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CESARE ZAVATTINI'S POETICS OF OBJECTIVITY

Abstract

Cesare Zavattini was an acclaimed neorealist screenwriter and a theorist of neorealism. He has played a pivotal role in the critical rethinking of the new postwar Italian cinema although many of his concepts were considered avant-garde for that period. He stood for a direct, spontaneous, and immediate cinema with real people and real events. Despite his desire to eliminate all that was fictional from his films, Zavattini's concept of new realist cinema cannot simply be described as a documentary approach. He was not so much interested in making documentary films but in making documentary-like fictions. He believed in the potential of cinema to reach a wide audience and in its capacity to be aesthetically subversive. The aspiration for an *avant-garde* cinema that would reach the masses was a naïve attempt that was too radical for the Italian cinema at the time. Most of his ideas were not accepted in Italy, but he was admired by young filmmakers all over the world. Some of his ideas were realized a few decades later in the works of the famous *cinéma vérité* and independent *avant-garde* filmmakers. Throughout his career, Zavattini argued that cinema should be socially committed art. He believed that neorealist films should direct the viewer's gaze toward specific social issues and voice a subjective judgment on it. In neorealist films, fictional style and documentary rhetoric make the illusion that the experience of characters stands for the experience of the audience.

Keywords: Italian neorealism, Cesare Zavattini, postwar Italian cinema, poetics of objectivity, investigative film, flash film

Introduction

Italian neorealism is generally associated with films produced in the post-World War II Italy, primarily between 1945 and 1952. Making morally and socially committed cinema, which would help reconstruct post-Fascist Italy, was a common goal of many post-war Italian directors. Neorealism was an ideological statement and an emotional response of filmmakers who brought real life on screen in an attempt to wipe out the legacy of Fascist propaganda cinema. The need to represent contemporary social issues was a long-awaited change in the history of Italian cinema. Therefore, style and technique were employed to highlight ethnical responsibility. The aim of the neorealist filmmakers was to strengthen the collective faith in common values and to represent the individual who is not a self-sufficient entity, but a responsible member of the society. As a style and a method, neorealism was interested in showing that people are inseparable from their social environment.

Although neorealism is conventionally associated with the film production between 1945 and 1952, it had a great impact on global cinema in the subsequent decades. Neorealism was formative for both European and non-European filmmakers with respect to production, techniques, and narrative modes. Neorealist techniques have influenced innovative styles of filmmaking all over the world, especially the new Third Cinema in Latin America. As the result of different histories and social circumstances, new realisms in world cinema were different and served different ends. However, there are some similarities between Italian neorealism and the new waves in the early 1960s. The first neorealist films screened in Latin America,¹ Africa, and Asia encouraged the film-

¹ Italian neorealism was a source of inspiration for Cuban and Brazilian directors in the early to mid-1950s and throughout the 1960s. There were many connections between Italian neorealism and the New Latin American Cinema. Young Argentine poet Fernando Birri, later to become theorist, documentary filmmaker, and the founder of the Escuela Documental de Santa Fe, studied at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome in 1950s; Gabriel García Márquez allegedly abandoned for a while his career of a journalist and film critic and travelled to Rome to study scriptwriting with Cesare Zavattini (see Crowder-Taraborrelli); García Espinosa went to Italy after having seen neorealist films (see Chanan). Zavattini himself visited Cuba before the revolution. Many Latin American filmmakers, such as Pereira dos Santos and Fernando Solanas, acknowledged the influence of neorealism on their early work (see Johnson and Stam). New Latin American cinema from the 1950s to the early 1970s, particularly the exponents of the Brazilian movement of *Cinema Novo*, expanded ethical principles of neorealism transforming their cinema into an ideological weapon and inspiring political filmmaking in the area. The new political and aesthetic cinematic project of creating radically new ways of filmmaking was based on a political and stylistic rejection of Hollywood film production (see Martin). However, the representatives of New Latin American cinema of the 1960s

makers to think critically about their societies. Neorealist cinema was an ethical statement that stood for cultural decolonization and class struggle against cultural hegemony. Latin American, Asian, and African filmmakers combined neorealist aesthetics with their local cinematic traditions and adapted them to respective sociohistorical contexts. They embraced certain aspects of neorealism while rejecting others, which has resulted in a variety of different narrative and stylistic choices.

