied to the communication objectives of a specific company, emerged a school of documentary production following in the wake of neorealism and on a par with the best international movements (Toffetti: 2005). One element that represented a break from the pre-war period and also stood out in the production of industrial documentaries was the new attention given to the human and social condition. The documentation of Italy's territory was a journey not only through the tapestry of a changing landscape, captured in its transformation from rural to industrial, but more generally through the socio-anthropological identity of the Italian population. Many different approaches taken to the representation of the Italian landscape intersect at its genesis, although it is important to stress that both institutional short films and industrial documentaries had quite limited audiences, while the television medium largely took over the task of presenting that landscape to society. Before delving into this aspect, it is important to note, as Bertozzi put it, that «Italian television played an important role in updating the forms of the documentary. This was a process that was carried out above all thanks to what were called 'filmed reports'» (2008: 183). Notable examples include Mario Soldati's *Viaggio nella valle del Po alla ricerca di cibi genuini* (1957, 12 episodes) and Virgilio Sabel's *Viaggio nel Sud* (1958, 10 episodes), as well as *Chi legge? Viaggio lungo le rive del Tirreno* (M. Soldati, C. Zavattini, 1960, 8 episodes), *Viaggio nell'Italia che cambia* (U. Zatterin, 1963, 5 episodes), and the program *I viaggi del telegiornale*, which first aired in 1957 (Simonelli, 2009). Moreover, in contrast to other television genres, the report offers the element of documenting reality, as Edoardo Bruno noted in his talk at the discussion panel on the *Inchiesta Filmata* (Centro Culturale Estense, 1964):

it was the first crack in that wall of conformity that television fed and feeds with its usual productions. Zatterin's *La donna che lavora* and Joris Ivens's *L'Italia non è un paese povero* continued to highlight a need to search, to offer a series of objectifications of a reality ignored and distorted by many. From all these images it is possible to capture aspects of the reality of a society struggling to define itself, as well as the confirmation of the validity of neorealism's social critique. (Cited in Di Marco, 2014: 143)

It is thus evident that numerous reports were produced in the form of travelogues, in a kind of virtual tourism, anchoring the narrative to geographical stages and their landscapes in order to reinterpret and connect the multiple facets of a country undergoing a rapid transformation. What emerges in this repeated journey across the Italian Peninsula is an attempt to expose the public to the slow yet profound transformation of the national landscape. This new genre proved especially well-suited to telling a story of the country, its landscape and the changes it was undergoing. It is worth remembering that it was a genre based on the radio documentary. Indeed, the case study chosen for this article is especially revealing in this respect. Therefore, before analysing the filmic texts that will allow us to corroborate our hypothesis, it is necessary to consider the radio series *Viaggio in Italia* and its relationship with the program that was broadcast on television a decade later.

### 3. FROM RADIO DOCUMENTARY (AND TRAVELOGUE) TO TELEVISION REPORT

*Questa Nostra Italia* is a case worthy of study because it constitutes a culmination of cultural initiatives associated with the hiring of Piovene by RAI in 1953, which involved the intersection of several media formats (radio, travel book), and simultaneously of the different modes and forms used to tell the story of the Italian landscape and present it to Italians.

After his trip to the United States as a correspondent for *Corriere della sera* (1950-1951), and his successful book *De America* (1953), Piovene was hired by the director of RAI's *Giornale Radio*, Antonio Picone Stella, and Saverio Sarnesi, who assigned him the task of telling the country's story on the radio, at the very moment of the birth of Italian television. The first episode of *Viaggio in Italia* aired on the *Programma Nazionale* on 6 December 1954, while the last one was broadcast on 17 December 1956. In total, there were 94 episodes, broadcast on Monday and Saturday nights from 9:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. The objective of the program, now that Italy was free at last of the Fascist regime's self-indulgent verbosity, was to explore Italy's heterogeneous regional realities, as well as to expose the situation of a country struggling to recover after the destruction wrought by the war. The broadcast, which was very well received by the public,<sup>3</sup> contributed in part to the publication of a book of the same name by the Mondadori publishing house. Drawing on notes taken on a trip he took between May 1953 and October 1956 from Bolzano to Rome and including visits to the two main islands,<sup>4</sup> Piovene worked on both the radio and print versions (first for some brief articles published in advance in the weekly magazine *Epoca*, and then for the book). As will be discussed below, it is interesting to note the "hybrid" dimension of the writing, as although the travelogue of the journey, reworked into the 18 chapters of the book, conforms to the conventions of literary tradition, it nevertheless suggests «a new approach to travel narratives» (Valese, 2020: 120-121). The work is not really a travelogue as seems to be suggested by its title, which brings to mind the products of the Grand Tour, but instead represented a perfect example of an active combination of the exploration by the journalist, who [...] produces weekly radio reports in which he carries out a social and economic investigation of the Italian situation in the early 1950s, with an artistic-literary purpose (Zava, 2020: 9).

