

STROLLING THE STREETS OF MODERNITY: EXPERIENCES OF FLÂNERIE AND
CITYSCAPES IN ITALIAN POSTWAR FILM

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For Peter – for all the work, for all the fun

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The study focuses on urban narratives and characters within Italian cinema film in the period (1947-1971). Including neorealist classics and modernist masterpieces as well as more vernacular thrillers, from *Ladri di biciclette* (De Sica, 1947), *Viaggio in Italia* (Rossellini, 1953) and *Le notti di Cabiria* (Fellini, 1957), to *La dolce vita* (Fellini, 1960), *L'avventura* (Antonioni, 1960) and *Morte a Venezia* (Visconti, 1971) to *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* (Bava, 1963) and *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (Argento, 1970), it produces new insight into films which have been much studied but never as a corpus and rarely, if at all, with an analytical focus on the city-walker. My approach to the cinematic city as a potentially multifaceted formation contingent on the eyes that see, relies in particular on Walter Benjamin's theories on the *flâneur* - a narrative and discursive motif within which is embedded the representation and perception of modern life – and on Gilles Deleuze's concept of the modern cinema as constituted around a viewing, rather than an (re)-acting, subject. This critical framework allows to account for the films' nature as both products and reflections of Italy's transition into a modern and predominantly urban society, while also privileging the movements and perceptions of the protagonists, each of whom is addressed as a specific realisation of the *flâneur* or the female *flâneuse*. Despite the major socio-cultural differences that separate their experiences, common among them is their troubled relationship with the urban crowd and exclusion from or unwillingness to adhere to official manifestations of the city's life. Actual or perceived as it may be, their sense of displacement within increasingly disintegrated urban formations serve to shed critical light on social disjunctions in postwar Italy as well as on the cultural and moral losses involved in processes of modernisation and

urbanisation. However, in contrast to the male wanderers who tend to remain inert or ultimately failing in their quests, the female urbanites who in these very years achieve access to previously forbidden male spheres prove considerable ability to fight an initial sense of alienation and make constructive use of non-official aspects of the cityscape. It is the *flâneuses* ultimately who demonstrate the rewarding quality of street-walking as a claim to subjectivity - to the right both to see and walk freely – and as a process of self-discovery with a potential for inner growth.

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Lo sguardo percorre le vie come pagine scritte: la città dice tutto quello che devi pensare, ti fa ripetere il suo discorso, e mentre credi di visitare Tamara non fai che registrare i nomi con cui essa definisce se stessa e tutte le sue parti.¹

Italo Calvino. *Le città invisibili*.

INTRODUCTION

Cities of Walkers; Cinema of Viewers: Visualising Spaces of Modernity

Preliminaries: Streets; *Flânerie*; Cinematic city

“When history is made in the streets,” Sigfried Kracauer writes in a well-known passage of the redemption of physical reality that motivates his film theory, “the streets tend to move onto the screen” (*Theory of Film*, 72). Some decades earlier, Walter Benjamin had spoken of 19th-century Parisian streets as “a dwelling for the *flâneur*; he is as much at home among the façades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls” (*Charles Baudelaire*, 37).² Both Kracauer’s felicitous capturing of the ideological and artistic foundation for Italian neorealism, and Benjamin’s reflections on the *habitus* of the *flâneur* – the leisurely stroller and observer who roams the streets in search of the essence of the metropolis – will here serve as a starting point for an examination of the urban narratives we see characterise and interconnect a group of stylistically and thematically different films which are all representative of Italian postwar cinema. It will begin with Vittorio De Sica’s neorealist classic *Ladri di biciclette* (1947), the film that Kracauer specifically

¹ “The look runs along the streets like written pages: the city tells you everything you have to think, it makes you repeat its discourse and while you think you are visiting Tamara you do nothing but register the names with which she defines herself and all her parts.” All translations, unless otherwise stated, are mine.

² Further references to *Charles Baudelaire* are indicated with *CB* and page number.

refers to as an example of cinema's ability to capture "the flow of life" within urban streets, and conclude with Luchino Visconti's adaptation of Thomas Mann's novella *Morte a Venezia* (1971) which, if juxtaposed to his *La terra trema* (1948), clearly indicates how far both Visconti and Italian national cinema eventually moved away from both the historical context and artistic principles of neorealism. While such differences – of subject matter, aesthetics, and modes of enunciation - separate *Ladri di biciclette* and *Morte a Venezia*, what they do share is their way of establishing a man's walk through urban streets as the basis for a subjectively lived cinematic city.

Kracauer's observation on the affinity between cinema and the urban flux points to the perceptively cinematic quality of the modern city and its status as one of the founding and certainly most lasting sources of inspiration for cinematic creation. The very modes and rhythms of the moving image would seem to be modelled on those of the metropolis, while the cinematic gaze embodies the *flâneur's* unique sense for voyeuristic inquiry into urban locations and characters. Between these two quintessentially modern entities, there is a relation of mutual dependence - of, in Sergey Daney's words, "complicité" and "destin commun" (121) - that gives life to the great city-films of the silent era, as demonstrated by *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1926); *Berlin: Die Simphonie der Grosstadt* (Walter Ruttmann, 1927); and *The Crowd* (King Vidor, 1928), and subsequently to a wave of gangster movies, such as *Little Caesar* (Mervyn Le Roy, 1931) and *Scarface* (Howard Hawks, 1932). The cinematic city comes eventually to establish itself as a dominant narrative and stylistic component of the American *film noir* as well as of a current of social realism that in the immediate postwar years characterises European cinema. Films such as *Der Verlorne* (Peter Lorre, 1945) and *Die Mörder sind unter uns* (Wolfgang Staudte, 1946) are symptomatic of the tendency within the German and Austrian *Trümmerfilme*, as well as in other waves of "ruin-films" in France, Great Britain and Italy, to portray physically and

psychologically damaged cities, where spatial testimony was accompanied and often reinforced by human dramas of poverty, loss and social disintegration (Sorlin, “La cinematografia europea,” 738).

The urgency that more specifically faces neorealist directors is, of course, to create a counter-discourse to 20 years of fascist rhetoric, a concern we often see leading towards city streets, where heroic ideals of nationhood and collective bravery may be polemically rejected by giving privileged space and voice to singular, everyday testimonies and subjective experiences of the War and the Reconstruction. Significantly, city-films such as *Germania anno zero* (Rossellini, 1947); *Gioventù perduta* (Germi, 1947) and, as we shall see, *Ladri di biciclette*, do not so much reveal a desire to disclose the horrors of fascism, as they attempt to convey the inner torments of those suffering from its effects (Sorlin, “La cinematografia europea” 739). As it merges inquiries into the postwar self and experimentation with introspective forms of narration and representation, neorealist cinema stands at the intersection between the discovery of subjective states that defined major areas of early avant-garde film, and the expansion of this discovery within postwar art cinema, sustaining the line of continuity that David Bordwell (228-230) draws between the historical and the modern *film d’art*. The latter current may be seen to have been announced with *Les quatre cents coups* (Truffaut, 1959); *À bout de souffle* (Godard, 1960); *Hiroshima mon amour* (Resnais, 1960); and affirmed with the 1960 Cannes Festival where *La dolce vita* (Fellini); *L’avventura* (Antonioni); *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (Visconti), *Jungfrukällan* (Bergman) and *The Young One* (Buñuel) in different ways establish the fundamentals of cinematic modernism. As subsequent examinations of *La dolce vita*, *La notte* (Antonioni, 1961), and *Morte a Venezia* will show, this second wave of art cinema tends to evoke the metropolis as an entity directly related to, if not dependent upon, the perceptions of often wayward and troubled characters, thereby conveying subjective

experiences of and responses to manifestations of modernity, to urban expansion, and to social disintegration.

These preliminary observations of tendencies in cinematic representations of the urban environments and the modern subject serve to contextualise the present investigation into the cinematic cities that manifest themselves throughout various phases of Italian postwar cinema. More specifically, it is the city walker to which these urban portrayals are anchored that motivates this project, and with this figure, the urban narratives and perceptions that emerge from the activity of *flânerie*. From a theoretical standpoint, we are engaging with a scholarly tradition that, since Giuliana Bruno's groundbreaking article "Ramble City: Postmodernism and *Blade Runner*" (1987), has established a critical *topos* around the cinematic city. However, while the tendency has been to read filmic cityscape as a matter of space, emphasising its physical features and the material or existential environment it creates for the film's narrative,³ urbanism is here understood as a lived phenomenon and the city, similarly, is addressed as an essentially intangible and subjective entity, contingent, as Italo Calvino's *Città invisibili* suggests, on the eyes that see. In adherence to Bruno's more recent affirmation that "the creation of a cityscape is a multifaceted affair of the senses" (*Atlas*, 384), I shall approach cinematic representations of the modern Italian city from the stance of the *flâneur*, privileging the sensual and existential perspective of the individual character that walks, lives, and reads streets of modernity.

Recent studies devoted to urban modernity, whether sociological, philosophical or textual in nature, have come to recognize the lasting influence of two major models:

Charles Baudelaire, who in *The Painter of Modern Life* (1859-60), talks of *flânerie* as a

³ See Penz, François and Thomas, Maureen. *Cinema and Architecture. Méliès, Mallet-Stevens, Multimedia*. London: BFI Publishing. 1997; the entire issue of *Wide Angle* 19. 4. (1997); and Dimendberg, Edward. *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. 2004; for illustrative examples of this tradition.

way to observe and immerse oneself in the urban flux; and Walter Benjamin, who in *The Arcades Project* (1927-1940)⁴ and *Charles Baudelaire: a Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (1935-38), describes the *flâneur* as an ambiguous and marginalised figure whose nonchalant strolling is threatened by the increasingly prevailing system of commodity exchange. Stimulated by inquisitive passion and a need for immediacy to the cityscape, the classic *flâneur* incorporates the form of sensual existence infusing the many fleeting desires of the aesthete Johannes in Søren Kierkegaard's "Diary of the Seducer." (*Enten-Eller*). Himself in part an aesthete, Kierkegaard allegedly gained the reputation of being a "*flâneur*," a "frivolous bird," a "loafer," as he was often seen enjoying his walks through the streets of 1850's Copenhagen.⁵ In O. Henry's 1906 short story "Man About Town," the search for a classification of this "fly guy" ends with a note on his "concentrated, purified, irrefutable, unavoidable spirit of Curiosity and Inquisitiveness." (13-18). While the Nordic metropolis formed an appropriate stage for the aesthete's sensual idleness, and the streets of New York offered free scope for an inquisitively inclined spirit, for Baudelaire, who shared both their aesthetic attitude and craving for new sensations, the *flâneur* was Parisian, and Paris, similarly, was the natural capital of *flânerie*, a view that Benjamin later came to affirm:

Paris created the type of the *flâneur*. What is remarkable is that it wasn't Rome. And the reason? Does not dreaming itself take the high road in Rome? And isn't that city too full of temples, enclosed squares, national shrines, to be able to enter *tout entière* – with every cobblestone, every shop sign, every step, and every gateway – into the passerby's dream? The national character of the Italians may also have much to do with this. For it

⁴ Further references to the *Arcades Project* are indicated with AP and page number.

⁵ Dersom Kjøbenhavn nogensinde har været af een Mening om Nogen tør jeg sige, den har været af een Mening om mig: jeg var en Dagdriver, en Lediggænger, en Flaneur, en letsindig Fugl, et godt maaskee endog et brillant Hoved, vittig o.s.v." (*Synspunktet*).

is not the foreigners but they themselves, the Parisians, who have made Paris the promised land of the *flâneur*. (AP, p. 417)

Seeking to elaborate on Benjamin's ideas regarding the origin and nature of *flânerie*, while also drawing on other scholars who have come to extend his visions,⁶ I shall examine the applicability of his concepts to the Italian *flâneur* that he in the 1930's did not see, but that manifests itself within the cityscapes of Italian postwar cinema. A significant number of films from this period not only portray a national urban environment into which both the native and foreign city-walker can "enter *tout entière*," but they also present the "national character of the Italians" in the form of city dwellers driven by a need or a desire, material or existential, to immerse themselves with the city whose streets become a text to read, a labyrinth to decipher.