1. Italian Neorealism

It was generally accepted among neorealist filmmakers that cinema could represent the real with few modifications from the filmmaker and reduce the ambiguities that might arise in the process of representation. Neorealism has never been considered a homogeneous film school or movement. However, neorealist films did comply with certain unwritten rules that guaranteed “truthfulness”: preference for medium and long shots, non-intrusive camera, non-professional actors, improvisation, natural light, shooting on locations, use of dialects and colloquial speech. Most neorealist directors were in favor of these “rules,” but only a few fully complied with them, which is evident in the films of three most famous neorealist directors: Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio De Sica, and Luchino Visconti. In *Rome, Open City* (*Roma, città aperta*, 1945), Roberto Rossellini used professional actors Anna Magnani and Aldo Fabrizi, the film was scripted and natural lighting was not an aesthetic choice but a necessity due to low budget and power cuts. Although De Sica’s *Bicycle Thieves* (*Ladri di biciclette*, 1948) complied with the majority of unwritten neorealist rules (non-professional actors, colloquial speech, predominance of medium and long shots), neorealist stylistic, technical, and ideological standards were fully embedded only in Visconti’s *The Earth Trembles* (*La terra trema*, 1948). The movie, based on Giovanni Verga’s novel *I Malavoglia* (1881), was shot in a small village in Sicily, with real fishermen who spoke in a local Sicilian dialect. Since the Sicilian dialect was not widely understood by Italians, subtitles in standard Italian were added in later versions. Unlike the majority of Italian directors of the period, Visconti refused dubbing the fishermen’s dialect in standard Italian in

soon felt the need to go beyond neorealist cinema and to establish their own political and aesthetic framework. Thus, Glauber Rocha, whose “aesthetics of hunger” served as the theoretical basis of *Cinema Novo*, recognized the importance of neorealism for Latin American cinema, but rejected any imitation. New Latin American cinema was aimed at changing the existing historical and social conditions (see Nowell-Smith).

order to respect linguistic authenticity and truthfulness of the representation. It is precisely because of stylistic and aesthetic diversity that it is impossible to talk about neorealism as a homogeneous film school or movement. Even the level of neorealist social commitment is disputable since the majority of neorealist filmmakers rarely addressed their protagonists' engagement with Fascism.²

The authenticity of Italian neorealism consisted in the capacity of Italian directors, such as Rossellini, De Sica and Visconti, to blur the boundary between documentary and fiction and to make the audience think that their artifice is real. Neorealist filmmakers rejected the conventions of the classical filmmaking and embedded the modes of documentary representation into fiction. They used some elements conventionally associated with documentary cinema (real people, events, and places) to documentarize fiction and to produce the illusion of authenticity. This process of blurring the distinctions between documentary and fiction has permanently changed the history of filmmaking. Neorealism was a particular form of both factual and fictional cinema that used the real in a dramatized form. This principle of dramatized actuality takes us far from the traditional perception of documentary as being in opposition to fiction.

Some film scholars have highlighted the aesthetic criteria and not so much the social content as the core of neorealist cinema. In his two volumes on cinema, *The Movement-Image* (vol. 1) and *The Time-Image* (vol. 2), Deleuze argues that the fundamental innovation of Italian neorealism is the shift from "movement-image" to "time-image." Italian neorealism marked the beginning of the "pure optical-sound image," in which the action is more observed than taken part in by the actors. In the historically dominant action-image, both movement and perception were related and easily comprehensible. The protagonists understood the problems and could act effectively to overcome the impediments. In the movement-image, time is subordinated to movement and it is measured as a process of action and reaction. The linear development of the plot is assured by the continuous linking of one shot to the next. In the movement-image, time

² Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* created the illusion of united Italy through the characters of common people engaged in the antifascist battle. It is surprising that the Fascists are almost completely absent from the movie. There are only few hints to the Fascist presence in Italy, mainly in the conversations and through the character of Marina, the lover of the partisan Manfredi. Marina is usually shown standing near the telephone – a direct reminder of Fascist "white telephones" cinema. The reluctance to deal openly with Fascist legacy in neorealist films may seem contradictory to the filmmakers' tendency to make socially engaged cinema but it can also reflect the unwillingness of Italian filmmakers to represent a disunited nation in the postwar period.

is reduced to intervals defined by movement and the linking of movements through editing. The organization of time is subordinated to the editing. In the time-image, this relation between movement and time becomes vague and difficult to comprehend. Linkages and connections in the narrative are weak and the characters struggle to comprehend the structure in order to be able to react. The dynamics of the classical cinema have been replaced by a new concept of movement that is no longer the measure of time. Chronological continuum is fragmented and time is discontinuous. Time no longer derives from movement but the movement derives from time. As Deleuze claims in his first volume on cinema, “there are five apparent characteristics of the new image: *the dispersive situation, the deliberately weak links, the voyage form, the consciousness of clichés, the condemnation of the plot*” (210). These characteristics are only preliminary conditions, continues Deleuze in the second volume on cinema: “They made possible, but did not yet constitute, the new image. What constitutes this is the purely optical and sound situation which takes the place of the faltering sensory-motor situations” (3). The optical situations that define neorealist films are different from the sensory-motor situations that Deleuze identifies with the old realism or the model of the action-image.

Gilles Deleuze identifies the movement-image with classical cinema and the time-image with modern cinema. The transition from the action-image to the time-image represents the gradual transformation in the nature of human thought. The changes in the audiovisual culture depended on social, economic, political, and historical factors that had influenced the development of the cultural image of thought. Apart from being the result of the aesthetic changes in the history of cinema, the passage from movement-image to time-image, in Deleuze’s view, was underpinned by the historical crisis of World War II. Italian neorealism was the first period in the history of cinema that represented the change that occurred in the nature of the image. Neorealist cinema was an attempt to purify the image from all the clichés. It was a period of critical rethinking of existing aesthetic codes. The change in the nature of belief is reflected in the type of cinema produced. The movement-image has derived from the deterministic model based on totality and unity. The situation changed in the postwar Europe. Traditional patterns of chronological time and linear narration began to dissolve, producing a change in the nature of image. Consequently, the narrative became more fragmented, as it may be seen in the films of Michelangelo Antonioni (*The Outcry, Il grido*, 1957; *The Adventure, L'avventura*, 1960;

The Eclipse, *Leclisse*, 1962), Federico Fellini, and Roberto Rossellini (*Rome, Open City*, 1945, *Germany, Year Zero, Germania, anno zero*, 1947; *Stromboli*, 1949; *Journey to Italy, Viaggio in Italia*, 1954). The reality in the new time-image is presented in a dispersive way, events are often incomprehensible, and the linking of images is often disconnected and no longer motivated by action. The logical linking of images of the movement-image is replaced by nonlinear relationships of the time-image. Therefore, modern cinema emerges as a result of the historical moment of uncertainty and disorder. This type of cinema stands as a metaphor of the probabilistic perception of reality.

2. Cesare Zavattini's Poetics of Objectivity

Cesare Zavattini was not only the most acclaimed neorealist screenwriter but also a theorist of neorealism, often credited as the true father of neorealism. Throughout his career of screenwriter, journalist and film critic, Zavattini played a pivotal role in the critical rethinking of the new postwar Italian cinema. In his articles and essays, Zavattini preserved an informal style of writing that sometimes led to theoretical inconsistencies. As he stated in the interview "La solitudine di Zavattini," published in the magazine *Film* in 1958, "[t]heoretically speaking, I believe I have very clear but simple, non-philosophical ideas on neorealism because I have neither cultural background, nor a proper language" (845).³

When evaluating his own contribution in rethinking neorealism, Zavattini stressed that in his view, neorealism was a moral obligation and not just an artistic movement. Zavattini's aim was to capture "film truth" – fragments of reality, which, when organized together, have a deeper truth that cannot be seen with the naked eye. The aim of the film is to discover truth in simple and everyday activities that have passed in front of our eyes unobserved. The main goal of the camera is no longer to represent but to reveal reality as Zavattini argues in his essay "Alcune idee sul cinema": "[t]he real effort is not to invent a story similar to real life but to narrate reality as if it were a story. The gap between life and spectacle should disappear" (721).⁴ The faith in the "miraculous" power of the camera comes from Zavattini's admiration of the Soviet documentarist Dziga

³ All translations from Italian are mine if not otherwise specified. E. B.

