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Queer Gender Performativity in Documentary Cinema: The Transgender Look of Italian Filmmaker Simone Cangelosi¹

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Abstract. This article analyses the ways in which Italian filmmaker Simone Cangelosi enacts a queer countervisuality in his documentary films *Dalla testa ai piedi* (2007) and *Una nobile rivoluzione* (2014). The theoretical framework traces a genealogy from what has been termed as fe/male gazes up to what can be understood as transgender, queer and feminist gazes. Connections between the performative mode of representation, performative documentary cinema and gender performativity are also established. By means of a close reading of both films and an interview with the filmmaker, this paper argues that queer ways of seeing in documentary cinema cannot only depict existing realities but also put forward other ways of being, becoming and collectively enacting the right to appear.

Keywords: queer visuality; documentary cinema; gender performativity; transgender look; Simone Cangelosi.

[es] Performatividad *queer* del género en el cine documental: La mirada transgénero del cineasta italiano Simone Cangelosi

Resumen. Este artículo analiza la forma en la que la contravisualidad *queer* del cineasta italiano Simone Cangelosi opera en sus documentales *Dalla testa ai piedi* (2007) y *Una nobile rivoluzione* (2014). El marco teórico traza una genealogía desde las llamadas miradas masculina y femenina, hasta las miradas transgénero, *queer* y feministas. También se establecen conexiones entre el modo de representación performativo, el cine documental performativo y la performatividad de género. Mediante una lectura detallada de las dos películas y una entrevista con el cineasta, este artículo argumenta que en el cine documental una manera *queer* de ver puede representar no sólo realidades existentes sino también otras formas de ser, de convertirse y de ejercer colectivamente el derecho a aparecer.

Palabras clave: visualidad queer; cine documental; performatividad de género; mirada transgénero; Simone Cangelosi

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1. Queer ways of seeing: from the fe/male gaze to the transgender look

Over more than forty years of feminist thought systematised around the seventh art, different methodologies have been adapted for “making visible the invisible” (Kuhn 1994: 67). The goal has been to reveal oppressions, absences and contradictions naturalised by androcentric practices and discourses not only within the film texts, but also within their contexts of

production, distribution and exhibition. This section of the article reviews feminist film theory insights on the gaze(s) so as to trace a genealogy from so-called fe/male gazes up to what can be understood as transgender and feminist gazes.

In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger describes some of the main characteristics of the gaze solicited by the tradition of European oil painting, which shaped the Western way of seeing between the sixteenth and the twentieth century. One of its main features, the use

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of perspective, “makes the single eye the centre of the visible world” (1972: 16) and, in so doing, it elicits a beholder similar to an invisible God for whom everything exists to be looked at. In his analysis of the nude, where the subject being depicted is always a woman, Berger argues that the beholder is gendered. Indeed:

...men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object –and most particularly an object of vision: a sight. (1972: 47)

Within the nude tradition, the naked bodies of women are turned into objects to be looked at by the spectator-owner of the painting, who is always conceived as ideally male. What Berger explains is that these conventions of the oil painting establish a way of seeing in which men remain subjects with an objectifying gaze directed outwards, while women are turned into things or abstractions, forced to adopt an internalised male gaze directed inwards. This operates as a kind of patriarchal inner panopticon⁴ with which women “survey like men, their own femininity” (1972: 63). Such a distribution of active and passive roles in our ways of seeing was to be one of the main issues tackled by feminist film theory since its beginnings.

Psychoanalysis has been key in understanding the fascination with cinema, starting with Sigmund Freud’s concept of scopophilia, i.e. “the drive to pleasurable looking” (Kuhn 1994: 44). This is closely linked with voyeurism: being able to look into a private world, objectifying what is seen without the risk of being looked at. What feminist film theory has made explicit is that such pleasures are gendered as well. First published in *Screen* in 1975, Laura Mulvey’s pioneer essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” asserts that visual pleasure is exclusively designed for a male spectator who identifies with the main character/active owner of the gaze, while the female characters occupy the passive position of objects to-be-looked-at.