Context: Reconstruction; Economic Growth; Cultural Modernity

If the Rome that Benjamin visited in the 1930's offered limited space for free strolling, what was the situation of the Italian metropolis some 15 years later, when the prevalently agrarian and mercantile country began to transform itself into an industrial and highly modernised urban society? The very processes of modernisation that promoted the appearance of the Parisian *flâneur* in the 19th-century – capitalist developments of industrialization and urbanisation, as well as the various "new dispositions" embodied and executed by the city dweller who searches and reads urban life (Gleber, vii) – are not set

⁶ See in particular Buck-Morss, Susan. "The *Flâneur*, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering." *New German Critique*. 39. Fall 1986. pp. 99-140 and *The Dialectics of Seeing. Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1990; Bruno, Giuliana. *Streetwalking on a ruined map: cultural theory and the city films of Elvira Notari*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993; and Gleber, Anne. *The Art of Taking a Walk: Flânerie, Literature and Film in Weimar culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.

into motion in Italy until the aftermath of World War II, when they manifest themselves in the constellation of unprecedented and far-reaching structural transformations destined to culminate in the 1960's "economic miracle". What appears so 'miraculous' is not merely the rapidity of the socio-economic changes that affirm themselves in the years 1958-1963, but also what Guido Crainz perceives as "il vero e proprio cortocircuito fra precedenti orizzonti economici, previsioni, quadri mentali, e quelli indotti dal *boom*" (*Storia*, 56).⁷ At the time of its liberation from twenty years of dictatorship and twenty months of resistance both to German occupation and to the fascist republic of Salò, Italy was, with the exception of the major northern cities, largely founded on the same community structures of rural cultures and local dialects with which it had undergone its national unification in 1870 (Ginsborg, 1). What is more, the enduring poverty that had caused severe living conditions especially in the South developed in the immediate postwar years into a national crisis, leaving both the lower and the middle classes in economic hardship due to inflation and unemployment. In 1945, the per capita access to alimentary products was less than 50% compared to before the war (Crainz, *L'Italia*, 10), while by 1947, 1.6 million Italians were unemployed (Ginsburg, 80).⁸ The problem of housing was equally critical: in 1945, 900.000 Italians lived under atrocious conditions in barracks, basements or caves, (Crainz, *L'Italia*, 13) while by 1951, almost 7 % of the Roman population is estimated to have been homeless or living in temporary accommodation (Shiel, 76). Involving not only those made homeless by the war, but also, as Mark Shiel writes, working-class people whom fascist planners had displaced from the centre of the major cities to *borgate* in the periphery, as well as thousands of émigrés fleeing rural poverty for a more promising life in the city (76), the shortage of housing presented a critical aspect of Italy's postwar crisis.

⁷ "the true and proper short circuit between previous economic horizons, expectations, mental images, and those infused by the *boom*."

⁸ De facto national population enumerated at the 1951 census was 46. 738, 000 whereas the Roman population enumerated was 1. 651, 000 (ISTAT).

As will be shown in later examinations of *Ladri di biciclette* and *Le notti di Cabiria* (Fellini, 1954), the housing crisis infuses itself within images of both the city and the urban character which both gain a privileged status within the immediate postwar cinema.

Not until the mid 1950's, when what previously had been "a peasant country [...] of sleepy provincial cities" suddenly emerged as "one of the major industrial nations of the West" (Ginsborg, 1; 212), did modern Italy take sociogeographical form. What took place in these years is best described as a social revolution, launched by an economic recovery that resulted in an almost 100% increase in net national income in the course of a decade, from 17, 000 billion lire in 1954 to 30, 000 billion lire in 1964, and an increase in per capita income from 350,000 to 571, 000 lire in the same period (Crainz, *Storia*, 83). To take a cultural indication of these developments, the production of films increased from 92 in 1950 to over 200 every year throughout the 1960's (Wood, *Italian Cinema*, 14). The unprecedented material prosperity brought about by the boom did not only cause considerable changes in living standards and in patterns of consumption; its reliance on intensified manifestations of economic and moral self-interest came also to promote processes of secularisation; disintegration in traditional social structures; and new ways of living based on an accentuated sense of individualism in economic as well as in social life (see Ginsburg, 239-49 and Sorlin, *Italian National Cinema*, 115). Ferdinand Tönnies's distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* provides an apt description of radical transformations: what had mainly constituted a Community of human associations rooted in traditions, emotional attachment and collective experience soon took the form of a Society; a pluralistic, atomised and impersonal formation. Characteristic of this social form was in particular the extended boundaries of communication, on the one hand, and the tendency to adjust to the shattering novelty of modernisation through isolation and an individualistic mindset on the other (Ginsborg, 248). The solid sense of solidarity and

collective action that had motivated both the Resistance movement and the first steps towards Reconstruction came rapidly and unobstructedly to melt into air, as material progress made the way for a cultural modernity favouring fragmentary, singular and subjective experiences.

If the *boom* can be said to have constituted an exquisitely private affair, it was also a “quintessentially northern phenomenon” (Ginsborg, 216-17),⁹ exerting a transformation beyond recognition in Central and particularly Northern Italy, without arriving at any solution to what Antonio Gramsci in 1926 had identified as “la quistione meridionale.” For Gramsci, the state of poverty that for centuries had created alarming living conditions in the South and positioned its rural population in a relation of colonial submission to the Northern middle class, could only be solved through the revolutionary “blocco storico” that would emerge from an alliance between industrial workers in the North and peasants in the South (179-204). Clearly, the geographical imbalance of this massive economic expansion came only to reinforce these divisions, while also accelerating already ongoing waves of migration from the South to the North. Between 1951 and 1961, Rome’s population increased from 1, 961,754 to 2,188,160; by 1967 it had grown to 2,614, 156. Milan similarly underwent an expansion from 1,274,000 inhabitants in 1951 to 1,681,00 in 1967 (Ginsborg, 216-20). As Carlo Emilio Gadda wrote in *Civiltà delle macchine* in 1955, everyone - from the town planner and the sociologist, to the civic administrator and the real estate agent – could feel the impact of these processes of urbanisation:

La città si dilata: la città si estende [...]: arriveremo anche noi ai tre milioni di Parigi, ai quattro di Berlino, agli otto di Londra: e via via. Nelle acropoli

⁹ Both Ginsburg (pp. 210-253) and Crainz (83-155) deal perceptively with the situation of the South during and after the economic miracle.

e nei turrati municipi della provincia codesto civico solletico è addirittura frenesia. (qtd. Crainz, *Storia*, 125)¹⁰

How frenetic cities such as Rome and Milan had become by 1960 is notoriously depicted in Fellini's *La dolce vita* and Antonioni's *La notte*, two key cine-cities within Italian film history whose urban protagonists will later be addressed as *flâneurs* of the "miracle." As this category indicates, the analytical approach of this study will be twofold. While it seeks to explore the cinematic city as a lived phenomenon, subject to the eye through which it is seen, the perceptions and experiences of these city dwellers are all, to some degree, reflections of processes of modernisation and may fruitfully be situated within the historical context of reconstruction, urbanisation, economic growth and social disintegration. The idea – fundamental to this study - that an inquiry into urban narratives and characters may allow us to establish a closer relation between films and the socio-economic and cultural ambiance they may be said to depict, follows Angelo Restivo's call for more nuance in critical reflections on the relationship between cinema and history:

postwar Italian cinema was profoundly connected, first, to the processes of political and economical reorganization that (re)constructed the nation into the Italy we know today; and secondly, to the larger and more 'invisible' processes that have marked the transformation of global capitalism in the postwar period. (2-3)

When we here will tend to emphasise films' historicity it is to examine the extent to which cityscapes and city dwellers in the postwar era figured as expressions of Italy's transition

¹⁰ The city is spreading: the city is expanding [...] we too shall arrive at the three millions of Paris, the four [millions] of Berlin, the eight [millions] of London: and so on and so forth. In the acropolis and in the turreted provincial town councils, this civic tickling is even frenzy.

into modernity. Furthermore, that cinematic urban signifiers may have a considerable testimonial value draws on Marc Shiel's observation of how

the numerous neorealist films set to urban space, from *Rome, Open City*, to *The Nights of Cabiria*, anticipate and represent much more directly the modernising processes at the heart of the city which would come to define the fabric of life for a majority of Italians in the decades after World War Two and which would come to connect Italy to the increasingly globalised economic and cultural realities of the post-war era. (15)

As the following readings of *Ladri di biciclette* and *Le notti di Cabiria* suggest, neorealist film may investigate urban environments to portray the contradictions between postwar deprivation and reconstruction, thereby conveying the social disjunctions brought about by processes of modernisation. In the cinema of the 50's and the 60's, on the other hand, cityscapes and city dwellers are evoked to articulate experiences of modernity, and, as the chapter dedicated to *La dolce vita* and *La notte* will show, of the contradiction between economic growth and moral decay. A unifying point between these two epochs of Italian film is the use of urban environments to convey emotional loss and the acquisition of self-awareness, a theme that, as we will see, is particularly well formulated in *Viaggio in Italia*, as well as to create an anchorage for essentially episodic and mostly unresolved narratives whose only structuring principle is the movements of the city dweller. With the exception of the two *gialli* which adhere to generic conventions of coherent narrative and a logical closure, these films tend to downplay plot for the visualisation of encounters between space and character. It is this encounter that here will be approached through an analytical focus on *flânerie*; that is, on the sensually and visually articulated inclination to immerse oneself in, and at the same time retain an analytical detachment to, spaces of modernity.

Fundamentally a mode and disposition of the metropolis, this form of dwelling is a way to capture the myriad of external impulses that manifest themselves in the streets. At the same time, it confronts the typically anonymous atmosphere that both isolates the modern subject and allows for a physical and existential intimacy with “the transient, the fleeting, the contingent” that for Baudelaire constituted the “indefinable something we may be allowed to call modernity” (“The Painter,” 402-3). As a “perfect idler” and “passionate observer,” the classic *flâneur* managed both to participate in the urban flux and register it with aesthetic enjoyment. Baudelaire came consequently to perceive of him as the hero of modern life (“The Painter,” 399), while a century and half later, Peter Brooker still noted how

The idea of the stroller or window-shopper as somehow congruent with an emergent modernity, and its symptomatic expression in the developing city, has become part of modern criticism’s shared sense of cultural history, and of its own present discourses upon contemporary forms of urban experience. (“*The Wandering Flâneur*,” 115)

This “cultural history” that presupposes a relation of necessity between urban culture and modernity has a major model in Georg Simmel’s 1903 essay “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” an early example of urban sociology as well as of studies devoted to “the inner meaning of specifically modern life and its products” (175)¹¹ Elaborating on the dichotomy Tönnies in 1887 articulated in terms of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, Simmel argues that the metropolis demands more of man’s differentiating faculties than traditional, community-based social forms: “With each crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational and social life [...] The metropolis

¹¹ Further references to “The Metropolis and Mental life” will be indicated with *MM* and page number.

extracts from man as a discriminating creature a different amount of consciousness” (*MM*, 75). Significantly, it is in the streets that one perceives the intense rhythm of urban life; the multiplicity of its images and the unpredictability of its impressions, and to walk them with ease and confidence require adjustment to the metropolis’ overwhelming and highly visualised external sensations. Materialising the points of correspondence that exist between “rhythm of life” and “sensory mental imagery,” the metropolitan subject adopts an intellectualised and extreme form of the “blasé attitude” that Baudelaire attributed to the *flâneur*, the difference being that, what for Baudelaire was a cold, yet fascinated, form of detachment, in Simmel becomes a radical structure of “self-preservation” (*MM*, 175-178). In confronting the myriad of stimulations that weakens the ability to react “to new sensations with the appropriate energy,” the urbanite becomes indifferent to external individuality, while the experience of “personal subjectivity” is intensified (*MM*, 178).

While this attitude of self interest and indifference towards the external world will have a tendency to isolate the subject and infuse interpersonal interaction with a degree of “reserve” or even “hidden aversion” (*MM*, 179-180), neither this form of self-preservation, nor the metropolitan logic of time and money, can extinguish the fundamental human need to relate to the external world. As Simmel later demonstrates in “The Bridge and the Door” (1909), human nature tends to “separate what is related and relate what is separate” (408), an ability that would be reinforced under the conditions of the metropolis where social relations are rationalised by more pronounced spatial oppositions between the private and the public, or the inner and the external. What Simmel illustrates with the ‘bridge’ and the ‘door’ is the irresolvable dialectic between unification and separation that Henri Lefebvre connects to the moment of socio-economic development when “everything becomes disjointed, yet everything becomes a totality” (*Introduction*, 121) and that Marshall Berman similarly sees as constituting the very paradox of modernity: while the

modern expands to “take in virtually the whole world,” the expanding modern public “shatters into a multitude of fragments, speaking incommensurable private languages” (133).

If it is modernity, or the experience thereof, that causes processes of association and dissociation, and this modernity can be said to find a privileged space of exposition in the city, the latter can be seen as a “heterotopias [...] a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (Foucault, 24). That urban space is constructed from a conglomeration of individually experienced *Lebenswelts* is a premise for this inquiry into cinematic representations of *flânerie* which, as a quintessentially modern activity, may imply both a way to visualise and engage with the city, as well as to read and ideally gain insight into signs of modernity on the basis of one’s use of the surrounding cityscape. Bruno astutely points to the epistemological aspect of the walking tour that may emerge from the encounter between *flânerie* and the antique Roman practice of *otium* (*Atlas*, 387-8), a form of “cultivated leisure” that in Cicero had primarily an “ethical purpose [...] of self-development [...] *Otium* implied variety: readings, the pleasure of collecting and correspondence, time set aside for contemplation, philosophical conversation, and walking were savoured alternatively” (Corbin, 251). Significantly, the idea of leisure as something exquisitely private reappears in Italy in the postwar years when collective activities organised by the church or, as during Fascism, by the state, are challenged by radically new concepts of personal enjoyment and forms of recreation. Whether practiced as “a privatised commodity”¹² of the ‘miracle,’ or *cum dignitate* as a search for knowledge of self and of the external world – the forms of leisure encountered in some of these films can serve to illustrate what *flânerie* may consist of in modern Italy,

¹² Anna Maria Torriglia (118) relates these new experiences of leisure to the emergence of private vehicles, such as the Vespa (1946) and the Fiat Seicento (1955), and of television (1954).

where, as Bruno observes, it is supported by an ability to accommodate not only inquisitive strolls, but also a “subjective sense of relational intimacy [...] which comprehends intellectual space as a part of ‘a room of one’s own’” (*Atlas*, 387-88).