⁴ "Alcune idee sul cinema" (in Zavattini 718-36) was originally written as a preface to the script of Vittorio De Sica's movie, *Umberto D* (1952), and published in the journal *Rivista del cinema italiano* (December 1952). It is one of the most important articles on neorealism in which Zavattini outlined the main ideas on the new realist cinema.

Vertov. Both Zavattini and Vertov shared the idea that cinema was a tool for exploring and not just representing the real and, as such, should be used for educational purposes. The image is a metaphor of the *cine-eye* in action and the camera has the capacity to catch the reality in becoming. As Kracauer will argue a few years later in his volume *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, the camera represents and reveals at the same time (46-47). Just like Vertov, Bazin and Zavattini, he believed that reality cannot be perceived in its totality by the human eye. By representing the real, cinema explores and reveals its unknown aspects. Cinema, Kracauer continues, can transform the viewer into a conscious observer. Similarly, Zavattini argues, the process of representation should not be separated from the interpretation of reality. The camera, as a more perfect tool than the human eye, shows and reveals the hidden “truth.”

Although Zavattini was inspired by the Soviet school and Vertov’s work, he was not always in favor of realism intended as a passive recording of the real. He praised neorealism for its ethical and political engagement with everyday life, which he understood as a methodological, ideological, and artistic statement. Moreover, Zavattini’s attitude towards the use of montage in cinema is quite ambiguous. Although he had embraced Vertov’s ideas on montage in his prewar writings, his idea of spontaneous and immediate cinema matured in the post-war period when he stressed the importance of representing the real duration of events, minimizing editing, and using long shots as often as possible. He argued that editing was another type of intervention that rendered the representation of time unnatural and, as such, diminished the credibility and truthfulness of the audiovisual representation. Neorealist cinema, claimed Zavattini, stressed the present time, actuality, and spontaneity. Zavattini, just like Bazin in “The Myth of Total Cinema” (*What Is Cinema?* 1: 17-22), was fascinated by the dream of perfect realism, which respects the real duration of events whenever that was possible.

Although criticized for praising the objectivity of the *cine-eye*, he was not so naïve to believe in the absolute objectivity of the camera but he stood for a new cinema in which the modifications of the real appeared less intrusive. When he praised the technical capacities of the camera and invited young filmmakers to go out on the streets and to shoot real life instead of writing scripts, he simply wanted to highlight the fact that new cinema should be different from classical fiction films. His idea on cinema, as a spontaneous and immediate tool for representing the real, was in line with the theoretical framework of realist film the-

ories that emphasized the role of the camera as a tool for representing the real and also for creating the knowledge of the world. They did not simply advocate neutrality or objectivity of the camera. Cinema was perceived not only as a tool for representing the real but a powerful instrument for constructing the “truth.” Zavattini was aware of the filmmaker’s role in the representation. In his 1953 article “Tesi sul neorealismo,” he claimed that the process of filmmaking was a creative process influenced by the director’s choices.⁵ “Only for Zavattini and De Sica neorealism becomes a question of language: it is not a simple mimesis – the fact that what appears on screen really exists – but a genuine attempt to show the world as it appears” (Bertetto 166).