Women as sexual objects is the leitmotif of visual spectacle in mainstream cinema. Nevertheless, despite this objectification, women continue to evoke the threat of castration. Thus, two strategies are used to neutralise them: turning them into a fetish (fetishism) and trying to solve their mystery so as to finally devalue, punish or redeem them (sadism). Patriarchal desire, projected from a Godlike perspective, organises

space and time in dominant cinema. Its mechanisms are invisible due to the manipulation of the cinematic codes (such as diverse shots, editing, and the shot/countershot system). The female spectator is caught between having to accept the masochistic position of the passive object and having to adopt the male gaze.

What Mulvey proposes is a deconstruction of the cinematic apparatus based upon three gazes: that of the filmmaker-camera, that of the spectator, and that of the characters onscreen. In dominant cinema, the former two (camera and viewer) are hidden and subordinated by the third one, the gazes exchanged by the characters onscreen. This is carried out by means of a suture mechanism, which hides the fragmentation inherent to editing, eliminates the intrusive presence of the camera, prevents the audience’s detachment, and relieves the anxiety generated by the off-screen space. One way to undermine this system is to raise awareness of the camera when, for example, a character breaks the fourth wall and looks directly towards the audience.

Mulvey’s essay has been of great importance in understanding the gendered dynamics of dominant cinema. However, it has limitations, starting from the fact that it fixes visual pleasure within sexual difference, conceiving the subjects under the universal and essential categories of Man and Woman. Its psychoanalytic framework negates any possibility for a so-called female visual pleasure, same-sex or gender-radical desires and, as stated by lesbian and black feminist film critics, “it also neglects differences among women –of ethnicity, class, age and sexuality” (Smelik 1993: 77).

For Teresa de Lauretis, films as those directed by Chantal Akerman, Lizzie Borden and Sally Potter, manage to open up spaces of vision for the female gaze, by means of an appropriation of the three gazes system, so that the points of view and identification with characters and camera are all female. However, theorists such as Ann Kaplan (1997), Mary Ann Doane (1999), Jane Gaines (2000) and bell hooks (2000) have emphasised that fe/male gazes are not universal, but negotiated by other categories like race. What hooks proposes is “an oppositional gaze (...) [developed] via an understanding and awareness of the politics of race and racism” (2000: 516). Such a gaze is the result of an active resistance towards the imposition of colonial ways of looking and sets the basis for “a theory of looking relations where cinematic visual delight is the pleasure of interrogation” (2000: 519). She also claims for an intersectional feminist film theory that goes beyond sexual difference as “the primary and/or exclusive signifier of difference” (2000: 517).

Judith/Jack Halberstam talks of a “transgender look” “capable of seeing through the present to a future elsewhere” (2005: 77). It questions the gendering of the gaze as always male or female, opting out for heterogeneous ways of seeing that exceed fixed identity categories. Halberstam finds examples of the transgender look in films such as *By Hook or*

⁴ The panopticon is a prison designed by English philosopher Jeremy Bentham. It is organised as a concentric building composed of ring cells surrounding a tower. From inside the tower, the guard can see and hear all the activity inside the cells without being seen by the prisoner himself. As a result, prisoners self-regulate their behaviour by imagining themselves being monitored. Foucault elaborates on this concept so as to explain how human beings assume self-regulation practices in response to surveillance systems, even when these are not evident. Power has to be “visible and unverifiable” (Foucault 1977: 201).

by *Crook* (2001) and *Boys Don't Cry* (1999). In the former, it is elicited by means of the construction that directors, Silas Howard and Harriet Dodge, make of an almost entirely queer universe. In the case of *Boys Don't Cry*, director Kimberly Peirce gives spectators access to looking “with the transgender character instead of at him” (Halberstam 2005: 78). Peirce manages to do so by threading the realistic film with a few fantasy shots, with which she creates a counternarrative to the tragic end of the main character (Brandon Teena, an American trans man, raped and murdered in 1993). In one particular shot/countershot sequence, Brandon is shown looking at himself, the embodied castrated Brandon gazing at the disembodied transgender one. In this scene, the transgender look:

...is constituted as a look divided within itself, a point of view that comes from two places (at least) at the same time (...) if usually the shot/reverse shot both secures and destabilizes the spectator's sense of self, now the shot/reverse shot involving the two Brandons serves both to destabilize the spectator's sense of gender stability and confirms Brandon's manhood at the very moment that he has been exposed as female/castrated (Halberstam 2005: 88-89).