Descriptions of landscapes—natural and urban—and references to the country's vast cultural heritage, traditions and folk customs are interspersed with interviews with prominent figures of the time and socioeconomic analyses of the industrial and primary sectors, supported by data, statistics and precise numbers. All this is framed by reflections on the specific identity of a region, or of a specific city, often combined with a discussion of the distinctive features of its inhabitants. The account of the journey is constructed based on focalisations and panoramas that treat the juxtaposition of *accumulatio* (Crotti, 1996: 278) as the formal instrument closest to what the author himself defines as an «inventory of Italian things» (Piovene, 1957: 7). The text thus eschews a monolithic vision of the country, like the one that had been imposed by the Fascist regime, by contrasting the variety and unique features of Italy's different regions, visited one by one. Another key element that guides the reporter/traveller's explorations is the repeated reference to statistics and figures, as well as the detailed analysis of the industrial and primary sectors and the exploration of Italian society, which also clearly reflected an attempt to praise the actions of the new government.<sup>5</sup> In this long national tour, the observer's gaze is framed by the main issues faced by the administrations of the new Italian Republic at that time: regional autonomy, the industrial boom, public construction, the problem of the degradation of the natural landscape, the deterioration of the country's artistic heritage, mass emigration, unemployment, the gap between north and south, and particularly the process of implementing the Agrarian Reform, which Piovene depicts in both positive and negative terms. Moreover, while describing the progressive decline of peasant civilisation and the persistence of pockets of poverty and backwardness in every region (but especially in the south), he documents the strong push towards the mechanisation and modernisation of agricultural production.<sup>6</sup> It is safe to suggest that this was due

to the powerful albeit indirect message emerging from the initiatives planned in the government's reconstruction programs. It is worth recalling that during those years, thanks also to the money from the Marshall Plan (1948-1952), the country was achieving very promising results.

A decade later, in 1968, in a very different historical context defined by the cultural hegemony imposed by the public broadcaster, Piovene received a new commission from RAI, for which he was joined by a prominent documentary filmmaker, the Turin-born Virgilio Sabel, who was also documenting the Italian situation once again. On 5 November 1968, the first of the 16 episodes aired on *Canale Nazionale*, with half-hour broadcasts every Tuesday and Thursday at 7:15 p.m. until December 26. Like the radio series and the book, the television program was very popular with the public, as Giannelli (1968) points out. For the television version, however, significant modifications were made: the title was changed, the 94 episodes that had been produced for radio were reduced to 16, and the geographical criterion that had defined the order of the previous versions was abandoned.<sup>7</sup> In addition, in contrast to the radio program, Piovene's in-studio commentary was in the first person, interspersed with images of the locations and a voice-over (Alberto Lupo) or live interviews. There are some similarities with the book published in 1957, such as the fact that the exploration of the different regions and their inhabitants reflects the same style of *curiositas*, without the author's mediation. Some of the places visited are also the same, and Piovene's comments and the voiceover include excerpts from the book, albeit reorganised. Fifteen years later, however, the author was cognisant of the profound changes that had occurred in the country and therefore proposed a new investigation, while also being aware that the sociopolitical context and thus the purpose of the program had changed as well. He toned down the meticulous analysis of the cultural and socioeconomic stratifications of a country in ra-

pid transformation in which rural heritages and new industrial realities coexisted, while trying to condense the country's geographical, human, economic and cultural variety for didactic purposes. The aim was not to provide a unitary vision of the nation, one that would ultimately fail to reflect its complexity, but rather to offer a picture of the whole made up of representative samples, driven by the potential of the new television medium. In keeping with the didactic approach of the section of which the documentary formed a part, *Sapere. Orientamenti culturali e di costume*, the narration of the journey across the country became a compendium of Italian geography in which Piovene's evocative prose was reduced to a minimum, replaced in the new medium by a succession of images.