Zavattini’s notion of the new neorealist cinema was later discussed by the famous French film critic André Bazin in his essay on *Bicycle Thieves*, considered by the critic as one of the first examples of pure cinema: “No more actors, no more story, no more sets, which is to say that in the perfect aesthetic illusion of reality there is no more cinema” (*What Is Cinema?* 2: 60). In his analysis of *Bicycle Thieves*, Bazin argued that neorealist films can represent an ordinary story without structuring the narrative around traditional dramatic principles (*What Is Cinema?* 2: 47-60). The flow of events lacks any dramatic link, creating a new type of cinema that gives full power to reality as it is. In this contradictory claim, pure cinema is equivalent to the absence of cinema (“no more cinema”). Just like Zavattini, Bazin was quite contradictory in his praise of pure cinema. Both critics were not so naïve as to believe in the “purity” of the new cinema made by the simple overlapping of film and reality. On the contrary, they were well aware that the new realist cinema was the result of an artificially created illusion of reality. In his famous essay “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” André Bazin stressed:

Originality of photography as distinct from originality in painting lies in the essentially objective character of photography. For the first time, between the originating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrumentality of a nonliving agent. For the first time an image of the world is formed automatically without the creative intervention of man. The personality of the photographer enters into the proceedings only in

⁵ “any connection to the thing that we want to represent implies a *choice* and a creative act of a *subject*” (Zavattini 744).

his selection of the object to be photographed and by way of the purpose he has in mind. (*What Is Cinema?* 1: 13)

However, his perspective shifted in later essays on Italian neorealism, in which he mentioned imagination and subjective approach as essential components of any realism.⁶ Some film critics, especially those belonging to the early *Cahiers du Cinéma* circle, praised Italian neorealism for its new approach to reality. The understanding of neorealism among the budding French New Wave filmmakers coincided closely with Zavattini's assumption that every realism in art was first profoundly aesthetic. Bazin emphasized the radicalism of neorealist filmmakers, stressing their ability to merge two divergent tendencies into cinema: documentary and poetic. Neorealism has created the illusion of reality by blurring the traditional distinction between documentary and fiction film.

Bill Nichols described Italian neorealism as a fiction film movement that “accepted the documentary challenge to organize its aesthetics around the representation of everyday life not simply in terms of topics and character types but in the very organization of the image, shot and story” (167). Neorealist films “melded the observational eye of documentary with the intersubjective, identificatory strategies of fiction” (Nichols 167). Neorealist filmmakers used narrative modes in such a way as to conceal the process of the construction of a filmic text and make it look natural and spontaneous without many interventions from the director. Neorealism builds upon the presentation of things as they appear; the vision seems real and the representation persuasive. According to Bill Nichols, neorealism can be described as the “art of artlessness”; a style that used specific conventions and norms for visual representations that claimed transparency and authenticity (168).

While the most famous Italian neorealist filmmakers strove to “naturalize” fiction by representing it in a documentary-style, Zavattini tried to document reality by avoiding fictional elements as much as possible. Zavattini made a distinction between two different ways of representing reality in literature and on screen. In the interview “Basta con i soggetti” with the famous Italian director

⁶ “The real like the imaginary in art is the concern of the artist alone. The flash and blood of reality are no easier to capture in the net of literature or cinema than are gratuitous flights of the imagination. Or to put it another way, even when inventions and complexity of forms are no longer being applied to the actual content of the work, they do not cease thereby to have an influence on the effectiveness of the means” (Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* 2: 25).

Elio Petri,⁷ Zavattini declared that cinema and literature are two different modes of expression:

When I say “no more scripts,” it is because it seems to me that by inventing plots I betray immediacy and freshness of the camera that, thus, serves to translate and not to create; there is a gap between the time we imagine a plot and the time we shoot it with the camera. That is why I believe that the diary is the most complete and the most authentic form of cinema. When I say diary, I mean something new. It is not a specific diary, but immediate and not preconceived knowledge of ourselves and others. (689-90)