This possibility of a gaze in-and-out of gender brings us to what could be considered a feminist and queer gaze: a point of view which de-centers the apparent coherence of the androcentric subject, the point(s) of view of eccentric others (re)produced in films “which inscribe that movement in and out of ideology, that crossing back and forth of the boundaries –and of the limits– of sexual difference” (de Lauretis 1987: 25). This feminist-queer gaze could be defined as the gaze of the inappropriate/d other or same “who moves about with always at least two gestures: that of affirming ‘I am like you’ while persisting in her difference and that of reminding ‘I am different’ while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at” (Minh-ha 1997: 418).

Donna Haraway has written about the connection between feminist objectivity, knowledge and embodied vision. The totalising gaze from the “unmarked positions of Man and White” (1988: 581), she argues, should be replaced with a gaze sustained by “location, embodiment, and partial perspective” (1988: 584). Haraway advocates for a feminist understanding of objectivity as situated knowledges that “allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see” (1988: 583). She stands for a feminist reclaiming of vision as partial perspectives of multidimensional subjectivities accountable for their positionings. Therefore, feminist, queer and eccentric gazes must be accountable and responsible, views from somewhere” (1988: 590) as this article proposes.

2. Gender performativity and performative documentary

In this article, performativity is understood in three senses, following Bill Nichols (2010), Stella Bruzzi

(2000) and Judith Butler (2015). For Bill Nichols, the performative is one of the six possible modes of representation in documentary cinema, the other five being: expository, observational, poetic, participatory and reflexive. While one mode might prevail over the others in any documentary, it is common for various modes to converge in one. Indeed, despite their dominant use of the performative mode, the documentary films we analyse in this article also resort to expository, participatory and reflexive modes of representation, as we will see below.

Performative documentary cinema emphasises the subjective and affective dimensions of our knowledge of the world, by stressing “the emotional complexity of experience from the perspective of the filmmaker him– or herself” (Nichols 2010: 202). It usually combines imaginary aspects and autobiographical facts, so it frequently resorts to a diaristic model, as well as to flashbacks, repetitions and/or frozen frames. Information and facts yield to “an expressive quality that affirms the highly situated, embodied, and vividly personal perspective of specific subjects” (2010: 203). Despite the centrality it gives to personal experience, it always joins “the particular to the general, the individual to the collective, and the personal to the political” (2010: 204)⁵.

Some critics claim that documentary cinema is always a performative act, regardless of the modes of representation it employs. Stella Bruzzi, for instance, argues that documentaries are “the result of the intrusion of the filmmaker onto the situation being filmed” (2000: 8). This, she continues, rather than invalidate the authenticity of documentary replaces its idea of unmediated transparency “with a performative exchange between subjects, filmmakers/apparatus and spectators” (2000: 6). Instead of presenting a reality that exists previously and independently, performative documentary cinema shows realities resulting from the intervention of the camera and/or the film production, situations created from the very action of making a documentary film.

Paraphrasing the original definition of the concept of performativity as utterances that bring what they state into being (Austin 1975 [1962]), it can be said that the power of documentary cinema is “to bring about a new situation or to set into motion a set of effects” (Butler 2015: 28). It could be productive to link this idea with the translation that Judith Butler makes of performativity in gender theory, explaining how gender is the product of constant repetition:

...to say that gender is performative is to say that it is a certain kind of enactment; the “appearance” of gender is often mistaken as a sign of its internal or inherent truth; gender is prompted by obligatory norms that demand that we become one gender or the other (usually

⁵ An example provided by Nichols is Marlon Riggs's *Tongues Untied* (1989), a documentary film which combines declarations, reenactments, poetic recitations and staged performances, through which spectators “are invited to experience what it feels like to occupy the subjective, social position of a black, gay male” (2010: 204).

within a strictly binary frame); the reproduction of gender is thus always a negotiation with power (2015: 32).

The moment we are born we are forced to enact the gender that we are assigned though in this repetition something may go awry or queer, opening up possibilities for change. Butler points out that choice in such deviations from the norm comes later in the process for we are “gendered prior to understanding anything about how gender norms act upon and shape us” (2015: 63). Eccentricity is punished rather than celebrated and usually encounters harassment, pathologisation, precarity, and violence. This is where the political dimension of gender performativity theory becomes evident. Butler summarises the ultimate aspiration of gender performativity theory as “to let the lives of gender and sexual minorities become more possible and more livable, for bodies that are gender nonconforming as well as those that conform too well (and at a high cost) to be able to breathe and move more freely in public and private spaces” (2015: 32).