#### 4. THE VISUAL IMAGINARY OF QUESTA NOSTRA ITALIA: THE RURAL LANDSCAPE, BETWEEN NOSTALGIA AND FOLKLORE

Guido Piovene, as the creator of the radio project, but above all as a writer, i.e., an exponent of the literary culture that Italian mass media outlets have always sought to integrate into radio, film

and television content (Sacchetti, 2018; Colombo, 1998), was the most prominent name involved in the *Questa Nostra Italia* television documentary series. Equally significant, especially for the program's visual imaginary, was the contribution of its director, Virgilio Sabel (b. Turin, 1920 d. Rome, 1989), a multifaceted figure with an outstanding capacity for storytelling, which he employed in the production of literary works and scripts, as well as documentaries and musical compositions. Sabel launched his career with an unusual collaboration with the poet Leonardo Sinigalli on the short film *Una lezione di geometria* (1948) and the subsequent *Un millesimo di millimetro* (1950), an award winner at the Venice International Film Festival that formed part of his experience at Olivetti. After another brief foray into the industrial documentary with *Le ricerche del metano e del petrolio* (1951), produced by the Istituto Luce for Agip/Eni, he began working on films about society for which he is particularly remembered, such as *In Italia si chiama amore* (1963). The report *Viaggio nel Sud* (1958), with a plot and script by the writers Giuseppe Berto and Giose Rimaneli (Del Gaudio, 2017), was undoubtedly the reason why he was

chosen for the *Questa Nostra Italia* project. However, Sabel's visual contribution suggests a different range from that found in *Viaggio nel Sud*, which is notable for the variety of shots and the pacing of the editing (Valentini, 2019: 92).

*Viaggio nel Sud* offers a powerful examination of the southern question and the problem of the deep economic and social gulf dividing northern and central-southern Italy in a specific historical period. With the creation of *Cassa del Mezzogiorno* and the SVIMEZ institute, between 1950 and 1962

Image 1. Guido Piovene and the documentary television series *Questa Nostra Italia* (1968)



a special endowment was allocated for land reclamation, the creation of infrastructures, and, more generally, the modernisation of what was still a very rural landscape in the south (Taviani, 1972). The television documentary seeks to capture the sources of this change, intertwining the history of an early industrialisation of the south with stories of a return to the land.

For example, the episode filmed in Metaponto in the Basilicata region features an interview with some labourers who had been assigned land to plant an orchard and rotation crops (29') with the help of expert advisors specialising in agriculture. Again, certain transitions stand out: for example, the formula of roving agricultural experts, and the idea that education must be expanded to include workers who are often unqualified, both of which were already present in the educational and propagandistic filmography of the Fascist period, are addressed here with a different approach. In the television series, the focus is not so much on specific techniques and crops that is, on teaching modern farming and stockbreeding techniques and methods but on the social transformation that the government was seeking to bring about. In addition, the rural landscape is no longer the protagonist of the narrative: rather than filling the visual space, it becomes the backdrop to an ongoing transformation captured in a few emblematic shots, playing a role that is secondary to the human activity and new settlements. This is clearly seen in the pan shots that begin with wide shots of the crops before coming to a halt on an interviewee. The interviews are largely unedited and take up a significant portion of the running time, effectively assigning the residents of these regions an important role in the socioeconomic progress of the period. In this episode, as in the one shot in the town of Manfredonia in the Apulia region, the camera goes inside



Image 2. Metaponto (Basilicata region) episode of *Viaggio nel Sud* (Sabel, 1958)

the people's homes: in this case, a farmhouse at dawn, when the farmworkers are waking up. A decidedly ethnographic approach is evident in the attention to the people's working and living conditions, which were practically ignored in previous productions. The footage conveys a profound concern with the southern landscape, which appears archaic yet at the same time in search of a new identity. The camera moves quickly, as if curious to probe the possibilities of a moderate modernisation that could preserve the beauty of the rural landscape without sterilising it.

*Questa Nostra Italia* was created more than ten years after *Viaggio nel Sud*, in the completely different context of 1968, when the major investments and the dream of modernising the south had waned and new tensions were looming on the horizon. [IMAGE 3] In the first episode, Piovene's in-studio introduction, which evokes but modifies the one in Soldati's well-known *Viaggio in Italia*, gives content and visual continuity to the reporting tour of the country. Instead of the map and painted background behind the presenter, there are a series of sweeping horizontal shots in the studio that modernise the approach and counteract the stiffness of Piovene, whose