In the same interview, Zavattini argues that cinema is spontaneous and all the rules of the cinematic language are artificially imposed obstacles between the human eye and reality. He goes so far to claim that screenwriters are no longer needed since the new realist cinema does not tend to create events and situations but to represent them as they are. As Stefania Parigi notes, his assumption is grounded on the binary opposition between cinema as the art of presence, which enables the spectator to establish an unmediated contact with the represented objects, and literature as the art of absence that can only evoke, but not represent the real (47-81). Furthermore, Zavattini claims that literature is related exclusively to the past tense, while cinema is related to the present time and it captures events in real time.⁸ Cinema should coincide with reality but should not be its pure *mimesis*. Zavattini mentions this principle in several articles and interviews stating that the neorealist struggle is to make reality coincide with its representation. Reality is cinema in itself, argues Zavattini. Therefore, the plot and the narration are not necessary; real events can be dramatic and truthful in themselves. The new revelatory strength of cinema does not emerge from invented stories. Despite his praise for the alleged miraculous power of the camera, Zavattini was aware that reality existed only as a construction within a filmic text and he was precise about the methods to be applied when shooting neorealist films: films should be made without a script or a plot, they should be shot outside the studios with unprofessional actors, they should represent the real with very few mediations and interventions by the filmmaker.

⁷ The interview took place in 1950 and it has never been published.

⁸ Zavattini's ideas on the relationship between cinema and literature are discussed in “Contro il passato nel cinema” (Zavattini 928-56), an interview with Mino Argentieri from 1965, and in “Il cinema è in ritardo rispetto alla letteratura?” (Zavattini 893-99).

Some of his attitudes towards literature appear contradictory, especially if we bear in mind that he was the most famous neorealist screenwriter. Throughout his career, he strove to reconcile the two passions: the need to write and the need to escape all narrative modes. He was far from believing that cinema is not structured, but he believed that its discursive mechanisms were less intrusive and less mediated toward reality as well as less artificial than literary ones. With his ideas on cinema, Zavattini wanted to deconstruct the classical notion of cinema.

Zavattini's new realist cinema was based on his radical "poetics of objectivity" built upon a series of refusals of commercial film canons such as excessive use of montage, fictional characters, invented plots, and professional actors. The new type of cinema (*film-inchiesta*, *cinema-pedinamento*, *film-lampo*, *cinema d'incontro*)⁹ is a synonym for a kind of voyeuristic cinema, shot as if there was a hole in the wall. In the short article titled "Film lampo: sviluppo del neorealismo" (1952), Zavattini describes flash film (*film-lampo*) as:

The type of cinema shot with real people, who reenact their true stories in real places, emerges from my old desire to use cinema in order to understand what is going on around us in a direct and immediate way, and not in an indirect and mediated way used in fiction. I've always felt reluctant to sympathize with fictional characters, knowing that there are real people that desperately need our compassion and our solidarity. (711)

This new cinema, as Zavattini argues in the article, does not exclude any topic or any event. It can hardly be compared to any film genre. Zavattini combines several *avant-garde* tendencies that a few years later will appear under the names of direct cinema or *cinéma vérité* in France: voyeuristic methods, abolition of traditional narrative forms, interviews, tendency towards morally and politically engaged cinema, preference for nonprofessional actors who reenacted their real life experiences, and the use of light equipment that allows more intimacy in the filmmaking. His ideas on radical neorealist cinema – aimed at deconstructing traditional narrative patterns and film genres – preceded sub-

⁹ The definitions of different types of cinema proposed by Zavattini are scattered in different writings and interviews (now gathered in Zavattini 2002): "Del film inchiesta, autobiografico e di altro" (907-27, interview with Francesco Bolzoni made in 1963), "Che cos'è il film-lampo" (708-10, short article first published in *Premio letterario*, in 1952), "Film lampo: sviluppo del neorealismo" (711-13, manuscript), "Tesi sul neorealismo" (741-52, first published in the journal *Emilia* no.17, in November 1953).

versive new waves in the 1960s and the 1970s, US experimental cinema, and European *avant-garde* cinema (see Barattoni 112-50; Saunders 5-24).