Queer (counter)visuality practices in documentary cinema might manage to render gender performativity visible by expanding and overthrowing the androcentric regime of gender visuality and creating legibility for gender nonconforming subjects. The performative potential that documentary has to co-create the realities it shows, makes it possible for it to operate as countervisuality in two levels: depicting existing realities and putting forward other ways of seeing, being and becoming.⁶

In the following sections, this theoretical framework is used to identify practices of queer countervisuality in two documentaries directed by Italian filmmaker Simone Cangelosi: *Dalla testa ai piedi* (*From Head to Foot*, 2007) and *Una nobile rivoluzione* (*A Noble Revolution*, 2014). Both depart from the realist documentary conventions, resorting instead to reflexive and performative modes of representation. The method employed for the analysis is close-reading as reappropriated by contemporary feminist methodologies: a bridge between formalist and poststructuralist approaches, starting from the text, but recognising “the *contextuality* and *historicity* of any reading” (Lukic and Sánchez 2011: 106).

3. *Dalla testa ai piedi*: a filmic self-construction process

Simone Cangelosi was born in Pisa in 1968. His work has been triggered by a personal need that reaches a socio-political dimension. In his filmography, Cangelosi has narrated transsexual vital trajectories, starting from his own female-to-male transition. In

an interview carried out with Cangelosi in 2017, he refused to label himself and his films as feminist. Still, he makes it clear that it’s not because of a rejection of feminism, since he acknowledges the feminist roots of the transsexual movement and the debts of the LGBT community towards feminism:

I do not consider myself as such [i.e. feminist]. Being over and done with my female identity, I don’t think in these terms any longer. Certainly I do not claim this definition but this does not mean that I would dislike people to think of me as a feminist (...) The LGBT movement has debts towards feminism because it all comes from there. Without the feminist debate, there wouldn’t have been any other.⁷

Cangelosi also refuses to label his cinema as LGBT, trans or queer. Rather, he defines his work as balancing his own expressive needs and politics and encompasses all these labels under the umbrella concept of political cinema. The goal, he asserts, is not to talk just to and between people who identify within these categories, but to reach out to those who normally would not listen to these narratives:

For me the most important thing is that my cinema addresses the world, raising these issues and these contents –LGBT, queer, trans and feminist, if you want– because it is the world that has to change.⁸

Film critic Adriano Aprá has compared Cangelosi’s opera prima, *Dalla testa ai piedi* (2007), to Alina Marazzi’s *Un’ora sola ti vorrei* (2002) since both express a traumatic experience connected with their identities by employing a creative montage of home movies, facilitated by digital technology. For Aprá, these films are examples of a type of non-fiction cinema that manages to effectively convey the filmmakers’ subjective experiences to a wider audience (2017: 96).

Cangelosi has directed three films, two of which, *Felliniana* (2010) and *Una nobile rivoluzione* (2014), are homages to transsexual activist Marcella di Folco. He recognises that his participation in the feminist movement during his university years influenced his filmmaking choices in at least two ways: starting from oneself and making visible the invisible. He insists that, though the drive for making his films has been an intimate need, they can be regarded as much as political as they are personal:

The feminists say “a partire da sé”, that is, the concept of “starting from oneself”; that film [*Dalla...*] cer-

⁶ The concept of “visuality” has its origins in 1840. Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle used it to refer to as “the visualization of history” through “the tradition of heroic leadership” (Mirzoeff 2011: 474-475). Mirzoeff coins the word “countervisuality” in order to refer to a resistant vision that takes place when the “right to look where none technically exists” (2011: 478) is enacted.

⁷ The interview was conducted in Italian and took place in Bologna, on October 25th 2017. All translations for this article are ours. Original fragment: “Io non mi considero tale, avendo chiuso con l’identità femminile, non ho più pensato in questi termini. Certamente non mi approprio di questa definizione ma questo non significa che non mi faccia piacere se uno pensa che io sia femminista (...) Il movimento LGBT ha dei debiti verso il femminismo, perché viene da lì, se non ci fosse stata quella messa in discussione non ci sarebbe stato tutto il resto”.