presentation is very different from the colloquial, direct style of Soldati. The editing also has a faster pace, linking the shots of the presenter, taken from different angles and enhanced by constant zooms, with the images in the studio and those in the report. Guido Piovene does not look completely at ease in the television studio, where he is forced to read at a distance and respect strict time limits. In this regard, the host's limited presence is noteworthy, as he appears briefly to introduce the program and/or specific episode, and only in the episodes on the regions of Apulia, Piedmont and Liguria. The writer's imprint on the program is visible, also with an impact on the style of Sabel, who has a less mobile and more focused gaze in *Questa Nostra Italia*, with more use of zoom and static shots, reproducing one of the literary characteristics of Piovene's prose, defined as a snapshot, a photograph of a moment to «save a landscape from destruction, to photograph it before the catastrophe, to document it, especially an inner landscape, which exists in the precarious aware-

Image 4. Episode 12, Abruzzo and Molise, rural landscape



Image 3. Apulia, the first episode of *Questa Nostra Italia*

ness of a dissolution that seems to hasten almost as it is being narrated» (Crotti, 1996: 279). The content of the episodes is quite varied and seems to be arranged according to a process of *accumulatio*, as Ilaria Crotti has previously pointed out, as the interviews with locals are interspersed with shots of rural and urban landscapes, along with descriptive shots of monuments and examples of Italy's artistic heritage. This is a distinctive element of the *Bel Paese*, and after the Second World War it became a crucial factor for the revival of cultural tourism. Nature and art coexist in Piovene's prose and converge in Sabel's perspective, which treats monuments as landscapes to be visually traversed, broken down into different angles. The rural world, included in the imaginary of the south, was giving way to urban space, which in those years constituted the pulsating core in which most of the Italian population were finding a place to live and work. This raises questions about the role

and representation of the rural landscape at the crossroads of 1968, a year rife with new and profound sociocultural transformations.

An interesting example can be found in the episode on the regions of Abruzzo and Molise, which begins by focusing on the paintings, wrought iron works and historic buildings of the town of Pescocostanzo, but with a change of perspective and of music, with a shift from opera to a folk song while the camera climbs up a cobblestone slope towards a group of women in the streets engaged in the ancient art of lacework. Continuing from L'Aquila to Pescara, again through castles and museums, the episode displays the region's incipient modernisation, and in a dialogue with young students from Pescara, the question of the loss of local traditions is discussed. As we move on to the Molise region we find the same internal division in the narrative. From the history of

the cathedral's art the story shifts to the tradition of knitting. [IMAGE 4] This is followed by a distinct pause, signalled in the soundtrack by the braying of donkeys and the crowing of roosters, before presenting Sepino, a town in the province of Campobasso, which boasts an extensive archaeological site. Sabel's filming comes alive again with a long pan that draws the viewer closer to the Roman ruins. [IMAGE 5] However, in contrast to previous archaeological sites, Sepino's setting is typically rural, as the Roman city lies in the countryside, now inhabited by shepherds who come here so their flocks can graze. Stone dwellings can be glimpsed nearby. The interviews convey a reality that is isolated but still marked by the changing routes of the livestock and the arrival of foreign tourists. Here an important transition occurs: the rural landscape, previously interpreted as natural and firmly entrenched in the Italian

**Image 5. Sepino, an archaeological site inhabited by shepherds**



imaginary, dissolves into a nostalgic, folkloric, elegiac setting that takes on an evanescent quality with luminous tones. The rural landscape, like the Roman ruins, becomes the memory of a bygone past. Once again, Sabel and Piovene seem to be in perfect harmony. The faded folk-magic dimension of the south, in particular the south that is still rural, is rendered palpable. As Altamura suggests, «as Piovene enters the South, in fact, he gradually introduces a melancholic touch that little by little, as Pasolini pointed out, makes the *Viaggio* resemble a 'poem' or a 'work of the imagination'» (2004: 19; Pasolini, 1979: 161). With this melancholic gaze, the rural landscape bids farewell to the Italian viewer, becoming a landscape of memories, a reminder of a reality that is almost extinct.

## CONCLUSIONS

After the Second World War, there were significant changes to the Italian media and the country's institutions. This transition was especially important for documentaries, since film production, particularly the output of the *Istituto Luce* during the years of the Fascist regime, gave way to other media such as television, and to other genres, including television reports. Meanwhile, the governments of the *Democrazia Cristiana* party, the protagonist of Italy's democratic revival, assumed control of RAI, which they considered an essential instrument to promote the country's cultural and social progress. To this end, they once again adopted mass communication strategies that had been used in radio broadcasting, including the participation of prominent personalities on the cultural scene. They continued to create multidisciplinary projects whose impact was further amplified by the expressive potential of the new medium of TV, resulting in the construction of the country's national folk identity at a crucial time.