To understand *flânerie* as an introspective and inquisitive form of *dolce far niente* implies a recognition, firstly, of the space from which city walkers perceive of and engage with urban modernity, and secondly, of the role that this essentially subjective space plays in any discourse - critical or creative - of the city. The cinematic cities to be explored in the following chapters linger within the encounter between the subject and the cityscape, an encounter that Roland Barthes in the premises his lays for an urban sociology describes as the discourse of the city: “the city speaks to its inhabitants, we speak our city, the city where we are, simply by living in it, by wandering through it, by looking at it” (96). The urban ambiance is thus seen to emerge from a collection of multiple perspectives joined through the “eroticism” or the “sociality” of the city which becomes a sphere where the wanderer meets “the *other*” (original emphasis, *Ibid.*). Michel de Certeau similarly talks in semiologic terms of “pedestrian speech acts,” arguing that the walk is to the city what the speech act is to language or to an utterance (97). The city dweller’s enunciative function *vis à vis* the urban system would therefore be realised in the act of selecting from and actualising the city’s many spatial possibilities, all of which exist and emerge by virtue of the wanderer’s walk (98). To approach the city as a text written and enounced through the dialogical relationship between physical and human urban entities implies a recognition of the role of subjective perceptions in foundation of any type – existent of artistic – of cityscape. It is the constitutive function of the urban character that occupies Hana Wirth-Nesher in her *City Codes. Reading the Modern Urban Novel*. Starting from the presupposition that the modern city setting is dictated from the position of the city dweller, she demonstrates that only by moving away from essentialist concepts for a view of the

city as an entity entirely in the eye of the beholder, can one account for its multifaceted and constantly changing image. When we here propose to examine the cinematic city in light of the *flâneur* – a quintessentially urban creature as well as a narrative and discursive motif within which is embedded the representation and perception of modern life – it is with the objective to show, with Wirth-Nesher, that “we might learn more about how we read cities, in and out of art,” if we pay attention to the various ways in which detailed aspects of the urban setting appear in films of divergent and contradicting point of view (3-7). An abstraction of the cityscape from conventional and more or less rhetorical paradigms for an emphasis on its representation as subjectively lived allows tracing the stimuli that both attract and displace the *flâneur*. The ways in which this figure moves within both exteriors and interiors in order to configure urban impressions is, as will become clear, what enables the city to become visible.

Dialectic of *Flânerie*: Masses; Shocks; Urban Modernity

The notion that there is a conceivable connection between the cinema’s frequent recurrence to urban environments and the ease with which metropolitan streets make their way to the screen, suggests an affinity between space and medium that significantly finds correspondence in the modes of the *flâneur*. While it is the urban flux, as Kracauer writes, that “creates kaleidoscopic sights” and “casts its spell over the *flâneur* or even creates him” (*Theory of Film*, 72), it is also this figure’s inquisitive, quasi-cinematic gaze that captures and projects the continuously fleeting life of the streets. The significance of the mesmerising urban stimuli to the nature and functioning of the city dweller was already known to Baudelaire, and it becomes a recurrent motif in Benjamin, who presents the *flâneur* of the Parisian Arcades as a marginalised and ambiguous figure, a passionate

reader of modern urban life whose aesthetic sensibility distinguishes him from the common passer-by (*CB*, 131), and who is more devoted to “the phantasmagoria of space” (*AP*, 12) and to the anonymity of metropolitan streets, than to any class or occupational group of society:

The *flâneur* is a man uprooted. He is at home neither in his class nor in his homeland, but only in the crowd [...] which is to say in the city [...] The crowd is his element. The London crowd in Engels. The man of the crowd in Poe. The phantasmagoria of the *flâneur*. The crowd as a veil through which the familiar city appears transformed. The city as a landscape and a room. The department store is the last promenade of the *flâneur*. There his fantasies were materialized. (*AP*, p. 895)

We will come back to the connection Benjamin draws between the decline of the *flâneur* and the development of modern capitalism in the second chapter which relates *flânerie* to the contradiction between economic growth and existential loss associated with the ‘miracle’. For now, the focus is on the city dweller’s relation to what Wordsworth in his introduction to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) had already described as “the encreasing accumulation of men in cities” (qtd. Brand, 3) and that both Baudelaire and Benjamin found portrayed so vividly by Edgar A. Poe, whose narrator spends the night walking the streets of London in search of “The Man of The Crowd” (1840). For Baudelaire, who himself comes to provide an historical model for Benjamin’s textual reconstruction of the classic *flâneur*, this “lover of universal life moves into the crowd as though into an enormous reservoir of electricity” (400), while Benjamin writes that to “endow this crowd with a soul is the very purpose of the *flâneur*” (*CB*, 120). Common among these writers is their observation of the captivating nature of the metropolitan masses; an “inscrutable

labyrinth” which Benjamin sees as offering a “drug for the solitary” as well as a ground for critical inquiry into urban life, satisfying the *flâneur*’s need for enigmas - for elusive impressions and unpredictable encounters (AP, 446). Significantly, the three chroniclers of urban modernity also emphasise the singularity of this figure who, situated on the threshold of the masses as well as of the rest of the urban world, abandons himself to the frenzy of the crowd without however being submerged by its uniform mechanics. It is in this way that the *flâneur* is seen to live dialectically between sensual engagement and analytical detachment, assuming a unique position that enables him, as a man of letters, to draw on the aesthetics of the city itself, reading its interiors and exteriors, as well as the crowd’s many faces and types, ultimately engaging in an interpretative practice that both deciphers and creates city text (Gleber, 142). Benjamin’s notions that *flânerie* has its “social base [in] journalism” and that “the figure of the detective is prefigured in that of the *flâneur*” (AP, 446) indicate how the intellectual endeavours and inquisitive stance of the urban wanderer associate him with two quintessentially urban professions, establishing a relation of affinity that shall be confirmed by some of the city dwellers we meet in the following chapters.

If the existential isolation of the *flâneur* assures him a unique position within the cityscape and, in particular, *vis à vis* the crowd, there is a sense in which the enchanting aspects of the crowd will play a significant part in his perceptive foundation of the city. Its appearance as an estranging “veil” that obscures the cityscape allows the fascinated and restlessly searching streetwalker to project his own receptions and imprint “previously unknown chthonic traits” onto the objectively familiar city (AP, 446). Inherent in Benjamin’s idea of the crowd as a phantasmagoria that captivates the *flâneur* by intensifying the city’s manifestation there is an explicit reference to “the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity [...] and the unexpectedness of onrushing

impressions” from which Simmel deduces his theories of metropolitan mental life (*MM*, 175). Benjamin’s city dweller similarly personifies Simmel’s notion that interpersonal relationships in giant cities are structured around vision rather than hearing: if the *flâneur*’s eye is overburdened with protective functions against impressions (*CB*, 151), his entire existence also embodies the pleasures of scopophilia and relies, ultimately, on the “new and urgent need for stimuli” which is both a premise and a result of urban modernity (*CB*, 132).¹³ Benjamin does however expand on Simmel’s theory by relating it to Freud’s concept of “consciousness” which in the context of the metropolis serves to protect against “shocks” provoked by excessive external energies (*CB*, 115):

The greater the share of shock factor in particular impressions, the more constantly consciousness has to be alert as a screen against stimuli; the more efficiently it is so, the less do these impressions enter experience (*Erfahrung*), tending to remain in the sphere of a certain hour in one’s life (*Erlebnis*). (*CB*, 117)

That Benjamin’s fundamental distinction between *Erfahrung* as “the outcome of work” and *Erlebnis* as “the phantasmagoria of the idler” (*AP*, 801) is related to his equally fundamental concept of the urban shock is significant to our understanding of the *flâneur* as positioned ambivalently between passionate immersion and conscious distanciation or alienation from the urban ambiance. If it is the search for the transient, lived experience of the shock that leads him towards the metropolitan masses, it is equally the “efficiency” of his consciousness and ability to live the shock as *Erlebnis*, that enables him to maintain distinction from the crowd (*AP*, 420).

¹³ This urgent need for stimuli takes material form in perceptions of “shocks” which Benjamin significantly sees as finding its formal principle in cinema (*CB*, 132).

This contradictory experience of enchanted immersion and analytical distance points to the “dialectic of *flânerie*” wherein resides the *flâneur*’s sensation of being suspected and observed in the streets where his idleness is put on display, while at the same time being able to exploit the anonymity that obscures presence and protects his persona as well as his inclination always to analyse and decipher the urban labyrinth (*AP*, 420). It is precisely the ambivalent nature of the *flâneur* that makes him so crucial to the *Arcades Project*, a “literary montage” (*AP*, 460) that in its continuous juxtapositions and fusion of citations and commentary appears to embody the fragmentary, random and contradictory aspects of modernity itself. Founded on the thesis that “modernity is always citing primal history” (*AP*, 10); that the old is always repeatedly present within the new, or, that the new is always already existent in Ur-forms, Benjamin’s reconstruction of 19th-century Paris as the original site of modernity aims to provide a blueprint for twentieth-century developments of the modern experience (Charney, 282-3). The *flâneur* is considered to constitute an Ur-form of contemporary life the way Paris presents the archetype of modernity (Buck-Morss, “The *Flâneur* ...,” 101). Crossing and interconnecting a range of urban spheres and the epochs they each evoke, the ambiguous city-walker brings the past into the present through the “the law of dialectics at a standstill” (*AP*, 10). Knowledge as theorised in the *Arcades Project* is produced in flashes provoked by within which “the Then and the Now comes together into a constellation like a flash of lightning” (*AP*, 456-62). Along with the concepts of shock and *flâneurie*, the dialectical image stands at the centre of Benjamin’s theories of how we experience the modern. More than a continuum of time, modernity is lived as a consecutive series of ephemeral moments that, given their transitory nature, can never be lived as presence, but rather as fleeting appearances in the here and now (Charney, 283-285). To the extent that

these moments may be captured by the senses, they will appear as a quintessentially lived experience - as a visual and momentary *Erlebnis*.

Lines of Inquiry: Types; Perspectives; Films

We will see more clearly how the dialectic of *flânerie* as a way to confront and live urban modernity may constitute principles for cinematic narration, since the wanderers we will encounter to various degrees embody the modern subject on the threshold, engaging with several different segments of the cityscape without belonging to any of them. While these characters for the purpose of thematic organisation will be discussed according to the analytical categories of the *flâneur* or the female *flâneuse*; the detective; and the stranger, it is clear that the study's overarching search for individual ways of seeing and modes of walking is incompatible with rigid categories that fail to account for the subjectivity of lived experience. Thus, these singular city-walkers will in the actual analysis tend to shade into one another, as indeed they do in Benjamin, and present several features that go beyond his descriptions. While his *flâneur* appears in a far more nuanced and increasingly critical light than Baudelaire's romanticised hero of modernity, he remains tied to the very same historical and cultural context and will, as an analytical category, have to undergo modifications. The choice that here is taken to endow this figure with an interpretative flexibility he originally did not possess is in thread with contemporary studies of modernity and urbanism where, as Keith Tester writes,

the *flâneur* has been allowed, or made, to take a number of walks away from the streets and arcades of nineteenth-century Paris. Not the least, the figure and the activity appear regularly in the attempts of social and cultural

commentators to get some grip on the nature and implication of the conditions of modernity and postmodernity. (1)

It is in particular as an indicator of social change and of urban relations, and as personification of existential sensibilities pertinent to the modern condition, that the following analysis of the postwar cinematic city will understand the activity of *flânerie*. Such a conception will make this way of interacting with urban space and ambiances equally applicable to all the characters in question, regardless of the singular urbanite's type and gender.