In 1953, Zavattini shot the first of his “investigative films” (*film-inchiesta*), *Caterina's Story* (*La storia di Caterina*), co-directed with Francesco Maselli. The film is a part of the six episode film *Love in the City* (*Amore in città*).¹⁰ Each episode is directed by a different director: Carlo Lizzani, Michelangelo Antonioni, Cesare Zavattini and Francesco Maselli, Dino Risi, Federico Fellini, and Alberto Lattuada. This pilot project will be followed by a series of other “investigative films” such as *Women* (*Siamo donne*, 1953), a confession film where different actresses reenact some important moments in their lives, *Italian Women and Love* (*Le italiane e l'amore*, 1961), and *Mysteries of Rome* (*I misteri di Roma*, 1963). The idea behind *Love in the City* was to make a movie on love in which ordinary people reenact real stories that really happened to them. Zavattini describes them as interpreters of their own existence and protagonists of their own lives. “Investigative film” is based on insignificant facts from everyday life in which any man can be a potential hero. It is a film about a man caught in small and unimportant moments of his daily routine. According to Zavattini in his “Il neorealismo continua,”

[f]or this type of movie active or passive collaboration – hopefully only active after some time – of all the team is needed to make a common effort, almost a ritual, to comprehend our deeds, to understand the relations, ambiguous links between our actions and those of others, which will help us understand the meaning of our existence and our place in the society. (717)¹¹

Zavattini's choice to put Caterina Rigoglioso, a real person as the main protagonist of his first “investigative movie,” *Caterina's Story*, met with sharp criticisms of his trenchant dogmatism, but also of his style. Critics have argued that Caterina's bad acting reduced her credibility as an actress. In an interview titled “Neorealismo, fatto morale” with Fernaldo Di Giammatteo, Zavattini argued:

The claim that Caterina was only 50% successful as an actress, comes from the critics' assumption that Caterina should have acted like a professional

¹⁰ The film consists of the following episodes: *Amore che si paga*, *Tentato suicidio*, *Paradiso per tre ore*, *Agenzia matrimoniale*, *Storia di Caterina*, and *Gli italiani si voltano*.

516 ¹¹ The article was written in 1952 but it was published in *La Gazzetta di Modena* in May 1953.

actress; but that concept of actress has vanished in favor of people with name and surname. Emotions and values that motivate her are different from those of an actress; it is necessary that the audience comprehends the new concept of having a real person on screen from the first shot. (788)¹²

The naturalness of Caterina's acting stressed the importance of lived experience over fictional character. Owing to Zavattini's approach, the epistemological shift in representing the real occurred. The act of representation in *Caterina's Story* differs from the previous methods. Embodied knowledge becomes the core of the plot. Although Zavattini centers the narrative of his film around real people, the author is still the dominant voice: he presents the character of Caterina at the beginning of the movie, provides the spectators with basic information on her past and present situation and comments on her actions throughout the movie. The basic principle of Zavattini's cinema can be defined as the dramatization of actuality. The boundaries between private and public, past and present, no longer seem clear. The story of the individual, Caterina Rigoglioso, speaks to and on behalf of the whole social body.

Throughout his career, Zavattini argued that cinema should be a socially committed art. He saw neorealism as having a role in the development of society. In order to obtain that goal, cinema should undergo a process of "democratization" and become accessible to the masses. Participation is the key word for the type of relationship between the spectator and the film: everybody should participate in the matters that concern the community. According to Zavattini in "Il cinema e l'uomo moderno," the biggest mistake in film history was the choice to follow Méliès and not Lumière type of cinema; the cinema of attractions versus the cinema of reality (678).¹³ Fiction films alienate the spectator from his/her true self. A film is seen as a mass ritual aimed at involving the entire community in the process of increasing the level of awareness that would eventually enable individuals to comprehend the true meaning of their actions. Neorealist films should direct the viewer's gaze toward specific social issues and voice a subjective judgment on it. Viewers' involvement with the movie and their participation in the construction of knowledge is the path to the new collective

¹² The interview with Fernaldo Di Giammatteo was first published in *Rassegna del film* (no.2) in June 1954.