In this context, it is also necessary to situate a process of major innovations to the documentary in terms of the changes that the rural ima-

inary codified by the *Luce Institute* underwent in the new historical and political environment. This analysis of the *Viaggio in Italia* radio program and the *Questa Nostra Italia* television reports has made it possible to highlight significant innovations introduced to the models of representation of the landscape through the formula of the travelogue.

The analysis of the texts here has revealed lines of continuity and points of divergence: in contrast to the codes of propaganda oriented towards the construction of self-aggrandising images under the Fascist regime, the "inventory of Italian things" (Piovene) filmed by Sabel for RAI in the late 1960s became a visual narrative in which the landscape took on an increasingly mythical nature, imbued with predominantly folkloric leanings. Precisely at a time when the rural world was disappearing and turning into a memory, its representation was increasingly associated with human presence and the narrative of a new national identity. ■

## NOTES

\* This article was written in the context of the *Agricultural Documentaries and Nationalities: A Comparative Study of the Productions of the Ministries of Agriculture of Spain, France and Italy (1930-1979)* Research Project, funded by the State Research Agency (Ref. PID2019-105462GB-I00). The authors collaborated on the research and on the content of the article; specifically, Linda Garosi wrote sections 1 and 3, and Deborah Toschi wrote sections 2 and 4.

1 Italian writer and journalist (b. Vicenza 1907-d. London 1974). In 1935 he joined the *Corriere della Sera* and then went on to *La Stampa*, where he worked until founding the Milanese newspaper *Il Giornale* (1974), together with Indro Montanelli and others. His work, which ranges from correspondence and high-level journalistic reports to travel pages and reflections, as well as short stories and novels, is that of an essayist trained at the intersection of a Catholic sensuality

and an Enlightenment sensibility inspired mainly by the French moralists and novelists of the 17th and 18th centuries, but open to the suggestions of Freudism and Existentialism. His best-known novels include *Lettere di una novizia* (1941), *Le furie* (1963) and *Le stelle fredde* (1970).

- 2 The project *Italia Mía* was presented to the Einaudi publishing house in 1952, with the idea of narrating the reality of the country through a combination of images and words, in a film-book. This initiative would ultimately only give rise to *Un paese* (1955) a phototextual publication, with writing by Cesare Zavattini and pictures by the Frenchman Paul Strand, documenting the artist's places of origin. It also reveals an incipient visual interest in landscapes that would shift as well towards the printed page (Pontillo, 2020).
- 3 Gigi (Luigi) Michelotti points out this fact in a review of RAI's programming for 1957 in *Radiocorriere* (Gigi Michelotti, *Documento di un'annata*).
- 4 Piovene's texts are read by Paolo Pacetti and interspersed with audio recordings of direct testimonies collected by active reporters sent to the different regions, such as Nanni Saba, Aldo Salvo, Nino Vascon and Sergio Zavoli.
- 5 This hypothesis seems to be confirmed in a private letter, preserved in the Piovene Collection, which accompanied the request for documentation dated 5 July 1954. Piovene writes: «due to the agreements between this Chamber and RAI, I will have to produce some weekly radio broadcasts aimed at illustrating the economic life of each of the Italian provinces» (the text of the letter is quoted in Arpioni, 2017: 141).
- 6 These topics are the exact same ones dealt with in *Treno della Rinascita*, a large national travelling exhibition presenting the achievements of the first governments of the new Republic (Frabotta, 2002: 25-36).
- 7 The order of the episodes is as follows: 1. Puglia; 2. Piedmont and the Valle d'Aosta; 3. Campania; 4. Friuli-Venezia Giulia; 5. Lazio; 6. Basilicata and Calabria; 7. Emilia Romagna; 8. Trentino Alto Adige; 9. Umbria and Marche; 10. Lombardy; 11. Sicily; 12. Abruzzo and Molise; 13. Liguria; 14. Tuscany; 15. Sardinia; 16. Veneto.