That the analytical dominance of this figure will imply the need to take individual characteristics as well as historical and socio-economic circumstances into account appears already from the first city-walker we encounter. Seen through the eyes of Antonio in *Ladri di biciclette*, postwar Rome is an exclusive entity, hostile to his material urgencies and aspirations to social mobility. Marginalised from and unaccustomed to the city-centre where processes of Reconstruction already have started to form what fifteen years later will set the scene for Marcello's 'sweet life,' Antonio manifests neither the intimacy with the cityscape, nor the ability to map out its constitution the way the classic *flâneur* does. Rather, his desperate search for a bike and its thief aligns him with the detective; a figure that in Benjamin is seen to assume the *flâneur*'s aimless indolence and blasé attitude as a mask behind which to hide "the riveted attention of an observer who will not let the unsuspecting malefactor out of his sight" (*AP*, 442). However, like Sam, the detective in *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (Argento, 1970), Antonio lives the city as displaced and excluded and his movements become too irresolute to create a successful search. Aimlessness is also a characteristic of *La dolce vita*'s "antihero" of modernity, Marcello, and his search - existential in nature rather than material or epistemological as theirs is - is

defeated by an inherent inertness in relation to the commodified city and to his own desire for meaning.

A particular case rises around the strangers we shall see walk foreign streets in *Viaggio in Italia* (Rossellini, 1953) and *Morte a Venezia*, two characters who both personify the figure Simmel discusses as the one who “comes today and stays tomorrow” (“The Stranger,” 402), and that Barthes includes in a scale of urban readers ranging “from the native to the stranger” (92-97). Benjamin, interestingly enough, does not specifically delineate the stranger, but these characters’ experiences of being out-of-place, as well as their search for a sensual immediacy to the cityscape, are crucial characteristics of his *flâneur* who as he appeared in his original form lived urban space as a marginalised aesthete. Similarly, features of the stranger are also displayed by several of the other city-walkers we encounter, and in particular the foreign detectives in *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* (Bava, 1962) and *L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo*. Apart from the ambivalent sensation of being both attracted to and at loss vis-à-vis an estranging cityscape, the confrontation with uncanny situations and manifestations of urban life – of the terrifying appearance, as Freud describes it in his excursus of the *Unheimliche*, of something familiar within the unfamiliar, or something homely within the unhomely (143-4) - is, as we shall see, an experience both native and strangers share.

What most strikes a contemporary reader of Benjamin’s notes on the 19th-century *flâneur* is, however, the absence of the *flâneuse*, so systematic as to imply that the experience of urban modernity and of the public sphere could not, at least at that time, have a female anchorage. Nor is Benjamin alone in excluding the possibility of female city dwellers. To the degree that Poe or Baudelaire include women in their urban texts, it is typically as a passive object of the male gaze. In “The Man in the Crowd,” Poe notes how “modest young girls” returning from work submerge in London’s crowd to escape “the

glances of ruffians” (110), while in Baudelaire’s sonnet “À une passante,” a mysterious widow fugitively enters the poet-*flâneur*’s field of vision before she is carried away by the crowd, creating a darkly intense moment of presence (*Œuvres*. 88-9); a “love at last sight” (*CB*, 124-125) that so much delights the city dweller (*CB*, 45). As Janet Wolff notes, whether Baudelaire’s female urbanite manifests herself as a prostitute, a lesbian or a passing stranger, she fails to assume an objectifying gaze and meet the *flâneur* as his equal (“The Invisible *Flâneuse*,” 41-2). The only female urbanite to be granted a position among Benjamin’s urban types is the prostitute, something which reinforces the idea that during, and well beyond, the heyday of the Paris arcades, prostitution constituted the only female version of *flânerie*. It is noted how George Sand, in order to walk unnoticed and at the same time exercise her voyeurism within prohibited Parisian streets, would famously disguise herself in a “sentry box redingote” and assume the attitude and freedom of a student (893-94), a strategy we find evoked by the astute Irene Adler when she discloses how her strolls around Sherlock Holmes’ London depend on the freedom offered to her by male costumes (Doyle, 228). In the 1930’s, Virginia Woolf still feels that she needs “an excuse for walking half across London between tea and dinner” (19). These accounts of how women experience their female identity as an obstacle in their interaction with urban space do all give testimony to “a social distribution of power that prescribed the exclusion of women from public presence” (Gleber, 175). The fact that women have been denied the pleasure of *flânerie*, this “peculiar characteristic of the modern [...] the fleeting, anonymous encounter and the purposeless strolling” (Wolff, “The Invisible *Flâneuse*,” 43) has implied that they have been deprived of not merely the right to participate in the life of the city, but significantly also the possibility to experience and to constitute themselves within modernity.

If *flânerie* - both as the emblem and the articulation of modern urban life and as a literary and cinematic mode of expression - traditionally has been reserved for men, it is most crucially because the “unbounded, unrestricted, pursuit of perception” (Gleber, 173) and the essentially sensual encounter with the city that constitutes the *flâneur*’s *raison d’être*, have appeared incompatible with conventional ideals of female respectability. In Benjamin’s account, not even the prostitute’s streetwalking can compare to this exclusively male sensation of urban life, as her gaze is focused on scrutinizing potential customers and watching out for the police (*CB*, 151), and her movements within the crowd are limited and indeed dictated by the economic predicament of being “seller and sold in one” (*AP*, 10). It is in line with these observations that Bruno, in her study on the city films of the Neapolitan director Elviria Notari, asks whether the city stroller’s “mobile gaze” is inherently male, adding that

the ‘peripatetic’ gaze of the *flâneur* is a position that a woman has had to struggle to acquire and to liberate from its connotations of social ostracism and danger. (*Streetwalking*, 50)

Bearing in mind this struggle for the right to watch and make legitimate use of previously forbidden ways of seeing and modes of walking, the female characters examined in the following chapters will raise a series of questions to be addressed before mapping out the cities that emerge from their *flânerie*. What are the means by which the *flâneuse* claims the right to the urban habitus once she is allowed into traditionally prohibited male spheres? Does her mobilized gaze allow participation in urban life and does it enable a passage from passive spectacle to active spectatorship, or is she objectified by the gaze and steps of others? And most crucially, is she able to objectify the targets of her gaze? While each of the female city dwellers we encounter proves to have distinct ways of

identifying with the cityscape and activating her sense of voyeurism through various forms of urban impressions, a common feature among them all is the ability to overcome an initial phase of alienation, something which significantly distinguishes the *flâneuse* from her male counterpart who tends to retain a detachment or even a sense of unease *vis à vis* both the human and physical urban environment. A juxtaposition between the male and the female characters will throughout the study be facilitated by the organisation of the material, in that each of the chapters will cover two films with respectively a female and a male protagonist to be analysed according to one of the four urban types outlined above (the *flâneur* / *flâneuse*; the detective; the stranger). Hence, the examination of *Ladri di biciclette* and *Le notti di Cabiria* in the first chapter will be anchored to the figures of the *flâneur* and the *flâneuse* of the Reconstruction, while the second chapter explores these two types in relation to the ‘economic miracle’ as they appear in *La dolce vita* and *La notte*. The female and male detective respectively will form the focus of the third chapter devoted to *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* and *L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo*; while the last chapter will trace the female and the male strangers’ walks through foreign cities in *Viaggio in Italia* and *Morte a Venezia*.

Including some of the most celebrated films and directors to emerge in the period 1947 – 1971, our selection of works can claim to be representative of Italian city films of the postwar era and, in particular, of the tendency in these years to create cinematic cities through which to establish a dialogue with the profilmic world.¹⁴ As this outline indicates, the thematic organisation based on urban types is paralleled by the films’ chronological order, establishing an arrangement that will allow us to suggest, firstly, the ways in which

¹⁴ Franco De Felice significantly sees the early 1970s and, more specifically, the assassination of Aldo Moro in 1972 which marked the defeat of the ‘historical compromise’ between the Christian Democrats and the Communist Party, as signaling the end of the postwar era: “Con la fine dell’esperienza di solidarietà nazionale [...] Con la rottura della reciprocità dell’assedio, il braccio di ferro avviato con la caduta del fascismo si conclude e si può sostenere, con una relativa fondatezza, che si chiuda allora il lungo dopoguerra italiano” (230).

cinematic portrayals of urban characters and ambiances have developed over this very period, and secondly, to what extent these representations can be said to reflect the radical socio-economic change and the rapid adjustment to Society structures that characterise postwar Italy. With the exception of *Morte a Venezia* (1971) - a re-creation of Thomas Mann's pre-World War I novella in which the auteur establishes a fin-de-siècle frame for a series of highly introspective responses upon contemporary experiences of distress and upheaval (Testa, *Masters of Two Arts*, 190) - these films all respond to and provide often critical portrayals of the postwar ambiance within which they are embedded. If *Ladri di biciclette* emerges from a wish to make a difference by exposing issues of social injustice and by contributing to a redefinition of national values and identity, *Le notti di Cabiria* approaches the same context of economic as well as existential dilemmas with an emphasis on the individual and with a less fatalistic tone, ultimately paralleling the call for a new society with a call for new modes of artistic creation. Similarly to Rossellini's other films with Ingrid Bergman - *Stromboli* (1950) and *Europa '51* (1952) - *Viaggio in Italia* explores more universal questions regarding the loss of values and one's place in the world, conveying the state of the world's post-World War II cognitive map (Wood, *Italian Cinema*, 120). Later, when neorealism has given way to modernist experimental film and popular film genres such as the *giallo*, *La dolce vita* and *La notte* appear as both creative applications and critical observations of the "miracle" and its degenerated zeitgeist, whereas beneath the unconcerned and ironic tone of *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* and *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* there runs a more critical line of inquiry into the deceptive nature of modernity and the culture and spaces it generates. Miraculous economic growth might enable communication and transcultural interchanges, but these means to transparency are complicated by the density of the crowd covering maniacs and

criminal networks, or by exclusion from corrupt and dysfunctional structures of panoptical surveillance.

Apart from the common attempt to portray a society in transition, these films are all anchored to the perspective of the city dweller, and to discuss them in terms of cinematic *flânerie* will produce new insight into films that have been much studied but never as a corpus and rarely, if at all, with an analytical focus on the city-walker. Such an approach will allow us to go beyond the films' often antithetical aesthetic and generic characteristics to see more clearly the affinities their concern with subjective experiences of urban modernity create. Cumulatively, these films demonstrate that the Italian postwar city may offer "room for play," albeit different from the *Spielrom* Benjamin associated with the arcades of Baudelaire's Paris,¹⁵ while their reliance on the voyeuristic city dweller as the most crucial narrative function indicates the common ground they find in what Gilles Deleuze describes as "purely optical situations." The new cinematic image brought about with the disintegration of the conventional "movement-image" reflects a need - so fundamental to neorealist film and subsequently to both Italian and French avant-garde cinema - to invent "a new type of tale (récit) capable of including the elliptical and the unorganised" (*The Movement-Image*, 211).¹⁶ What characterises the essentially modern "time-image" is its tendency to extend into reflection instead of action, making for a "cinema of the seer and no longer of the agent" where the dramatic situations work to activate the character's perceptions while excluding consequential actions or reactions (*The time-image*, 2). Where the conventional "action-image" is constructed around

¹⁵ The idea of play (*Spiel*) in Benjamin appears in various contexts and with a series of connotations, ranging from toys and children's mimicry, involving the Freudian notion of repetition, to acting or the creativity of performance and display, and to gambling (Hansen, "Room for play", 6-9). To some extent, all of these associations are intrinsic to his concept of *flânerie*.

¹⁶ The difference between realism and neorealism is, according to Deleuze, precisely the former's reliance on situations which extend into action, whereas the latter is dominated by optical and sound situation where the connection between the "reality of the setting and that of the action" is dreamlike and located to "liberated sense organs" (*The Time-Image*, 4).

dynamic modes of recognition that leads the character from a point A to a point B, the “optical-image” relies on “*attentive recognition*” which is static in nature as the perceived manifestation or situation will be connected to the imaginary and the mental, ultimately allowing for a new, “temporal and spiritual” form of subjectivity (*The time-image*, 45-8).¹⁷ If it is the viewer-character’s ways of investing “the settings and the objects” with his gaze that create the time-image, it is his or her “stroll or wandering” that loosens the “sensory motor link” of the conventional action-image (Deleuze, *The Time-Image*, 4). Mobilisation of the gaze and of physical presence within mutually distanced spheres of the city is what structures these typically episodic urban narratives, and it is from the intersection between the wanderer’s gaze and his or her encounters with these spheres that the cinematic city manifests itself.

¹⁷ Subjectivity for Deleuze appears thus when there is a “gap between perceived and an executed movement,” a gap that is filled by the “recollection-image” called up by the actual image (*The Time-Image*, 45).