⁸ Original fragment: “Per me la cosa più importante è che il mio cinema si rivolga al mondo, porgendo fuori queste tematiche e questi contenuti –appunto LGBT, queer, trans e femministe se vuoi-, perché è il mondo che deve cambiare.”

tainly comes from a lesson I learned, which is that of “starting from oneself” (...) *Dalla testa ai piedi* managed to express something that I would not be able to express in any other way than with a film because it shows the process of my change to someone who could not follow it, to others, a process that otherwise remains invisible.⁹

The process to which he alludes is that of his transition from Simona to Simone. And it is precisely in the rendering visible of this process of becoming, that the performative character of *Dalla testa ai piedi* emerges: by filming films his body throughout the process of his becoming legible as male Cangelosi co-creates the reality he films.

The 28-minutes-long documentary is a video-diary in which he combines home movies, archival materials of the LGBT Italian movement, registers of his everyday activities, animations, a conversation with his mother, voice messages, and his ironic voice over as the thread that keeps everything together. He narrates how from childhood, he always felt male, how he got involved in separatist lesbian feminist activism during his university years, how he nearly committed suicide at a certain moment in his life, and how the people at the Transsexual Identity Movement (MIT) of Bologna accompanied him during his transition.

Cangelosi employs the camera to tackle the conflict between his inner self-image, and the image of himself reflected back by others and the screen. By recording his own transition, he uses the filmic medium to give Simone a body, a voice and a history. In the interview he explains the reasons behind his decision to start his career as a filmmaker with such intimate work:

Paradoxically, even though it was extremely complicated to start with a documentary which followed my transition, it was the easiest way to start my film-making career. It was a way to start talking about me right away, without having to account for what I had done later on.¹⁰

Cangelosi thinks that he found his voice as an author by making *Dalla testa ai piedi*. This film enacts a queer performativity of gender norms and makes it possible for a gender non-conforming person to become legible. The initial sequence of the film establishes the core of the conflict in which Simone finds himself. As we see hand-held recorded, out of focus, and fragmented images of Simone's menstruation in the bathroom, we listen to a conver-

sation with his mother. In this dialogue, prejudices, fears and anxieties, linked with a rigid gender binary scheme, are confronted with the resistance and hard-fought autonomy of the transsexual character:

-I mean what you are, that you were born a girl. With a stronger voice, more like a man's, would you feel better? -I feel bad this way, I don't feel myself. Do you understand I don't feel like myself? (...) =Yes, I do realise. You're not having one of those sex operations too, then? You aren't, are you? -It's my business what I'm having -And then your breasts! -Mum, please -Your breasts, you're making me feel bad -Look, it's not yours they're taking off -It's a mutilation -Mum, it is a mutilation if you think I'm a girl, but if you think I'm a boy it isn't a mutilation -But I don't, you aren't a boy -I'm not a boy to you but I'm telling you I feel like a boy, I've always felt like one. (Min. 00:37)¹¹

The entire film is narrated with Cangelosi's voice over, which acquires an impersonal tone only towards the end of the film, as he reads the medical information of the male hormones he takes. By acknowledging his subjectivity, Cangelosi manages to inscribe the film with “a transgender look” (2005: 78) as defined by Judith/Jack Halberstam, which looks *with* the transgender character instead of *at* him.

A sense of estrangement is transmitted when Cangelosi looks at his own fragmented body, as the frame is occupied by his stomach, breasts, eyes and mouth at different moments of the film. As he explores his own “female” body in detail, he alienates himself from it:

The reality was that Simona had a body, Simone didn't. Simona was recognised by everyone, she even had a diploma. Simone didn't, he only lived in my mind. Faced with a radical choice I decided Simona would prevail, and I would lock up Simone and hide him from myself and especially from other people. (Min. 5:31)

In his video-recorded transition process, Cangelosi enacts his performative right to become the one he considers his true self: “Simone, who I'd always been from head to foot” (Min. 12:15). The queer countervisuality that he enacts is that of making legible two gendered lives carried out by the same person, thus questioning the dominant gender visuality regime that categorises and defines people either as women or men, depending on the sex they are assigned at birth.