## REFERENCES

- Altamura, G. (2004). «Un paesaggio all'oscuro di se stesso»: Il Viaggio in Italia di Guido Piovene. In V.G. Martín, M.G. Rovira, M.M. Clavijo e I. Scampuddu (eds.), *Un recorrido por las letras italianas en busca de humanismo* (pp. 11-23). Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca.
- Arpioni, M. P. (2017). «Si credeva ancora nei viaggi»: paesaggi in Guido Piovene e Gianni Celati. Doctoral thesis. Venice: Università Ca' Foscari.
- Bertozzi, M. (2008). *Storia del documentario italiano. Immagini e culture dell'altro cinema*. Venice: Marsilio.
- Bevilacqua, P. (2002). *Il paesaggio italiano nelle fotografie dell'Istituto Luce*. Rome: Editori Riuniti.
- Bisogno, A. (2019). I viaggi in Italia di Mario Soldati tra cinema e televisione. In S. Parigi, C. Uva, V. Zagarrìo (eds.), *Cinema e identità italiana. Cultura visuale e immaginario nazionale fra tradizione e contemporaneità* (pp. 455-461). Rome: RomaTrePress.
- Bruni, D. (2008). I cortometraggi industriali. In B. Tobagi (ed.), *I volti e le mani* (pp. 87-103). Milan: Feltrinelli.
- Colombo, F. (1998). *La cultura sottile. Media e industria culturale in Italia dall'Ottocento agli anni Novanta*. Milan: Bompiani.
- Conti, A. (1931). Brevi note sulla cinematografia agricola. *Rivista Internazionale del Cinema Educatore*, III, August 1931, 779-799.
- Crainz, G. (2005). *Storia del miracolo economico. Culture, identità, trasformazioni fra anni Cinquanta e Sessanta*. Rome: Donzelli.
- Crotti, I. (1996). Piovene viaggiatore della scrittura: Viaggio in Italia. In S. Strazzabosco (ed.), *Guido Piovene tra idoli e ragione. Atti del convegno di studi (Vicenza, 24-26 novembre 1994)* (pp. 269-87). Venice: Marsilio.
- Di Marco, P. (2014). Il viaggio televisivo di Mario Soldati. In A. Gimbo, A. Ricci, M.C. Paolicelli (eds.), *Viaggi, itinerari, flussi umani. Il mondo attraverso narrazione, rappresentazioni e popoli*, (pp. 141-148). Rome: Nuova cultura.
- Forgacs, D., Gundle, S. (2007). *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Frabotta, M. A. (2002). *Il governo filma l'Italia*. Rome: Bulzoni.