¹³ These ideas were first mentioned in the talk Zavattini gave at Convegno internazionale di cinematografia, held in Perugia in September 1949.

consciousness. Zavattini believed that films can compel spectators to engage in a new understanding of the world. That is one of the reasons why he was against fiction that prevents direct and immediate contact between the spectator and the reality. In his opinion, fiction films are produced for amusement only and as such prevent the spectator to engage seriously with the world around him. Only his new realist cinema gives the spectator a chance to experience situations similar to his/her own. In neorealist films, fictional style and documentary rhetoric make the illusion that the experience of characters stands for the experience of the audience. Neorealist cinema does not intensify the melodrama for the sake of the plot. On the contrary, it draws attention to the issues it addresses.

Conclusion

The impact of Zavattini's ideas on film criticism in Italy was significant despite the fact that his approach was often considered too radical. Many of Zavattini's concepts can be considered *avant-garde* for that period. The most important theorist of neorealism stood for a direct, spontaneous and immediate cinema as well as for the abolition of fiction films and narration. The aim of Zavattini's neorealist cinema was not to create characters but to focus on real people and real events that already had dramatic potential. Despite his desire to eliminate all that was fictional from his films, Zavattini's concept of new realist cinema cannot simply be described as a documentary approach. He was not so much interested in making documentary films but in making documentary-like fictions. Zavattini's radical neorealism first developed as a combination of experimental and amateur film that never developed into a proper *avant-garde* film movement. He tried to put two opposite tendencies – populist and *avant-garde* – together because he believed in the potential of cinema to reach wide audience and in its capacity to be aesthetically subversive. The aspiration for an *avant-garde* cinema that would reach the masses was a naïve attempt that was too radical for the Italian cinema at the time and was doomed to failure. Another reason, Stefania Parigi argues, could have been the existence of two different realist tendencies among Italian film critics (203-04). In the early 1950s, the majority of the Marxist film critics – gathered around Guido Aristarco and the film journal *Cinema Nuovo* – promoted the return to the narrative modes of the nineteenth century novel and ignored Zavattini's radical ideas on neorealism. They criticized Zavattini for his documentary-like cinema that, according to them, lacked critical depth and political message. The modernity of Zavattini's

thought is evident when contextualized within European cinema. Most of his ideas were not accepted in Italy, but he was admired by young filmmakers all over the world. His ideas on non-fiction cinema were too radical for the time, but some of them were realized few decades later in the works of famous *cinéma vérité* documentarists and independent *avant-garde* filmmakers such as Stan Brakhage or Jonas Mekas.

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POETIKA OBJEKTIVNOSTI CESAREA ZAVATTINIJA

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Cesare Zavattini bio je poznati neorealistički scenarist i teoretičar neorealizma. Imao je ključnu ulogu u kritičkom promišljanju novog poslijeratnog talijanskog filma premda su većinu njegovih ideja smatrali avangardnima za to vrijeme. Zalagao se za direktan, spontan i neposredan film sa stvarnim ljudima i stvarnim događajima. Usprkos želji da eliminira sve što je fiktionalno iz svojih filmova, Zavattinijev koncept novog neorealističkog filma ne može se jednostavno svesti pod formulu dokumentarca. On nije bio toliko zainteresiran za snimanje dokumentaraca koliko za snimanje doku-fikcije. Vjerovao je da film može doprijeti do široke publike, ali i da ima mogućnost da bude estetski subverzivan. Ideja o avangardnom filmu koji može doprijeti do mase bio je naivan pokušaj koji je bio preradikalalan za talijanski film tog vremena. Većina njegovih ideja nije bila prihvaćena u Italiji, ali bio je uzor mladim sineastima diljem svijeta. Neke od njegovih ideja realizirat će se nekoliko desetljeća kasnije u filmovima poznatih *cinéma vérité* i nezavisnih avangardnih redatelja. Cijelu svoju karijeru Zavattini je tvrdio da film mora biti društveno angažirana umjetnost. Vjerovao je da neorealistički filmovi trebaju usmjeriti pogled gledatelja na određene društvene probleme i iznijeti subjektivan stav o njima. U neorealističkim filmovima fikcija i dokumentaristička retorika stvaraju iluziju da iskustvo likova predstavlja iskustvo publike.

Ključne riječi: talijanski neorealizam, Cesare Zavattini, poslijeratni talijanski film, poetika objektivnosti, istraživački film, instant-film