Despite the centrality he gives to his own subjective experience, Cangelosi also manages to join “the particular to the general, the individual to the collective, and the personal to the political” (2010: 204), as Nichols describes performative cinema. Hence, the film also portrays members of the LGBT community who assemble in public spaces exercising with their rebellious bodies “a plural and performative right to appear, one that asserts and instates the body in the midst of the political field” (Butler

⁹ Original fragment: “Le femministe dicono ‘a partire da sé’, cioè, il concetto di ‘a partire da sé’, quel film certamente nasce da una lezione che ho imparato, che è quella dell’ ‘a partire da sé’ (...) Dalla testa ai piedi poi è riuscito a esprimere qualcosa che non sarei riuscito esprimere in nessun altro modo se non con un film poiché mostra il processo del mio cambiamento a qualcuno che non può seguirlo, agli altri, un processo che diversamente rimane invisibile.”

¹⁰ Original fragment: “Paradossalmente iniziare da un documentario che seguisse la mia transizione per quanto fosse estremamente complicato era il modo più semplice per iniziare a fare il regista. Era un modo per iniziare subito parlando di me, senza non dover rendere conto di quello che avevo fatto in un secondo momento.”

¹¹ Both films, *Dalla testa ai piedi* and *Una nobile rivoluzione* are in Italian with English subtitles. For the transcriptions in this article we have constructed upon such subtitles.

2015: 11). Indeed, at a screening organised by the Bologna Women's Library in February 2018, the filmmaker made it clear that, while the transformation of his body was a personal and intimate need, the filming of the whole process was a political action through which he intended to create not merely a representation but rather an object that would "allow people to get into the process and therefore, to say the unspeakable, the ineffable."¹²

4. *Una nobile rivoluzione: a personal-political portrait of an LGBT activist*

Una nobile rivoluzione operates at two levels: on the one hand, it is a biographical film that reconstructs the two lives led by transsexual activist Marcella Di Folco, first as a man in Rome, then as a woman in Bologna. On the other hand, it is a compilation film, which gathers footage from diverse times and spaces in a personal-political reconstruction of the memories surrounding a specific character's life, but also the memory of the LGBT civil rights movement in Italy. Both narrative strands enact queer countervisualities. This is so, on the one hand, since Cangelosi makes legible two gendered lives carried out by the same person, as he had done in *Dalla testa ai piedi*. On the other hand, the film renders visible strategic alliances from and against precarity, already embedded in the memory of feminist and LGBT demands for equal rights, but highlighted now by means of the re-vision of archival materials within the film.

The point of view from which the film is narrated is the onscreen embodied gaze of Cangelosi, who met Marcella during his own transition process. He reconstructs Marcella's story through various other perspectives tied together with his accountable, situated gaze and in so doing he manages to inscribe the film with the aforementioned transgender look, which subverts fixed identity categories. The film enacts a queer performativity of gender norms through the portrait of its main character, opening up conditions of visibility for "an eccentric subject constituted in a process of struggle and interpretation, a rewriting of self" (de Lauretis 1990: 144).

Marcella's identity is not shown as uniform and without contradictions. As a man, working with Federico Fellini in films such as *Satyricon* (1969) and *Amarcord* (1973), Marcella embodied "exactly the typical Latin male of the thirties" (Min. 27:32). After adopting the female gender identity and undergoing sex reassignment surgery, Marcella's deviation from gender norms was punished with precarity and increased vulnerability. It was at this point in her life that she engaged with political struggles for equal rights. Towards the end of the film, she makes an open reference to the unintelligibility of the bodies

when they depart from the gender norms that regulate the ways in which they are supposed to appear in public and private spaces: "I've been a woman for thirty years. I have a voice which creates embarrassment everywhere I go. I'm tired" (Min. 1:15:56).

The importance of queer gender performativity within the diegesis of the film, along with the filmmaker's subjective point of view and active presence within the frame, allow us to assert that the main modes of representation in the film are performative and participatory. Instead of positioning himself on the detached world of commentator or witness, Cangelosi chooses to place himself and the filmed characters in the same reality as Marcella's, who, as we learn throughout the film, had died in 2010. This way, "the viewer senses that the image is not just an indexical representation of some part of the historical world but also an indexical record of the actual encounter between filmmaker and subject" (Nichols 2010: 157).