- Giannelli, S. (1968). Torna con i «protagonisti» l'ormai popolare rubrica televisiva *Sapere* anno 3. *Radiocorriere*, 45 (45, 3-9 novembre), 56.
- Grasso, A. (2004). *Storia della televisione italiana. I 50 anni della televisione*. Milan: Garzanti.
- Insolera, I. (2009). *Roma fascista nelle fotografie dell'Istituto Luce*. Rome: Editori Riuniti
- Latini, G. (2011). *L'energia e lo sguardo. Il cinema dell'Eni e i documentari di Gilbert Bovay*. Rome: Donzelli.
- Martignoni, C. (2008). I cinquant'anni del *Viaggio in Italia* di Guido Piovene. *La modernità letteraria*, 1 (1), 57-73.
- Mazzei, L. (2004). I documentari industriali di Ermanno Olmi. In S. Bernardi (ed.), *Storia del cinema italiano. Vol. 9. 1954-1959* (pp. 282-288). Rome-Venice: Marsilio-Fondazione Scuola Nazionale di Cinema.
- Michelotti, G. (1957). Documento di un'annata, *Radiocorriere*, 34 (35, 1-7 settembre), 23.
- Montale, E. (1957). *Viaggio in Italia. Corriere della Sera*, 30 novembre. In Id. (1996). *Il secondo mestiere. Prose 1920-1979*. Milan: Mondadori.
- Monteleone, F. (2005). *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia: costume, società e politica*. Venice: Marsilio.
- Pasolini, P. P. (1979). *Descrizioni di descrizioni*. Turin: Einaudi.
- Petrini, R. (1990). L'azienda giudicata: la Montecatini tra mito, immagine e valore simbolico. In F. Amatori B. Bezza (eds.), *Montecatini 1888-1966. Capitoli di storia di una grande impresa*, (pp. 273-308). Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Piazzoni, I. (2004). *Storia delle televisioni in Italia: dagli esordi alle web TV*. Rome: Carocci.
- Pierotti, F. (2019). Progettare il futuro. I tecno-film Olivetti: politica, tecnologia e media. *Immagine. Note di storia del cinema*, 19, 129-153.
- Pierotti, F., Pitassio, F. (2019). Immagini industriali. Film e fotografia industriali nella cultura visuale italiana: interfaccia, evento, archivio (1945-1963). Monograph *Immagine. Note di storia del cinema*, 19.
- Piovene, G. (1957). *Viaggio in Italia*. Verona: Mondadori.
- Pontillo, C. (2020). *Un Paese* di Paul Strand e di Cesare Zavattini. *Genesis e lettura di un fototesto italiano, Sines-tesieonline*, 9 (29), 1-6.
- Sacchettini, R. (2018). *Scrittori alla radio. Interventi, riviste e radiodrammi per un'arte invisibile*. Florence: Firenze University Press.
- Simonelli, G. (2009). *Si salvi chi può. Cronache della Tv italiana dal 2000 a oggi*. Effatà Editrice.
- Tamiozzo Goldmann, S. (2009). Appunti sul *Viaggio in Italia*. In E. Del Tedesco, A. Zava (eds.), *Viaggi e paesaggi di Guido Piovene* (pp. 103-122). Pisa-Rome: Fabrizio Serra Editore.
- Taviani, P. E. (1972). *Il problema dello sviluppo e l'esperienza della Cassa del Mezzogiorno*. Florence: Le Monnier.
- Toffetti, S. (2005). Conversazione con Ermanno Olmi. In F. Magliulo (ed.) *Il mestiere dell'uomo. Ermanno Olmi regista per la Edison* (pp. 17-84). Milan: Motta-Edison.
- Toschi, D. (2009). *Il paesaggio rurale. Cinema e cultura contadina nell'Italia fascista*. Milan: Vita e Pensiero.
- Treves, A. (1976). *Le migrazioni interne in Italia*. Turin: Einaudi.
- Valentini, P. (2019) Inventario delle cose italiane e scorribande. Il viaggio nella televisione degli esordi. *Imago. Studi di cinema e media*, 9 (2), 79-96.
- Valese, F. (2020). La Liguria di Guido Piovene tra *Viaggio in Italia* and *Questa nostra Italia*. In M. Bacigalupo, S. Verdino (eds.), *Viaggio in Liguria. Studi e testimonianze* (pp. 117-137). Genoa: Accademia Ligure di Scienze e Lettere.
- Zava, A. (2019) Dimensioni e prospettive urbane: campioni e modalità di indagine in *Viaggio in Italia* by Guido Piovene. *Quaderns d'Italia*, 24, 45-54
- Zava, A. (2020). Le dinamiche dello sguardo nell'Unione Sovietica by Guido Piovene. In M.P. Arpioni, A. Zava (eds.), *Guido Piovene. Articoli dall'Unione Sovietica (1960)* (pp. 9-23). Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari.

## MODELS OF REPRESENTATION OF THE RURAL LANDSCAPE IN THE TELEVISION DOCUMENTARY SERIES QUESTA NOSTRA ITALIA (1968)

### Abstract

This article presents a study of representations of Italy's rural landscapes in the 1950s and 1960s. This period, which has been somewhat neglected in studies of the country's rural imaginary, was a time of important transitions: from the Fascist regime to democracy, from rural predominance to economic acceleration and industrialisation, from the documentary production and didactic initiatives of *Istituto Luce* to the new industrial productions and the consolidation of the television medium. In fact, it was Italy's newly founded public broadcaster, RAI, that seized the baton of education and rediscovered the landscape through reports on travels around Italy with a focus on social issues. The case study chosen for this research is the documentary program *Questa Nostra Italia*, a follow-up to Guido Piovene's historic radio program and book, directed by Virgilio Sabel. These television reports capture rural Italy, particularly the rural south, with a dynamic perspective encompassing both modernisation and a return to the land, always with a view to the human presence, which becomes the protagonist and driving force of the narrative. The landscape is subjected to a profound reconsideration, crystallised in an array of images with folkloric and evanescent connotations to become a bucolic and timeless remembered space, fixed in the memory of every Italian.

### Key words

Rural landscape; RAI; Piovene; Sabel; radio documentary; television documentary; *Questa Nostra Italia*.

