

Docustories

Imagination & reality in documentary filmmaking

Outline

- ž **Documentary** film: how does it relate to reality?
- ž **Italian documentary** filmmaking and the **neo-realist** legacy.
- ž Documentary filmmaking as a **genre**
- ž The **city** as a favourite setting
- ž Walking through the city: emotions & geography = psychogeography

A. Caccia, *L'Estate vola*

- ž Representation of the city
- ž Main characters
- ž Fact vs fiction?
- ž Notion of realism?



Does the film easily connect to neorealism?

- ž Does the story refer to a person/character in particular? Is the character living an average situation?
- ž Is the main focus on the character or on the community?
- ž Which city is referred to?
- ž How's the city represented?
- ž Does the filmmaker choose a specific point of view? If so, how's this choice made evident?

On Caccia's documentary film

ž The film is set in Milan, in August. The city appears abandoned, a desert place where the narrating voice looks for someone who's gone lost and who seems to be his relatives. The narrating voice seems a foreigner and looks at the city through foreign eyes, without fully understanding what he sees. The city does not appear to him as very fascinating: quite the opposite. Eventually he wouldn't find what he's looking for and he would go back home before dying in such an alien place.

ž

L'estate vola was nominated in various festival, both national and international (Festival dei Popoli di Firenze, CortoImolaFilmFestival, Visioni Italiane BO, Festival del cinema africano di Milano, Hamburg shortfilmfestival.)

ž Italia - 2000 - 18' - DVD - Andrea Caccia

ž WEBSITE [Andrea Caccia - CinematItaliano.info](http://AndreaCaccia-CinematItaliano.info)

Italian documentary filmmaking: birth & development

- ž shaped as a genre not necessarily connected to political propaganda: end 50's
- ž Main directors: Vittorio De Seta, PP Pasolini, Alberto Grifi, Cecilia Mangini, Silvano Agosti
- ž End 90s: it seems disappeared as a cinematic genre
- ž Today: new birth, going back to the legacy of neo-realism

Basic assumption

Documentary filmmaking and neorealist cinema are quite near, & to a certain extent some of the basic principles of neorealist cinema defines new paths for developments and approaches in contemporary European documentary filmmaking

Documentary filmmaking as a genre

Mimetic implication inbuilt in documentary filmmaking:
misjudgement.

Documentary film = a movie about real life



Documentary filmmakers: not journalist bu storytellers.

- References:
 - J. Corner, *The Art of Documentary* (ch.1, pp.9-11 +24-27)
 - P.Aufderheide, *Documentary Film. A Very Short Introduction* (Ch.1, pp. 1-26 & pp.51-55)

Contradictions

- ž Reality is not what is out there but what we know, understand, and share with each other of what is out there
 - ž Documentary is currently felt as the “artistic representation of actuality”
 - ž Documentary as always implying a tension between representation & reality
 - ž Documentary filmmakers, just like any other filmmaker, operate choices in terms of form, and they are acutely aware that all their choices shape the meanings they choose
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- References:
 - J. Corner, *The Art of Documentary* (ch.1, pp.9-11 +24-27)
 - P.Aufderheide, *Documentary Film. A Very Short Introduction* (Ch.1, pp. 1-26 & pp.51-55)

Research question

ž What allows us to separate & distinguish a documentary film from a neorealist film, set in the same city and developing around the same kind of characters (i.e. *Miracolo a Milano* & *L'estate vola*)?

Rif. critici:

- Ø P. Aufderheide, *Documentary Film. A Very Short Introduction* (Ch.1, pp. 1-26 & pp.51-55)
- Ø E. Barnouw, *Documentary. A History of the Non-Fiction Film* (1993)

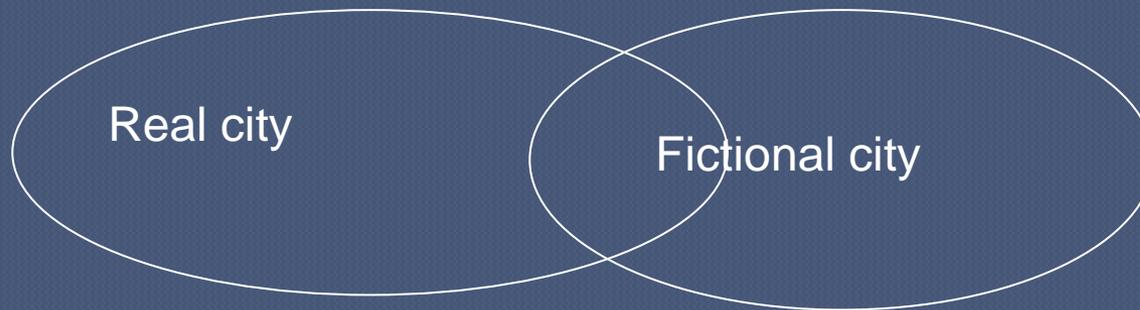
Favourite setting: the city

- ž Documentary filmmaking's tradition: Ruttmann, Watt & Wright, Jennings
- ž Diachronic & synchronic development: interweaving at a faster pace
- ž Space & place: more emphasis on the relationship between architectures & community

