Title
The Passage of Fish - A Day in the Life of Wholesale Market

Nationality of Film
Italian

Submitted by
Name
Dawn Lyon
Affiliation
University of Kent
Role in the Film
Director

People Involved in the Film
Director
F. Bachis, D. Lyon, F. Tiragallo
Camera
F. Bachis, A. M. Pusceddu, F. Tiragallo
Sound
F. Bachis, A. M. Pusceddu, F. Tiragallo
Editor
F. Bachis, D. Lyon, F. Tiragallo
Producer
F. Bachis, D. Lyon, F. Tiragallo

Synopsis
Film Summary
This short ethnographic film about the everyday life of the wholesale fish market in Cagliari, Sardinia, Italy immerses the viewer in the material, sensory, and affective atmosphere of the market space. It presents the broad temporal and spatial rhythms of the market. We see the fish arrive before daybreak, and later we watch as it is packed up and driven off to the next point of distribution or consumption. Within this narrative, the film focuses on the key social practices that underpin trade. At the beginning of the day, we witness the fish merchants’ labor of preparation and display the act of staging value — in readiness for exchange. Once the buyers arrive, they can be seen evaluating the fish with their “skilled vision” or their touch. Negotiations are intense at times and happen in different emotional registers — challenge, angry, insulting, and humorous (some of which appear to be embellished for the camera) — and through social relations which are animated by the market space and the alluring presence of the fish itself. Once trade is over, the remaining fish and the market space are the site of further care and work. The soundscape of the film is composed of multiple voices and the noise of actions and interactions but the film does not rely on language (with the exception of three subtitled exchanges with us), aiming instead to show how buyers and sellers of fish deploy their embodied knowledge and sensory perceptions in their everyday working lives.

Theoretical, conceptual framework/perspective that influenced the making of this film
The film is concerned with three questions. 1) What do fish merchants and buyers do to produce value in fish? 2) How do they use their practical embodied and sensory knowledge in their everyday work? and 3) What are the social relations of the market which underpin these practices? These questions imply attention to the overarching and to the micro spatial and temporal rhythms of the market. We are particularly interested in the sellers’ and buyers’ techniques of communication, evaluation, exchange, and care. The gestures they use to communicate between themselves, the “skilled vision” and the haptic sensitivity they bring to evaluating and handling the fish itself, and the embodied performance of labor are central here. In addition, we explore the material dimensions of the work which takes place in the market, including the use of objects and devices (scales, the ice machine, the ubiquitous polystyrene boxes) and how they are animated by social practices. The fish itself is a key focus of activity: how it is classified and ordered, aestheticized and displayed, a labor of presentation to produce value which is then negotiated in interaction between buyers and sellers. These interactions are an opportunity to
attend to non-verbal techniques of evaluation and exchange. Indeed, our interest is in the ways in which embodied action, gestures and the deployment of the senses are present in different forms of market work.

**Methodology that influenced your making of this film**

Our approach to this research was to follow and document the action that took place within and beyond the market space. We went to the wholesale market on three occasions in autumn 2010 with permission from the local authority where we sought direct verbal informed consent from those we interviewed and filmed. On our first visit, we observed trade and made contact with key figures at the market many of whom had long family traditions as fishers or merchants. We further developed these relations by talking to fishmongers at local retail markets who were in the same social networks, including some in the same families. On our second visit, we worked with two cameras and were on site from the time of the arrival of the fish at around 5am. We shadowed people in different roles and documented different sequences of action as well as recording several interviews. We then accompanied a fish merchant to his processing plant and undertook an extended interview with him there. On our third visit, we worked with one camera and followed the fish from its landing at the port at 4.30am to the wholesale market, leaving when the market was ready to close. This film is the result of our intention to focus specifically on the visual, embodied, sensory and practical aspects of market life and work in a unity of time and space â€“ a day in the life of the market - but is informed by the broader research.

**Main ethnographic and/or social scientific “findings” or insights that you intend your film to convey/present**

The film both reveals and presents the embodied and sensory knowledge and social practices of the everyday work of fish merchants and buyers in a wholesale fish market in Sardinia, Italy. It draws the viewer’s attention to aspects of work and the everyday social relations of the market that might otherwise go unremarked. This is enhanced by the unintelligibility of the majority of the verbal exchanges in the soundscape of the film. Instead of concentrating on the language of trade, the viewer is immersed in the atmosphere of the market space and the plethora of interconnected activities and interactions that produce it. The brief subtitled dialogue with the research team nevertheless helps situate the film and discloses something of the process of its making, as well as documenting the merchants’ engagement with the camera. Overall, the film makes apparent the different if overlapping phases of the life of the market and the accompanying pace and content of work including distinct sequences of action. The fish merchants can be seen ordering and staging their displays, and negotiating sales with buyers in different emotional registers challenge, anger, insult and humor. Their gestures as much as their words convey the tone of these interactions. We also see the material objects and devices used in the market in particular, the hooks, scales, boxes, ice and trolleys. Finally, the film highlights the vitality of the fish themselves and the centrality of their presence in the life of the market.

**Key scholarly references**


TIRAGALLO, F (2006) Warping. The preparatory phase of weaving in Armungia (Sardinia), con M. G. Da Re, Museo storico etnografico di Armungia, video 13, post-production Artevideo scrl.