Cos'è Roma? Qual è Roma? Dove finisce e dove comincia Roma? [...] Per lo straniero e il visitatore Roma è la città contenuta entro le vecchie mura rinascimentali: il resto è vaga e anonima periferia, che non vale la pena di vedere.¹

P. P. Pasolini. *Storie della città di dio*.

CHAPTER ONE

Views from Beyond: Exclusion and Transgression in the Postwar City

1. 1 Introduction

One of the major achievements of Italian neorealism is to have given voice to contemporary social experiences through urban narratives that dramatise intersections between physical, social, and mental space. The choice – artistic and moral - to move into city streets in search for stories of everyday experiences with the postwar condition emerges as a counterdiscourse to prewar cinematic conventions and, in particular, to the cinema of the Fascist era. In line with the Regime's politics of ruralisation, these films would often convey ideas of regeneration by foregrounding the characters' transition from the city to the country (Bertellini and Giovacchini, 97), whereas urban narratives would present an ultimately reactionary realism that characterises light-hearted comedies such as Mario Camerini's *Gli uomini che mascalzoni!* (1932) and *Il Signor Max* (1937), both of which star Di Sica in a completely different role than the one André Bazin a decade later will celebrate for its revolutionary humanism. Whether it is anchored to images of war, liberation, and destruction, as in Rossellini, or it lingers between deprivation and

¹ “What is Rome? Which is Rome? Where does Rome start and where does it end [...]? For the foreigner and visitor, Rome is the city contained within the old Renaissance walls: the rest is vague and anonymous periphery that is not worth seeing.”

reconstruction, as in De Sica, the neorealist city is both a geographic and a human phenomenon, an entity founded on the “‘fact’” - on the “‘fragment of concrete reality’” – with which Bazin immediately pinpointed the narrative technique of Rossellini (37) and which for Cesare Zavattini constituted the *raison d’être* of neorealism (98-100). It is this ‘fact’ that Kracauer subsequently discerns within the “‘stream of material situations and happenings’” that so easily finds its way to the screen, constituting the “‘unfixable flow which carries fearful uncertainties and alluring excitements’” in *Ladri di biciclette* (*Theory of Film*, 71-73). While this neorealist classic fails to realise Zavattini’s ideal of a social diary capturing objects and encounters in their real-time manifestation (118), the lyrical rendering of three days in the life of a poor worker proves an authorial commitment to the profilmic that met scarce sympathy within what, after 1948, became increasingly reactionary official circles (Armes, 28).

To devote a portrait of postwar Rome to three days in the life of an unemployed worker implies both a sense for poetic realism and the assumption of a moral stance, both of which are readopted with innovative variations in *Le notti di Cabiria*. Fellini’s approach to cinematic narration and character development differs greatly from that of De Sica, and the two films may be said to signal respectively the height and the eclipse of neorealism, as Bazin’s noted 1957 essay, “‘Cabiria, the Voyage to the End of Neorealism,’” implies. What they share and what inspires this study of *flânerie* and the reconstruction, is the choice to anchor the urban narrative to an unresourceful wanderer whose struggles and marginal positions betray the city’s inability to provide an even distribution of its means of reconstruction. The economic predicaments that in the aftermath of the war leave Antonio in frustrated search for his bike force Cabiria into a life of prostitution a few years later, when spheres of official Rome have already started to live its ‘miracle’. Furthermore, the cityscapes they live and wander do both embody the polycentric nature that Shiel sees as

the major characteristic of the neorealist city (67), a feature sustained by the two city dwellers' displacement from more privileged circles and dramatised by their perpetual walks into the city centre. While these cinematic cities are both structured around distinct social disjunctions that oppose the marginalised character's aspiration to social mobility, they differ from each other to the extent that the two city walkers do, and it is in particular their divergent ways of handling alienation and mechanisms of exclusion, that create discrepancies between their respective postwar cities.

De Sica's worried and absent *flâneur* initially approaches the city centre as an open space of possibility, a vision that soon will disintegrate as he realises his own powerlessness in relation to the indifference and hostility that the loss of a bike provokes. The failure of his search and his limited role in the urban discourse may be seen as resulting from his unfamiliarity with metropolitan life and scarce receptivity towards its external impressions, but an even more crucial factor is the nature of postwar Rome which, as it adapts to large-scale "Society"- structures, causes further experiences of exclusion for those who already find themselves on the margin. The extent of Antonio and Cabiria's dislocated position appears by way of contrast through their interaction with the city centre, and their continuous confrontations with spaces and ambiances on the verge of modernity brings a close past into the present in ways that dialectically reveal social discrepancies unaccounted for by the Reconstruction. However, where Antonio's desire to liberate himself from a present that is still entangled in the struggles of the past brings him from the *borgata* to the city centre only to lead him back to exactly where he started, Cabiria moves repetitiously between the two destinations, forming a trajectory that after a series of disappointing encounters, sees her rise once more and approach a different road and a greater degree of self-awareness. Their divergent modes of *flânerie* reflects the way her profession brings her into spheres to which Antonio has no access and of which he is

mostly oblivious, while it also signals the distinction between his aimless and evasive presence and her ability to adjust better to the city's rhythms and claim a voice in the urban discourse that ultimately allow her to overcome her misfortunes and look into the future.

1. 2 From the Periphery to the City Centre

What moral and artistic intentions motivate *Ladri di biciclette* can already be identified from the film's incipit where a slow pan and a melancholic score bring us into the austere atmosphere of a Roman *borgata*. Beside the commitment to portray areas and citizens of Rome that have fared less well during the Reconstruction, there is also a conviction, as De Sica later would explain, that neorealism presents "reality filtered through poetry, reality transfigured" ("On De Sica," 31). Hence we have De Sica's poetic take on postwar deprivation, represented not so much the way it really was, but, rather how it really might have been lived by one who suffers from its effect. As a sophisticated play with medium close-ups and long or extra long-shots works to situate the wretched apartment buildings among a network of unpaved roads and vast areas of uncultivated land, De Sica foreshadows in audio-visual terms what Pasolini some years later described as the vague and anonymous Roman periphery. In fact, the Valmaleina area is objectively speaking hardly worth seeing, except perhaps as an indication of what actually emerged from Fascist planners' decision to relocate inner city proletarians in underdeveloped housing projects in the outskirts (Sorlin, *European Cinemas*, 118-19). What the world of the *borgata* clearly provides however, is an appropriate setting for a "film inchiesta" ("inquiry film") which, as Zavattini defined it, would do away with preconceived storylines to foreground instead the dramatic quality of contemporary everyday

experiences (Zavattini, *Neorealismo ecc.*, 70-71). While the 'investigative' quality of *Ladri di biciclette* appears through its uncompromising testimony about the alarming housing crisis that in the immediate postwar years harmed vast areas of Italy, it is perhaps even more crucially manifested in the choice to set a narrative and discursive focus on the desperate situation of the 2,141,000 of Italy's 46, 000, 000 inhabitants who in 1948 were out of work (Sitney, 91). For workers like Antonio who live in the outskirts, the crisis presents a Catch-22 situation. While there clearly are no subsidies provided to complete the apartments and therefore there are no jobs in the area, the neighbourhood's location miles outside the city wall prevents the men from going into the city centre in search for work, just the way Fascist housing policies had predicted (Sorlin, *European Cinemas*, 118-19). If, as a theatrical space, this cinematic city is constructed around socio-economic dynamics that make the poor steal among themselves, its discursive structures are constituted within the distortions of Fascist urban policies, revealing the continuity of Regime's mechanisms of exclusion years after its abolishment.

It is within this context of crisis lived in economics and in space that we must interpret the view of unemployed men lining up in front of a paternalistic, cigar smoking employment office representative who arranges weekly collective appointments to announce the few new positions available. Only when he is insistently called upon and sought by a young jobseeker does Antonio leave his solitary and resigned position at the water pump. Both his complete lack of interest in the meeting as well as his detachment from the other, less lucky workers, indicate not only how disheartened his job search has become after two years of unemployment, but also his solitude and lack of participation, something which the scene's visual composition emphasises as it frames him in accentuated isolation from the crowd. If, as Sorlin suggests, Antonio's detachment from and general unfamiliarity with both human and physical aspects of the cityscape indicate

that he is an immigrant to Rome, his marginalised position within the local worker community, as well as his restricted circle of acquaintances; his insecure movements; and reserved modes of interaction, find a logical explanation (121). However, when Antonio is portrayed as an outsider in relation to every milieu he comes in contact with – from the labour union in Valmaleina to the church and ultimately to the thief’s courtyard - without addressing the question of his origin, suggests an authorial wish to present the subjectively rendered drama in more general terms than as that of a geographical and cultural stranger.

While providing a socio-historical context as well as a justification for the choice to centre the urban narrative on the recovery and the theft of a bike, the first sequence is also significant in that it indicates the nature of the relationship between city walker and cityscape. Antonio’s alienation might well reflect an objective position as a newcomer, but this is not the only, nor the most significant reason, why he scorns, or at best ignores, both his physical and human environment. Once he has received the notification of his job and experienced a fleeting moment of hope, Antonio quickly retreats to an even more frustrated solitude without engaging with the less lucky workers who, for their part, are joined against him and do not even consider conceding the bicycle they claim to possess in the hope of themselves being able to get his post. We will see more clearly how this opposition between ambience and subject will turn into a mutual alienation when we follow Antonio’s less fortunate encounters with the city centre. For now, we should note that whether it manifests itself through deficient material facilities; through its women lining up in front of the water pump, or through human resources directed towards involuntary and socially destructive idleness, the *borgata* is seen to embody all the misery Antonio wishes to leave behind, and he consequently confronts it with an inclination towards auto-exclusion that significantly is not limited to the public sphere. While his wife Maria, upon returning to their humble apartment together, acts with fury and

determination to find, as she says, a “remedy” to his dilemma, Antonio falls into introspective impassivity and first leans towards the wall in the hallway before he sits down on the edge of the bed, prepared to resign himself to the bitter fate of having found a job and of almost, but not quite, having fulfilled its only condition. The following morning sets up a completely different situation. Antonio is now the one to activate Maria and Bruno in his preparations for first day at work and proves to be in confident control of the domestic environment, moving between the kitchen and the bedroom with hopeful expectations before closing the door behind him as if to protect his home. If the idea of being able to provide a degree of economic stability entitles him to act as the head of the household, he is clearly aware of having compromised this position when he comes home that night without his bike, leaving Bruno at the door while turning to his only friend Baiacco for help. That Antonio may exclude himself from his most intimate ambience as he does from the surrounding worker community, demonstrates that his position as a stranger is a result of major socio-economic disjunctions rather than of a disadvantaged stranger’s failure to adjust. The subjective perceptions he forms of private and the public spheres are largely based on preoccupations related to these disjunctions.

The significance of Antonio’s material exigencies for his interaction with physical and human surroundings becomes even clearer if we consider his first entrance into Rome’s centre where he in both geographical and social terms is a foreigner. Following Maria’s resolution to pawn all their bed linen to discharge in turn the bike he had pawned in a previous moment of despair, his movements are no longer avoiding, but inquisitive, conveying a relieved and outgoing attitude that, whether it is channelled through the appreciation with which he negotiates the prize of the linen at the pawnshop, or the childlike excitement over having a uniform that authenticates his appointment, or later, in his casual way of interfering in some childrens’ play, makes him considerably more

receptive towards external stimuli. Contrary to his previously introverted and spiteful impassiveness, he is now driven by a curiosity towards the unfamiliar which he shares with Maria, lifting her up to the window to show her the spacious billposter office where every worker, as he emphasises, has his own spot. Both space and jobs are luxuries offered by the city centre; a yet unknown sphere that gives promises of the relative prosperity he joyfully outlines to Maria after having received his first work instructions. Rome's most "reconstructed" and urbanised area is thus initially received as far more inviting and including than Antonio's usual environment – despite his unfamiliarity with metropolitan customs and rhythms. At this point in the narrative, however, his out-of-placeness is used to add a comic effect to episodes such as when he enters the office and is told to put down the bike he carries demonstratively on his shoulder to show that he has met the requirements. The comic potential of Antonio's character is however already undermined in the subsequent episode where the office window suddenly closes from inside and interrupts his and Maria's untroubled moment of voyeurism, in effect foreshadowing the mechanisms of exclusion that by Sunday afternoon will drive him away from the city altogether.

Not until his bike is stolen does Antonio start to sense the effective consequences of his dislocation from the spheres of future prosperity. As long as he lives in the illusion of having claimed a position with the city's socio-economic structures, he can also retain the confidence to ride zigzag through the streets and to intrude into the fortune teller's room only to categorically dismiss the sort of twaddle he later will seek to in desperation. What ultimately marks this transiently unconcerned encounter between cityscape and city-walker is, respectively, an ability to incorporate the foreign and a pleasure in immersing oneself in the urban flux, and it is, as a consequence, with expectation that he leaves for work the following morning. His sense of hope is reflected in idyllic atmosphere of dawn

which distance father and son from the misery left behind, while reinforcing their togetherness and abandonment to the swarm of cycling workers. While the film is prevalently composed by the medium- or long-shots in the deep focus, a technique that, as Bazin first noted, has the effect of retaining the ambiguity intrinsic to reality itself (“The Evolution of the Cinematic Language”), Antonio’s subsequent ride along the via Nomentana is framed in a series of close-ups focusing on his serene facial expression and cheerful attitude as he approaches the city centre, where he encounters his colleagues and disappears altogether in a wave of an inner city working environment that demonstrates all the solidarity the unemployed in Valmaleina sadly lack. This overtly romanticised, fleeting moment of harmony between subject and the physical ambiance as well as social ambiance creates a neat opposition between periphery and city centre – between past depravity and future welfare - that all too suddenly will be ironically denied.