As a portrait of, and homage to a recently deceased person, *Una nobile rivoluzione* raises various issues in terms of indexicality. Domitilla Olivieri argues that documentary cinema differs from fiction cinema because of its particular relation with reality, one of "contact and continuity" (2012: 35), which she defines as "haunting" (2012: 8). Indexes are "signs founded on a 'physical' or 'existential' relation with their referent, a relation of copresence if not of contact" (2012: 36). In the case of documentaries, such referent is "an actual object that exists or existed in actuality and that has not solely been created for the camera" (2012: 37). At various moments in the film, Marcella becomes present as an indexical sign despite her death and this suspension of filmic space-time, attained by the editing of the archive material, manages to turn *Una nobile rivoluzione* into a documentary film in which the performative mode of representation is central.

As stated before, performative documentary emphasises the embodied and affective dimensions of our knowledge, experience and memory of the world. Moreover, it shows realities resulting from the action of the camera and/or the film production: situations created from the very action of making a documentary film. The spectator looks with Cangelosi as he re-constructs the portrait of Marcella. The filmmaker avoids the talking heads resource, using instead informal conversations that blur the boundaries and hierarchies between filmmaker and filmed subjects.

Working with digital technology, Cangelosi has access to an "elastic reality" as described by Manovich (1995): He can make the film with a combination of photographs, recent digital video, VHS archives, film and television fragments. He articulates a movement back and forth in time and space which can be analysed as different waves of narration entangled into one film, complementing one another, and providing the spectators with diverse entry points.

¹² A screening of *Dalla testa ai piedi* and *Una nobile rivoluzione* took place on Friday 2nd February 2018, at Associazione Orlando – Bologna Women's Library. Original fragment: "permette di entrare in un processo e quindi di dire lo indicibile, lo ineffabile."

Various scenes from *Dalla testa ai piedi* reappear in *Una nobile rivoluzione*, such as the first sequence, in which Marcella gives a political speech. Other sequences were originally recorded for Cangelosi's opera prima, but were discarded in the final cut of the film only to reappear later on in *Una nobile rivoluzione*. Cangelosi wanted to make a film not just about but also with Marcella: "I wanted it to show how much the personal aspect, Marcella's intimacy, was connected to the political aspect, I wanted to show her as a political figure starting from that privileged, intimate point of our relationship"¹³. As in the case of *Dalla testa ai piedi*, the film has an important biographical aspect: Cangelosi's encounter with Marcella and her death. He identifies two dimensions in his drive to make this film; an intimate-therapeutic one, and a socio-political one:

Una nobile rivoluzione was born certainly because I needed to mourn the loss of Marcella and it was also the way in which I could make a film with her (....) I also wanted to restore Marcella's stature as a person in the history of Italian politics, her humanity (...) I wanted to make a film which would also show her contradictions, rather than make a saint of her.¹⁴

In the same vein, he distinguishes between two kinds of publics and the goals that he had in mind concerning each of them. On the one hand, the LGBT community who had known her; on the other hand, the general public who had never heard of her:

Addressing the film to those who had loved her, beyond her contradictions, I thought of this work as an exciting tribute, capable of serving as a collective ritual for overcoming mourning, a way to give her back to those who had loved her. For a more general and broad public I thought that the film would fulfil the task of making a historical reconstruction, that of transfiguring her from a person to a historical character.¹⁵

Cangelosi didn't want to give audiences the clear feeling that Marcella was dead. Rather, he wanted her to be "inside the film as if it were in the present"¹⁶. Therefore, instead of interviews, he creates encounters with those who surrounded Marcella, in places that had been important for her. He also envisions a

structure similar to that of a road movie filmed between Rome and Bologna, and this transition between two places, together with the presence of Marcella's life time frame manages to create a sort of queer time-space: "The goal was to be able to keep Marcella present in this non-space, in the continuum between her time and her non-time."¹⁷

The choice of using archival materials was also derived from this idea of making Marcella present: "we tried to break down these temporal barriers between us and her in the narrative construction. The archives were immediately the fundamental objects, because Marcella was there"¹⁸. The importance given to Marcella's voice over is another strategy to queer time and space evincing that Cangelosi conceives documentary cinema as a performative act that composes the real and that demands response-ability from the ones working on it.