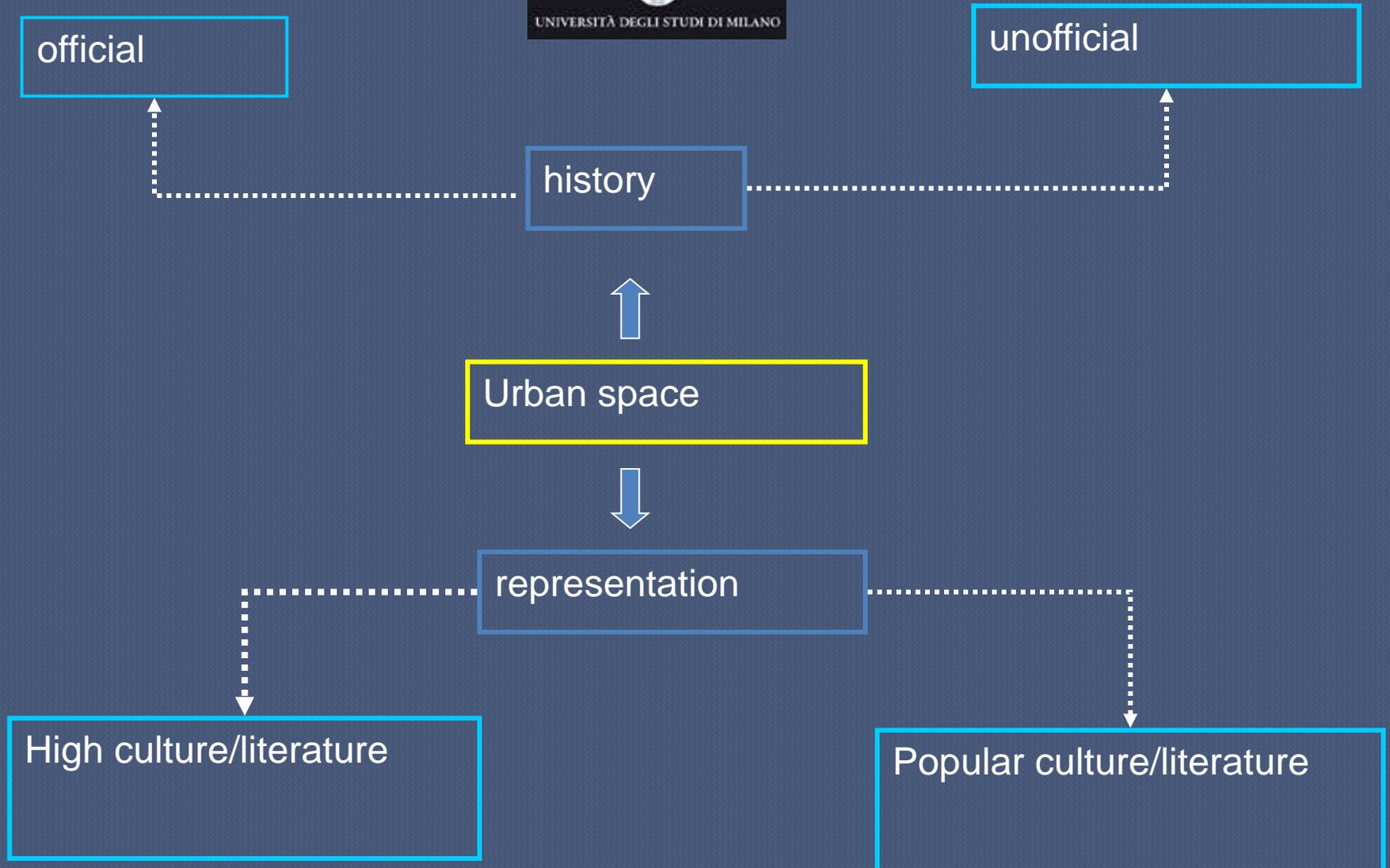
ž References:

- M. Coverley, *Psychogeography* (2006)
- I. Chambers, "Maps, Movies, Music and Memories" (1997)
- P. Aufderheide, *Documentary Film. A Very Short Introduction* (2007)
- E. Barnouw *Documentary. A History of the Non-Fiction Film* (1993) → (Flaherty & Grierson; Jennings)

We are able to operate in urban society only because the surface of the city and the people in it (including ourselves) are opaque, historically contingent, complexly determined, but also, in some ways and to some degree, legible. And, agreeing here with Lefebvre, that legibility requires less the angelic skill of perfect reading than the human powers of imagination (Donald 1999:18)



This traffic between urban fabric, representation and imagination fuzzies up the epistemological and ontological distinctions and, in doing so, produces the city between, the imagined city where we actually live (Donald 1999: 8)



Favourite characters

- ž Streetpeople
- ž Marginal people
- ž People who's not normally felt or deemed as relevant

ž References:

- G. Bridge & S. Watson "Introduction: Reading City Imagination", in G. Bridge & S. Watson (eds), *The Blackwell City Reader* (2002).
- P. Brooker, *Modernity and the Metropolis. Writing, Film and urban Formations* (2002)

Reportage & commitment: documentary filmmaking as a tool to focus on a specific issue

- Ø Polis, or the city as a community
- Ø The Other as a marginal member
- Ø The Other as a stranger:
Migration & integration
- Ø The Other as a person you need to know: documentation
- Ø The Other as a voice to be listened to



How to cope with the *Other* within the borders of the metropolis?

Exploring the city following one's own emotions

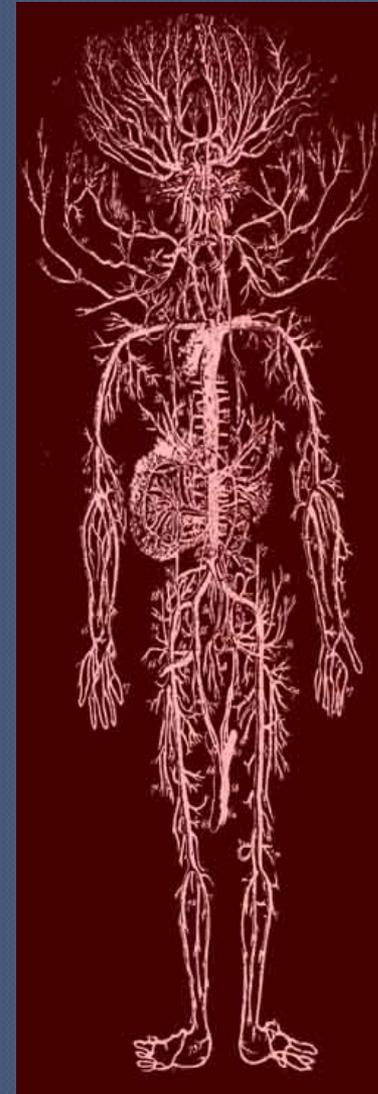
“Psychogeography” – definitions:

Psychogeography is where psychology & geography collide

Psychogeography research is carried through non-scientific methods such as the derive, aimless drifting through the city, trying to record the emotions given by a particular place; and mental mapping, the production of mood-based map.

References:

M. Coverley, *Psychogeography* (2006)



Guidelines in contemporary filmmakings

- ž Forgotten memories
- ž Nostalgia
- ž Migration
- ž Migration as a one-way journey



- ž *My Marlboro City* (V.Pedicini, 2011)
[Euganea Film Festival 2011 - My Marlboro city di Valentina Pedicini \(Documentario\)](#)

Innovation & tradition

z “But realist documentary, with its streets and cities and slums and markets and exchanges and factories, has given itself the job of making poetry where no poet has gone before it, and where no ends, sufficient for the purposes of art, are easily observed. It requires not only taste but also inspiration, which is to say a very laborious, deep-seeing, deep-sympathising creative effort indeed” (Grierson in *Corner*)

- Walther Ruttmann, *Berlin: die Sinfonie der Grosstadt* (1927)
- Grierson, *Drifters* (1929): “an epic of steam & steel”
- Harry Watt & Basil Wright, *Night Mail* (1936)
- Jennings: definito “The one real poet”

Conclusions?

- ž Invisibility & voice over
- ž Style: hybridization
- ž Commitment
- ž Narration: often prevailing on representation