1. 3 Between City-walker and Cityscape

This initial perception of the developed inner city areas as accessible and liberating to the marginalised worker collapses in the wake of the episode in which, as Zavattini noted, “per cinque minuti quel punto di Roma diventa il centro del mondo” (“Il soggetto,” 51).² A vital factor controlling Antonio’s ambitions for a change in economic and social status, the bike has also a distinct structuring function, as demonstrated by the episode of the theft, which creates a caesura within the essentially episodic narrative, establishing a *before* and an *after* in Antonio’s drama. While his trajectory initially went from the periphery into the city centre and ended optimistically with a vision of the wanderer’s inclusion into urban life, from this point on it will take the opposite direction, delineating

² “for five minutes, that point of Rome becomes the centre of the world.”

his futile quest and disillusioned return to the *borgata*. A similar rupture occurs in the newly established relationship between city walker and cityscape. Antonio immediately abandons his tentatively inquisitive and unworried exploration of the metropolis, and what seemed to be a series of open doors will from now on only close around him. Lost in thought over how to attach the poster of Rita Hayworth without ruining her enchanting appearance, he fails to see that he is surrounded by a group of thieves – a micro-level form of organised crime, whose members are possibly even poorer than himself – strategically positioned in order to take advantage of the billposter's complete dedication to his duties. Combining multiple layers of action and character relations, the episode's visual construction illustrates the complexity of Rome's street life in relation to the protagonist who only too late realises that a man with a German soldier's cap, as he later will recall, is running off with his bike, and both his desperate call for attention and the taxi driver's benevolence are vain against the accomplice who convincingly leads them in the wrong direction. Antonio's initially alarmed expression turns into frustration and despair as he returns to adjust the image of the glamorous Gilda who reinforces, by way of contrast, the helplessness of his movements and the vulnerability of his position.

One of the most memorable moments within the history of Italian film, the sequence is crucial not only for how it vividly conveys the relative significance of an objectively insignificant vehicle, but also for the dramatisation of disparity between character and ambiance. As a symbol of participation in the city's economic processes and social relations, the bike implies a physical and existential position within the world of progress that Antonio proves eager but tragically unprepared to seize. His hopelessness against the coordinated theft is symptomatic of an inadequate adjustment to the overwhelming dimensions of urban structures which not only make him an easy offer for traps, but that also receive the disadvantaged subject with indifference or hostility. This

becomes clearer from his successive encounter with the police. Antonio is framed in a humble position in front of the desk of a bored and entirely uncaring officer who evidently has just inquired as to whether there were any people at the scene of the crime. The officer's attitude and Antonio's answer to his question – “Sì, c'era gente, ma andavano per i fatti loro, poi mi sono messo a cerca'...”³ – foreshadow, in juncture between them, the lack of sympathy he will encounter throughout his search, as well as his tendency to remain isolated when his situation is most critical. Between the officer, who reduces his dilemma to “solo una bicicletta,”⁴ suggesting he go searching for it himself if he has the time, and Antonio, who, oblivious of what he will go through the next day, reacts with incredulousness to such a proposal, there is a discrepancy in perception that more than resulting from an opposition between immigrant/native, or even periphery/centre, rests on the gap that exists between tradition and modernity. If Antonio naïvely had expected a “Community”- form of assistance from Rome's notoriously useless police force, the officer perceives of his duties as directed towards the city's emerging Society structures and is not as much unwilling, as incapable, of sympathising with the loss of a bike.

The only ones who respond to Antonio's request for help with the set of Community values he clearly is expecting (“Mi ce hai da aiutar, Baiacco!”),⁵ are Baiacco and his street-cleaner colleagues. Their organised, albeit completely futile, search around Piazza Vittorio presents a rare presence of solidarity in a culture dominated by bourgeois ideals of individualism infusing both social and institutional urban structures. Sadly, neither the first nor the two successive encounters involving the police – at the market and at the thief's home – are atypical but rather indicative of a society that excludes and displaces:

³ “Yes, there were people, but they went their own way, then I started searching ...”

⁴ “Just a bike.”

⁵ “You ought to help me, Baiacco!”

The worker is just as deprived and isolated among his fellow trade unionist as he is walking along the street or even in that ineffable scene of the Catholic “Quakers” into whose sympathy he will shortly stray, because the trade union does not exist to find lost bikes but to transform a world in which loosing his bike condemns a man to poverty. (Bazin, 52)

Antonio’s bewildered appearance at the trade union in Valmaleina more critically presents the tension between collective indifference and individual failure to adjust. As his whispering is immediately silenced in favour of a political talk, excluding him conceptually as well as physically, the gathering dramatises a major gap between theory and practice. The patronising, cigar-smoking employment office representative stands among the most eager participants, demonstrating a set of double standards that also reigns over the charity leaders who during Sunday mass open the church doors only to reconfirm their distinction from the lower classes. Whether it involves a group of unionists who profess collective rights but ignore the individual worker’s needs, or a hypocritical bourgeoisie that shaves and feeds the poor provided they attend mass, Antonio’s experiences with the city’s social institutions only reinforce his desperation as he is repeatedly denied a practical solution and a social network to solve his dilemma.

The lack of consideration Antonio faces within official Rome tends also to define his social encounters, and it is particularly during the disappointing visits to the markets that the desperate wanderer starts to distance himself from the hostile environment. The German priests who take shelter from the rain under the same roof as Antonio and Bruno while ignoring their presence is the most famous example of the indifference his dilemma meets, and the alienating encounter dramatises the sense of individualism that also leaves him without a witness to the theft and that subsequently will isolate him from the people at

the bus stop and at the fortune teller who reproach him for disregarding the queue. While the encounters with Rome's working class, including those at the markets, demonstrate the hostility Antonio faces within his own social ambience, they also emphasise how his walk excludes Rome's historical attractions and more prosperous spheres. Signs of change within postwar economical structures are only alluded to through quintessentially bourgeois phenomena such as cars and football games, or American culture as represented by *Gilda*, and their peripheral position within Antonio's trajectory suggests that his inability to participate in the city's economic and social life does not ultimately depend on the loss of a bike nor, certainly, on the inability to adjust, but on social disjunctions that exclude him in the first place.

The social disjunctions by which the bourgeoisie becomes the privileged class of the Reconstruction, just as much as it later will become the great winner of the economic *boom*, are rendered in socio-geographic terms through Antonio's displacement to the outskirts and the vast distances he has to cover to enter and move within the city. His ride into work Saturday morning, starting from Valmaleina to Piazzale di Monte Sacro, where he leaves Bruno, along Via Nomentana to Porta Pia, the official entrance to the city centre, and, finally, to Porta Pinciana where a colleague gives him a lecture on billposting, and Via Crispi, where his bike is stolen, is approximately eight kilometres long. When he retreats from Lungotevere Flaminio Sunday night, his way home is equally long, and without a bike, it would require, as Zavattini noted, a combination of tram, two buses, and finally a walk ("Il soggetto," 52). Between these points of entrance into and exit from the cityscape, Antonio's itinerary involves such disparate sites as the notorious black markets in Piazza Vittorio and Porta Portese, respectively situated within the city centre and at the city wall, and the Ponte Duca D'Aosta, where for a moment he fears that Bruno has drowned. Four to seven kilometres separate these locations from each other, and

considering, in addition, all the other sites that more or less by chance fall within his path – from the Chiesa dei SS. Nero e Achilleo to the restaurant in the Passeggiata di Ripetta, and the fortune teller in Via Paglia where they incidentally run into the thief – what emerges from this odyssey is a fragmentary and polycentric city that appears constantly to extend its boundaries while at the same closing its doors on the increasingly aimlessly searching wanderer.

To what extent social inequalities determine Antonio's use of the city becomes clear when he attempts to ignore his dilemma and challenge his marginalised position. Struck by a sudden and altogether transitory stroke of relieve over knowing that Bruno has not drowned after all, as well as by a sense of sheer defiance towards a life that deprives him of the most modest pleasures, Antonio counts the lire he is left with and takes Bruno to a restaurant. This "dramatic oasis" (Bazin, 54) is the nearest he ever gets to the *flâneur's* nonchalant and inquisitive stroll, and it symptomatically starts to disintegrate from the very start, when they realise with astonishment how out of place they are. To keep up the illusion, Bruno gets a grilled mozzarella like the snooty girl next to them, but when the second course arrives at her bourgeoisie family's table, Antonio cannot but resign, observing spitefully towards them and to his own miserable condition that "per mangiare come loro bisogna guadagnare un milione al mese."⁶ Unable to ignore the reality of his loss, he removes his half-empty plate and asks Bruno to add up the economic implications of his loss, as he quotes the very figures he previously had illustrated to Maria in undisturbed delight over the new job. His failure to assume more constructive measures than to return, despite himself, to the ridiculously useless fortune-teller for advice, points to the tendency of his wandering to loose direction as his search gets more

⁶ "In order to eat like them, you would have to earn a million a month."

desperate, reinforcing his alienation from his surroundings as well as from his own objectives and actions.

Having transgressed into an exclusive sphere of the city only to be faced with the futility of his passive aspiration to social mobility, Antonio's subsequent encounters are with groups of his own stratum who, however, do nothing but reinforce his sense of isolation in his concrete search for the bike, as well as in his demand for justice. More cynical than the police constable, La Santona (the fortune teller) disregards his loss and charges 50 lire to say that he will find the bike immediately or never (a tragic truism), while the women in the brothel do what they can to oppose his entrance in favour of his adversary who, evidently familiar with the place, is served a drink. He fares no better as he follows the thief home, where the entire courtyard is infused by an *omertà* that protects the culprit while forcing the victim to leave without filing the complaint they all know is due. In contrast to Nora in *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* who, as we will see in the discussion of the noir-city, is able to constructively confront the fact that to witness a crime and to prove its occurrence are two completely different matters, Antonio approaches the dilemma with a self destructive measure of justice that only serves to provoke a solidarity turned against him. As soon as he seizes the bike, the entire neighbourhood is after him, and how all these men manage to react so quickly to the poor worker's theft while nobody was there to help him when his own bicycle was stolen is explicable only in terms of a Kafkaian surrealism. The collective persecution and call for his retreat nevertheless presents a verisimilar culmination to the antagonistic urban stimuli that have marked his walk up to this point. It is with humiliated resignation that he turns his back to the square where shouts from the mob fuse with those of the football fans, his shame overcoming his awareness of living in an unfair world. Destroyed by the misdeed committed and by the lack of any alternative to a life of miserable solitude and forced leisure in the *borgata*,

Antonio vanishes into the street the way he disappears in the film's texture, without however enjoying the rhythm of the urban flux as he did upon entering the city centre the previous day. It is the despair in his look; his exclusion from the crowd; and the comfort he finds in Bruno's hand, that make these final moments of his walk the most uncompromising representation of Rome of the Reconstruction – not as it was, but as it was lived.

1. 4 Dialectics of *flânerie*

It is first at the end of the film, which refuses to offer an end to Antonio's dilemma, that we see instances of the "Community"-forces he vainly has been in search throughout his walk. The dramatisation of unity and collective effort turned against him is typical of his position on the city's physical and social margins, as well as of how his movements have constantly been constrained by the discrepancy that exists between his static despair and the indifference of the dynamic urban ambience. P. Adams Sitney aptly identifies this mutual alienation as the structuring principle for the film's mode of representation. However, his view that it reflects an authorial wish to emphasise the troubled interaction between city-walker and cityscape rather than encouraging an identification with the protagonist (93), suggests that the representations of the two entities are separated and parallel to each other, whereas this equipoise clearly shows that the former is visualised by the latter. The multifaceted and in fact changing appearance of the cityscape - ranging from a desolated and aversarial periphery, to a tentatively receptive and including centre, and finally to what Marcus perceptively has described as a labyrinth of increasingly hostile streets and institutions (67) – is only understandable in relation to the futilely searching eyes that see. To emphasise the protagonist's role in the projection of this cinematic city

allows us to see that the viewer's experience of it largely relies on an identification with Antonio who, unable due to his material concerns to assume the socially privileged *flâneur's* blasé attitude and inquisitive gaze, illustrates Benjamin's notion that revealing urban presentations tend to be "the work of those who have traversed the city absently, as it were, lost in thought or worry" (*CB*, 69). It is, as we will see, precisely the wanderer's absent and inert perception of the alienating urban ambiance that projects a fragmentary and polycentric city which cannot but disclose the social disjunction involved in the transition to modernity.