### Authors

Deborah Toschi holds a degree in Modern Literature and a PhD in Philosophical Disciplines, Arts and Entertainment from Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan. She continued her studies at Università degli Studi di Pavia and is currently an Associate Professor at the Università dell'Insubria in Como. She has published her research in Italian and international specialist journals on Italian cinema, educational cinema and gender studies, and she is the author of the monograph *Il paesaggio rurale. Cinema e cultura contadina nell'Italia fascista*. (Vita e Pensiero, 2009). Contact: [deborah.toschi@uninsubria.it](mailto:deborah.toschi@uninsubria.it)  
Contact: [deborah.toschi@uninsubria.it](mailto:deborah.toschi@uninsubria.it)

## MODELOS DE REPRESENTACIÓN DEL PAISAJE RURAL EN EL DOCUMENTAL TELEVISIVO QUESTA NOSTRA ITALIA (1968)

### Resumen

El artículo propone un estudio sobre la representación del paisaje rural italiano en los años cincuenta y sesenta. La periodización, algo desatendida en relación con el imaginario rural, da cuenta de algunas transiciones importantes: del régimen fascista a la democracia, de la Italia campesina a la Italia de la aceleración económica y la industrialización, de los esfuerzos documentales y didácticos del Istituto Luce a los nuevos sujetos industriales y a la afirmación del medio televisivo. De hecho, fue la recién nacida RAI la que recogió el testigo de la educación y el redescubrimiento del paisaje mediante el reportaje de viaje por Italia y de corte social. El caso de estudio propuesto es el reportaje *Questa Nostra Italia*, evolución del histórico programa radiofónico y libro de Piovene, aquí con la dirección de Sabel. En el reportaje televisivo, el territorio rural, y en particular el meridional, es captado con una mirada dinámica, entre la modernización y el retorno a la tierra, siempre en relación con la presencia humana, que se convierte en protagonista y motor de la narración. El componente paisajístico sufre una profunda revisión, cristalizándose en un repertorio de imágenes con connotaciones folclóricas y evanescentes hasta convertirse en un paisaje de la memoria, bucólico e intemporal, fijado en la memoria de los italianos.

### Palabras clave

Paisaje rural; RAI; Piovene; Sabel; documental radiofónico; reportaje televisivo documental; *Questa Nostra Italia*.

### Autoras

Deborah Toschi, tras licenciarse en Literatura Moderna y conseguir su doctorado en Disciplinas Filosóficas, Artes y Entretenimiento por la Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore de Milán, ha continuado su trayectoria académica en la Università degli Studi di Pavia y actualmente ocupa una plaza de profesora titular en la Università dell'Insubria (Como). Ha publicado en revistas nacionales e internacionales ocupándose del cine italiano, cine educativo y estudios de género. Es autora de la monografía *Il paesaggio rurale. Cinema e cultura contadina nell'Italia fascista* (Vita e Pensiero, 2009). Contacto: [deborah.toschi@uninsubria.it](mailto:deborah.toschi@uninsubria.it)

Linda Garosi holds a degree in Foreign Languages and Literatures from Università di Verona, and a PhD from the Universidad de Córdoba, where she is currently an Associate Professor in Italian Philology. Her research, which has been published in Italian and international journals and monographs, examines areas including representations of Italian emigration in cinema and literature and the canons of Fascist ruralism in newsreels and documentaries. She co-edited the volume *Esodi e frontiere di celluloide. Il cinema italiano racconta le migrazioni* (Franco Cesati Editore, 2016). Contact: linda.garosi@uco.es

**Article reference**

Toschi, D., Garosi, L. (2024). Models of Representation of the Rural Landscape in the Television Documentary Series *Questa Nostra Italia* (1968). *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 38, 49-64.

Linda Garosi, tras licenciarse en *Lingue e Letterature Straniere* por la Università di Verona y conseguir el doctorado en la Universidad de Córdoba, es actualmente profesora titular del área de Filología Italiana en este centro. Ha publicado en revistas y monografías nacionales e internacionales, ocupándose, entre otros, de la representación de la emigración italiana en el cine y la literatura, así como de los cánones del ruralismo fascista en los noticiarios y documentales. Ha coeditado el volumen *Esodi e frontiere di celluloide. Il cinema italiano racconta le migrazioni* (Franco Cesati Editore, 2016). Contacto: linda.garosi@uco.es

**Referencia de este artículo**

Toschi, D., Garosi, L. (2024). Modelos de representación del paisaje rural en el documental televisivo *Questa Nostra Italia* (1968). *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 38, 49-64.

recibido/received: 27.11.2023 | aceptado/accepted: 10.05.2024

Edita / Published by



Licencia / License



ISSN 1885-3730 (print) / 2340-6992 (digital) DL V-5340-2003 WEB [www.revistaatalante.com](http://www.revistaatalante.com) MAIL [info@revistaatalante.com](mailto:info@revistaatalante.com)