In the interview, Cangelosi explains that, although the drive for making *Dalla testa ai piedi* and *Una nobile rivoluzione* was very intimate to begin with, the films can be considered as much personal as they are political:

Both films were my best way to use public space in a political mode. The best possible way because they combine creativity, personal need and a therapeutic drive (....) But it is not a political essay, it is not a political manifestation, it is the sum total of all those things but through my own self-expression.¹⁹

5. Final thoughts: queer countervisuality in documentary cinema

The close-reading and analysis of two documentary films directed by Simone Cangelosi, *Dalla testa ai piedi* and *Una nobile rivoluzione*, make it possible to assert that this filmmaker's cinema enacts a queer countervisuality from a situated transgender look which places feminist principles like "starting from oneself" and "the personal is political" at its core. As has been illustrated in this article, this can be identified in various features of both films, namely:

a. *Dalla testa ai piedi* is the product of Cangelosi's quest for his true self. Through the recording of his transition process, the performativity of documentary cinema ac-

¹³ Original fragment: "volevo che mostrasse quanto il personale, l'intimo di Marcella fosse connesso all'aspetto politico, volevo mostrarla come personaggio politico a partire da quel punto privilegiato, intimo, della nostra relazione."

¹⁴ Original fragment: "Una nobile rivoluzione è nato sicuramente perché avevo bisogno di riparare il lutto della perdita di Marcella ed è stato anche il modo in cui io ho potuto fare un film con lei (...) Volevo anche restituire la levatura di Marcella come persona nella storia della politica italiana, con la sua umanità (...) Volevo fare un film che mostrasse anche le sue contraddizioni, insomma, non è che uno deve fare un santino."

¹⁵ Original fragment: "Rivolgendo il film a chi l'aveva molto amata, al di là delle sue contraddizioni, pensavo a questo lavoro come a un omaggio che fosse emozionante, capace di servire da rito collettivo di superamento del lutto, un modo di restituirla a chi l'aveva amata. Per un pubblico più generico e vasto pensavo che il film avrebbe il compito di fare una ricostruzione storica, quello di trasfigurarla da persona a personaggio storico."

¹⁶ Original fragment: "dentro il film così come ci eravamo noi nel presente"

¹⁷ Original fragment: "La volontà era quella di riuscire a tenere Marcella presente in questo non spazio, in questo non tempo, in cui c'è la contiguità tra il suo tempo e il suo non tempo."

¹⁸ Original fragment: "abbiamo cercato di abbattere queste barriere temporali tra noi e lei nella costruzione narrativa. Gli archivi immediatamente sono stati gli oggetti fondamentali, perché lì c'era Marcella".

¹⁹ Original fragment: "Entrambi i film sono stati il modo migliore per me di utilizzare lo spazio pubblico in maniera politica. Il modo migliore che potessi avere. Perché si uniscono insieme la creatività, il bisogno personale, la spinta terapeutica (...) Ma non è un saggio politico, non è una manifestazione politica, è la somma di tutte quelle cose ma attraverso il tuo modo di esprimerti."

- tually aids him in bringing Simone into the world.
- b. *Una nobile rivoluzione* is a film with and about Italian activist Marcella di Folco, an homage to her importance within the transsexual movement, a document for the memory of the LGBT community, and a medium to restore her complex story and offer it to a wider public. In this film, Cangelosi clearly enacts the performative right to appear of gender non-conforming people, something charged with an important political dimension.
 - c. In both films, the protagonists lead two lives, one as a man and one as a woman. By portraying these processes, starting from himself, Cangelosi renders gender performativity visible, makes gender non-conforming lives

legible, and highlights the concrete ways in which the struggle for equal rights is enacted from and against the precarity faced by gender dissident groups.

All in all, it can be argued that Cangelosi's political cinema offers a powerful example of the ways in which queer ways of seeing in documentary cinema can go beyond denouncing existing realities of gender inequalities and violence experienced by gender-dissident subjects. Indeed, building on the performative potential that documentary has to co-create the realities it shows, queer countervisualities can put forward other (eccentric and inappropriate/d) ways of seeing and becoming. These specific conclusions could be extensive to a more general understanding of what transgender and feminist situated gazes can look like in fiction as well as non-fiction cinema.

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