The mutual alienation between the wanderer's perplexity and antagonistic urban stimuli becomes clearer in light of the discourse that emerges between city-walker and cityscape. Initially, the inner city centre speaks to Antonio through all that the *borgata* is not – jobs, large offices, inviting streets. Following the theft, however, its discourse comes entirely to involve barred passages and limited horizons, as well as signs of the material and social resources that he so urgently needs (accumulations of bikes; supportive networks), so as to constantly remind him of his limited means without presenting him with any form of alternative. In responding to this, Antonio reassumes the characteristic of his initial role in the urban discourse, enunciating the city's dislocated spatial possibilities. In all the official sites he enters, from the pawnshop and the billposters' headquarters, to the police station and the worker's union, he is consistently both physically and socially displaced to humiliating positions vis-à-vis authority figures. In other moments – specifically during his first visit to the fortune teller and when he returns home after the theft, leaving Bruno alone at the door, as well as when he enters the restaurant and is confronted with his own otherness within the world of the rich - he is captured literally "on the threshold," precisely where the classical *flâneur* used to find himself (*AP*, 10). The ambiguity of this figure was however what gave him access to a range of urban ambiances

without making him socially or economically dependent on any of them, assuring a flexible and free scope to assimilate the stimuli of the crowd from a distance and with inquisitive nonchalance. Faced by the hostility of the city, however, Antonio tends to seek protection in more anonymous and deserted sites around the church and along the Tiber where his walk ends, whereas his gaze loses its initially eclectic curiosity for a desperate focus on all the bikes he paradoxically walks into or for an evasive and introverted attitude that similarly reduces his perceptivity towards external impulses while also hindering him in assuming a more consequential approach to his search.

While this inclination towards auto-exclusion also marks Antonio's relation to the worker community in Valmaleina and must be seen as a reflection of his tendency to resign himself to rather than acting upon the practical realities of his situation, it appears more specifically as a response to mechanisms of exclusion within the social spheres of the official city. In direct antithesis to Baudelaire's hero of modernity who refused to integrate himself within the Parisian bourgeoisie, for Antonio, a passage into the Roman middle class remains an unrealisable utopia. The socio-economic imperatives that constrain his use of the city may however point to the limits of idealised portrayals of the classic *flâneur* who realistically cannot have lived unaffected by capitalist forces, including "the division of labour" (CB, 54) which entirely defines Antonio's existence. The discussion of the *flâneur* and the *flâneuse* of the miracle in our next chapter will allow us to see more clearly how processes of commodification forced the autonomous *flâneur* to resign himself to the market (AP, 21). For now, my focus is on the "peculiar irresolution" and profound "doubt" of this figure (AP, 425), since these responses to the uncertainties of the modern condition imply an existential correspondent to Antonio's economic despair. That the latter's search on the other hand is complicated by his absent and irresolute nature is emphasised already from the moment of the theft, which he

observes of and reacts to when it is too late, and with so little clarity of mind frustrated measures as to be lead into a second trap, allowing the thief to escape. The bitter resignation with which he sits down on the ladder recalls the isolated and equally resigned position he first assumed when the news of his job was announced in absentia. The ambiguities of the situation that unfolds - there is a job for him and he cannot accept it; he has and does not have a bike; he loses the bike and has no job unless he finds it (Moneti, 41) - announce the lack of direction that will lead him to cover vast and completely unproductive distances. Both the way he passively leaves it up to Maria to recuperate the pawned bike, and how he transfers the responsibility for the injustice suffered over to the police and to the more resolute Baiacco, demonstrate an inertness that, independent from the material imperatives of his search, hinders him in identifying a measure by which to influence the course of externally determined events.

The combination in Antonio's trajectory between constant movement and irremediable failure to act decisively allows to see the apathetic and externally obstructed search as also being an "absent" and "worried" mode of *flânerie* directed towards a solitude or to fleeting illusion in an attempt to escape the very simple reality of having found and lost a job. Inherent in the increasing sense of irresolution that leaves his character most inert or evasive in moments where practical measures would be required there is an awareness of the modern condition that Deleuze sees expressed in the "crisis of the action-image" and which first took place with neorealist cinema (*The Movement-image*, 211). Inspired by both material and existential uncertainties brought to the surface by the postwar economic crisis, De Sica shatters the traditional Action-Situation-Action form where a given situation forces the character to react with the effect of altering the initial situation. The unstable nature of Antonio's world are reflected in a series of

insignificant or uncontrollable events which in themselves seem to exclude consequential reactions:

there is no longer a vector or line of the universe which extends and links up the events of *The Bicycle Thief*: the rain can always interrupt or deflect the search fortuitously, the voyage of the man and the child (Deleuze, *The Movement-image*, 212).

The narratively unjustified rain does however more than to create the most emblematic and quoted of the film's "idle periods" (*Ibid*, 21), it also encapsulates the uselessness of a character who perceives of opportunities and antagonistic forces - usually when it is too late, as in the above quoted episode when he sees the thief just before he takes off - and who reacts with aptitude and ultimately self-destructive initiatives that do not even seem to belong to him. The unfortunate worker who ends up stealing a bike is "un uomo onesto che si fa ladro perché è fuori di sé [...] si fa acciuffare dopo un tentativo di fuga goffo e scoordinato, di chi si lascia andare" (Moneti, 42).⁷ If it is the city-walker's irresolution that directs the film towards the "cinema of the viewer," it is also this errant "viewer" and the society he projects - a disintegrated formation founded on physical and social barriers - that dramatise how the processes of reconstruction have worked to reinforce rather than dissolve the social disjunctions that deprive him from the agency to position himself within the economic and social workings of the city centre.

What in particular emerges from confrontation between the city centre as the habitat of the middle class and the unemployed from the outskirts is a constant juxtaposition between tentative manifestations of the modern and sings of a not-yet-overcome national crisis. Still suffering from the effects of Fascism and of the War,

⁷ "an honest man who becomes thief because he is out of himself [...] he lets himself get caught after a clumsy and uncoordinated attempt to escape, like the one who has given up."

Antonio is caught in a gap between the underprivileged small-scale structures to which he is mentally attached but from which he materially desires to free himself, and the modern form of organisation and tentative prosperity he wishes to take a share in. His aimless *flânerie* between these two positions achieves a critical function that relates him to postwar Rome the way the classical *flâneur* related to 19th-Century Paris. Their ambiguous nature appears as the “law of dialectic at a standstill” where “what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation” (AP, 461-62). By bringing life to the recent past within which his existence still is anchored, Antonio becomes himself a “dialectical image.” Evoking recent collective events which the privileged middleclass prefer to forget in favour of progress and individualism, Antonio’s attempts to make use of their spaces may deflect imagination back to a “primal history” and to “elements of a classless society” as he reveals, like any dialectical image does, how modernity rather than being a new phenomenon “is always citing primal history” (AP, 4).⁸ His critical function resides then in challenging the very ideas of progress that have directed processes of reconstruction away from imperatives of social justice, while also presenting a potential for a historical “awakening” which, through a synthesis of “dream consciousness” and “waking consciousness” (AP, 463) would create awareness of the how social disjunctions established in the near past of Fascist regime continue to displace and exclude in the present of the Reconstruction.

1. 5 From the Passeggiata Archeologica to Via Veneto

It was exactly the opposition and the possibility of transgression between Rome’s coexisting and opposed spheres, both spatial (*borgata* vs city centre); social (proletariat vs

⁸ Typical this “historical materialism which has annihilated within itself the idea of progress” is Benjamin’s notion of how “only a thoughtless observer can deny that correspondences come into play between the world of modern technology and the archaic symbol-world of mythology” (AP, 460-61).

bourgeois) and temporal (a present past vs a future in progress) that interested Fellini and scriptwriter Tullio Pinelli when they first posed the hypothetical *what if*:

Se a Via Veneto casca per caso una prostituta di periferia, di quelle che vivono in borgata o tra i ruderi del Foro Romano, che succede? Le sue colleghe d'alto bordo faranno la manfrina, i commendatori non la guardereanno neppure, poi un poliziotto le dirà di andarsene. Invece facciamole vivere una serata da favola. (qtd. Del Fra, 37)⁹

Cabiria emerges as a suggestive response to this question ten years before the film's release in 1957, taking material form first in *Lo sceicco bianco* (1952), Fellini's directorial debut which also establishes his recurrent use and recreation of Rome's inherent cinematic qualities. While Cabiria's brief encounter with the newly wed Ivan Cavalli in *Lo sceicco bianco* fails to establish the complexity she later will achieve, the eccentric and completely asexual prostitute's presence among the nocturnal Roman fountains clearly delineates the figure Giulietta Masina would later remember as the "piccola, svagata, e incuriosita abitante della notte" (223).¹⁰ When Cabiria is brought back to live her nocturnal drama, it is in part to restore the tragic fate of *La strada*'s (1954) dim-witted but good-hearted heroine Gelsomina who meanwhile has made use of her vignette figure and clumsily intrusive manners. Both films rely on Masina's unique ability for tragicomic performances to create narratives that linger between the reality of a social class dislocated to the margins, and the lyricism of an individual's search for a sense of belonging and a spiritual awakening.

⁹ If, in Via Veneto, a prostitute from the periphery should happen to come around, of the ones that live in the *borgata* or among the ruins of Foro Romano, what happens? Her vip colleagues will go on and on about her, the "commendatores" will not even look at her, then a policeman will tell her to leave. Instead, let's make her live a fairytale night.

¹⁰ "tiny, absentminded and inquisitive habitant of the night."

It is in the intersection between the crude reality and the imaginary of Cabiria's *flânerie* that her fairytale night evolves, starting with a chance encounter with Lazzari whom she in amazement recognises as a famous actor without quite understanding that he would exist outside the world of his films. Enchanted, she observes the far less glamorous fight he now is having with his girlfriend Jessy who runs off with an air of autonomy she certainly does not possess. Her entire performance is keyed in opposition to Cabiria who far more convincingly has just proclaimed her independence in response to Amleto's suggestion she get a man to "administer" her work. This fur-clad hysterically jealous woman will soon be back, depriving Cabiria of a night with her hero whose material existence she hardly believes. In the moment, however, it is this wayward tramp misplaced to the city's most exclusive spheres that intrigues Lazzari. Cabiria appears both more refined in her presentation of self and more reflective with regard to her surroundings than Gelsomina, but they share the Chaplinesque mannerisms and a naïve optimism, despite the many disappointments involved in their respective journeys. It is the self-reflexive clownishness and inability ultimately to effectuate the desired change in her life, that gives her a tragicomic and isolated yet inquisitively engaging presence, at odds both with the proletarian margins where she lives and works, and the world of the rich and famous and dreadfully bored Lazzari.

It is in fury over Giorgio's betrayal and with a desire to demonstrate her autonomy that she insists Amleto drop her off in Via Veneto - the habitat for postwar Rome's idle rich and the very personification of the country's transition to modernity, as we will see better in *La dolce vita*. Her knowledge of this notoriously exclusive area would be based more on narratives than on empirical experience, and her intrusive appearance there dramatises the field of transgression that her profession allows. This whim articulates however also a stubborn sense of pride internalised as a protection against continuous

deprivation and disappointments and that now enables her to actively deny Amleto's notion that Via Veneto is hardly a place for a lower class prostitute like herself. The dismissive looks she gets from the two elegant and far more robust prostitutes she encounters confirm his point, but Cabiria walks demonstratively and apparently unaffected between them and gets her felicitous revenge later when yelling at them from Lazzari's Cadillac. At stake behind her is a desire to challenge the categories of class that exclude her from certain areas of the city, and while she ultimately is expelled from Lazzari's luxurious and spiritually poor world, this act of transgression is both more reflective and persistent and significantly more successful than Antonio's disconcerting restaurant visit.

That Cabiria's visit to the world of the rich would take qualitatively different form than Antonio's was perhaps laid down in her eccentricities and gawky clothing, elements that in themselves call for attention. Her position at the window where she gets a mediated insight into the fancy nightclub recalls the moment when he lifts Maria up to show the billposter office, but whereas he was resigned to having the window slapped in his face; Cabiria rejects the imposing nightclub porter's order to get lost. Turning her back to him while manoeuvring obstinately with her umbrella, she confronts him with a directness the irresolute *flâneur* Antonio never was able to assume, stating her right to a look and to a presence even within spheres she knows leaves no room from her: "Ma ché, non posso manco guarda' [...] E invece io resto qua!"¹¹ The entire episode is structured around a sense for voyeurism which we will come back to since it largely defines her character and directs her trajectory towards the unseen and the unknown in the search for something that may allow her a new life. For now, we should note that this confrontation with an authority figure whom she has no scruples making fun of presents an ambivalence between her awareness of being out-of-place, and her determination not to renounce the

¹¹ "What! Am I not even allowed to look? On the contrary, I remain where I am."

basic rights of any citizen to use what, after all, is public space, even if all she can do is to watch this world from the outside, in the quality of an undesired element of disturbance. Her presentation of self when she follows Lazzari continues to move between these two positions. She follows, despite herself, his brusque commands and feels the need to excuse her hesitant entrance into the nightclub, transferring the responsibility to the renowned actor (“M’ha detto di entrà!”).¹² For her to conform to the refined norms of this place is however both impossible and undesirable, and she chooses instead to display her more or less conscious mannerisms, purposefully placing the umbrella on the lady’s newspaper when requested that she leave it, before getting lost in some exquisite velvet curtains and launching herself in an absurd mambo that is clearly less suitable to the Piccadilly dance floor than to her workstation on the Passeggiata Archeologica.

The ability to reflect on her otherness within a world that excludes is rooted in Cabiria’s less comic reality at the city’s outskirts. Continuous exposure to a range of realities made accessible by her profession cannot but set her deprivation as well as her unorthodox ways in perspective. However, both the assumed nonchalance and need for self assurance also shows a sense of pride that ultimately is rooted in her aspiration to a normal life and liberation from prostitution. Oscillating between alienation and dramatisation of her own otherness, the character’s complexity establishes an ambivalent relationship to the cityscape that is also conveyed in the visual construction of the ultimately disheartening fairytale night. Cabiria’s transgression into Lazzari’s luxurious villa is rendered through an attentive use of chiaroscuro effects that covers her minute and hesitant figure. The actor asks for her name, and her answer is eclipsed in the presumptuous entrance, emphasising both her distance from the environment and the marginal nature of her character. She has, however, already assimilated some of this

¹² “He told me to enter!”

world's customs and she places her umbrella in the useless servant's arms, before approaching the pompous stairs, climbing step by step with determination and very little elegance. While the stairs –an area of transgression and an objective correlative for Cabiria's liminality - establishes the bridge that enables her to cross over from the tangible and disillusioning nocturnal city, its majestically insuperable appearance also indicates the futility of her dreams and aspirations. Her climbing of these stairs is shot from behind and below in ways that often serve to convey the physical or metaphorical gigantic nature of a cinematic character or element, but in relation to Cabiria, this technique emphasises how misplaced she is within spaces which both intimidate and enchant her but which fail to deprive her from the right to retain her nonchalant attitude and eccentric manifestation of self.

If we return to Cabiria's intrusion in Via Veneto and, later, to her visit to the Piccadilly club where she initially remains at the margins before conquering the dance floor, these episodes are framed so as to emphasise her transition from alienation to manifestation of self by initially dislocating her from the main action and subsequently granting her centre-stage position in the field. The same technique is used to convey her changing attitude to Lazzari's overwhelming bedroom. Her initial appearance on the edges of the frame is consistent with both her astonished reaction to and social distance from a world of magic closets, champagne and Beethoven. She soon takes a liking for Beethoven, however, and starts talking to Lazzari as if he were the old friend his cinematic characters are to her, and a series of medium close-ups capture her expressivity as she forgets how misplaced she is. The eccentricities of her comic personae enable her to overcome her estrangement and embrace this encounter as an opportunity for escapism in line with Lazzari's films and her subsequent visits to the Divino Amore shrine and the variety theatre, events that all provide a fleeting moment of liberation from her everyday struggles

before they collapse in devastating disenchantment (Shiel, 117). As for the encounter with Lazzari, it remains unclear whether she expected an erotic encounter or something more lasting, but the disillusion his reconciliation with Jessy creates and the comfort she finds in the dog, as lonely and isolated as herself, suggests that the latter hypothesis is the more likely. A vision of salvation also fits better in with her aspirations to a different life. In either case, Jessy's untimely yet entirely predictable return results in displacement first to the bathroom and eventually to her usual workstation where, just as she had foreseen, the story of her fairytale night is met with disbelief and derision.

Cabiria had, however, made a point to Lazzari about her distinction from the other prostitutes on the *Passeggiata Archeologica*, one of whom, she explains scornfully, sleeps under the arches, while she has her own place with all the comfort she could possibly need. What she does not tell him is of course that one of her workmates waits for her clients in her car – a relative privilege she is excluded from. The house she likes to refer to as an alibi for her self-sufficiency is a tiny shack chucked down in the middle of a field, the “house” she talks so proudly of and that she has almost paid off betrays her idealised presentation of self, as does the *borgata* of San Francesco in which it is located, an even poorer and more desolated section of Rome's wasteland than Antonio's Valmaleina. Objectively seen, her situation is even more underprivileged than that of Antonio, if we consider the way her stigmatised social status considerably complicates her aspirations to social mobility, while also making her more vulnerable to exploitation, something which the events involving Giorgio and Oscar both demonstrate. As they provide a structure to her loosely connected adventures, these two parallel episodes enable to develop her character and her trajectory in ways that escape an unequivocally circular form. The final loss of love and of the house she repeatedly refers to in defence of her dignity appears to have a more decisive impact on her, and the ability to rise and smile may be seen to

suggest an experience of maturity and self-awareness that her previous moments of collapsed happiness did not provide (Stubbs, 17). Both of the robberies are experienced more as personal betrayals than material losses and relate less to her relative prosperity and independence compared to the other prostitutes, than to her desire for recognition on a purely human level and determination to overcome the misery she is very aware of not having chosen.

If the film's ambiguous finale seems to leave little choice for Cabiria other than to start over again with perhaps a more mature approach, Oscar's betrayal and her own naiveté appear irrelevant in light of social structures that always find direct or indirect ways of keeping her at the margins. Both her stubborn claim to a presence within the city centre and excitements over finally being able to leave the *borgata* in preparation for her marriage ("Me ne vo! [...] Io qui vendo tutto")¹³ show, beneath her ingenuousness, an awareness of her displacement from the social and material means to change. Cabiria might have proved capacities to improve on her conditions and arrive at the possibility of an honest life, but this only places her 'almost, but not quite,' where she wants to be, in effect foreshadowing the even more distressing fate of Anna Magnani's character in Pasolini's *Mamma Roma* (1963) who just when she has been able to start a petit-bourgeois life with her son closer to the city centre, falls back to a life of prostitution. Pasolini significantly noted how Cabiria's liminality is conveyed formally through a repetitious pattern of a long shot that first establishes a more or less abnormal environment in the outskirts or in more central spheres and that is followed by her introduction in another long shot. Whether she appears wretched in sumptuous upper-class settings, or innocent and unarmed amidst the exploitation and corruption of her usual gangland surroundings (*Nota*, 233), the two juxtaposed shots dramatise questions of social injustice by

¹³ "I'm leaving! [...] I'm selling everything here!"

establishing a contrast between cityscape and city-walker displaced to where she does not belong, and marginalised from where she aspires to be. More obviously a stranger in her usual surroundings and a strikingly more disruptive element within spheres of the official city than Antonio, Cabiria manifests herself in more complex ways as “matter out of place” - not “dirty” in and of herself, but in relation to where she stands in a system of categories (Douglas, 106-115).

The dislocation to the *borgata* of San Francesco in Ostia at a distance of 19 kilometres from the city centre is precisely a result of a housing policy aimed at keeping the city centre “clean,” while the restriction of her work-sphere to the notoriously unrefined *Passeggiata Archeologica* on the border of Rome’s historical centre is another reflection of social fears of contamination. The social marginalisation of these areas creates, as Pasolini noted, a city on its own:

Oltre la città nasce una nuova città, nascono nuove leggi dove la legge è nemica, nasce nuova dignità dove non c’è più dignità, nascono gerarchie e convenzioni spietate nelle distese di lotti, nelle zone sconfinite dove credi finisca la città, che ricomincia, invece, ricomincia nemica per migliaia di volte in polverosi labirinti, in fronti di case che coprono interi orizzonti. (*Il cinema*, 117-18)¹⁴

The portrayal of nocturnal life within this city left to reside at the borders of The City draws on Fellini’s repeated visits to these areas and benefits from having local unprofessional actors in the film’s minor roles (Fellini qtd, Del Fra, 193).¹⁵ The scripting of these sequences relied considerably on the contribution of Pasolini, whose linguistic

¹⁴ “Beyond the city a new city is born, new laws are born where the law is enemy, a new dignity is born where there no longer is no dignity, pitiless hierarchies and conventions are born in the extensions of the lots, in the unlimited zones where you think the city finishes, where it starts, instead, where it begins again inimically a thousand times in dusty labyrinths, outside houses that cover entire horizons.”

¹⁵ See in particular Lino Del Fra, *Le notti di Cabiria*” di *Federico Fellini*, and Tullio Kezich, *Fellini*, for accounts of Fellini’s preparations for the film.

and sociological knowledge of the Roman proletariat inspired both the crude vivacity of gestures and verbal exchanges, as well as the reconstruction of the unofficial laws and the social relations they create. What in particular betrays Cabiria's association with this "other city" is her direct verbal approaches and expressive physical manifestations of self, aspects of her character that make her out of place even in the popular ambiance of the variety theatre. This excluded and autarchic city on the other hand holds no promises for the materially and spiritually richer life she envisions and that she has the personal abilities to achieve, since the law it imposes is equally antagonistic towards her independent ways and equally ready to exploit her as the City that rejects the risks she represents of "dirt" and social abnormality.

1. 6 From Streetwalking to *Flânerie*

The question as to whether the classic *flâneur* did have or could have had a female counterpart has been raised by a series of scholars who have mostly confirmed Wolff's presuppositions that this "was rendered impossible by the sexual divisions of the nineteenth century" ("The Invisible Flâneuse," 43). Only the prostitute, enjoying a liberty respectable women did not possess, would have been able to walk the streets unaccompanied, an idea that the very concept of the female "streetwalker" or "passeggiatrice" in Italian, would seem to imply (Bruno, *Streetwalking ...*, 50). While Benjamin's account of "the feminine fauna" of the Parisian arcades indicates that female urbanites existed in the form of "prostitutes, grisettes, old-hag shopkeepers, female street vendors, glovers, *demoiselles*," (AP, 494), none of these types would have enjoyed the inquisitive and unworried stroller's privileged access to the city. The prostitute becomes particularly important to Benjamin's critique of modern capitalism, since her movements

by definition are calculated according to economic imperatives, just as much as her gaze is constantly “scrutinizing the passer-by” in search for clients, while at the same time “being on its guard against the police” (CB, 151). Several sequences involving exchanges between the prostitutes and potential or actual customers, as well as their hasty flight from a police raid, illustrate the constraints posed on this figure. Their presence in the city is limited to the spatiotemporal dimension defined by their commerce (nocturnal outskirts areas), and to which they have resigned themselves in lack of the conscience to face the city’s strategies of exclusion. Where Cabiria distinguishes herself is ultimately not in the relative prosperity and independence she has managed to provide for herself, but rather her ability to claim a voice in the urban discourse and to challenge and in part break away from the inhibited and exclusively materially defined use of the cityscape.

Between the two parallel episodes of robbery and abandonment which cumulatively confirm Cabiria’s vulnerability and scarce chances of achieving social mobility, there emerges a dynamic trajectory based on largely unrelated adventures connected by shorter episodes from her workstation. While providing continuity through repetition to the sequence-based narrative and allowing a familiarisation with Cabiria in light of her familiar social ambiance (Stubbs, 14-15), the episodes showing Cabiria at work relate scenes from the *borgata* to alternative experiences located to more central and socially accepted areas. With the exception of the episode from the caves, these adventures do all allow her insight into and momentary participation in the life of ‘The City’. The dynamics of her *flânerie* comes as such to follow Rome’s actual layout where the Passeggiata Archeologica constitutes a liminal space at the border of the historical centre, providing a location for unacknowledged realities. For Cabiria, however, it represents not merely the officially unspoken reality of her work, but the bridge that allows her a passage from ‘the city’ to ‘The City’ and constitutes, like the stairs in Lazzari’s house, an objective

correlative of her own liminal nature. She is allowed encounters with and temporary participation in spheres of 'The City' such as the variety theatre and the pilgrimage, but because of her dependence on this passageway which is also her stigmatised profession, these transgressions remain transitory and most often disappointing in nature.

All the same, it is the idea of transgression that best captures Cabiria's ambiguous nature, and if all her major and centralised adventures evolve as eccentric *flânerie* rather than constrained streetwalking, it is due to her ability to constantly transgress borders and insist on a subjective position as something else than a displaced object for exploitation – or, as Benjamin and Baudelaire before him saw it, as a commodity objectified by forces of modern capitalism (*AP*, 10). At her station, she claims distinction from a lot she is a part of but which she literally and conceptually looks down on, but it is in the encounter with the city's exclusive and potentially revitalising spheres that we see the function of her gaze as well as her claim to autonomy. Cabiria's stubborn and unlikely appearance in Via Veneto is entirely structured around voyeuristic techniques and mannerisms. Looking nonchalantly ahead of her while pretending to establish herself among the pompous local prostitutes, she demonstratively swirls herself between them, but their elegance and indignation forces her off the most patronised part of the street and towards a deserted and darker spot where she can move and look freely. Music from a dancing hall leads her towards the barred basement window, and she bends to get a better view inside. As a counterpoint to the exclusion signalled by the bars, the light shining through intrigues her gaze, and the music invites her to dance, at the margins and in her whimsical ways, in effect making use of deviant "speech acts" hidden but available within the urban discourse (de Certeau, 95-6).

Having established a spot and a voice, Cabiria continues to dance and does not become aware of being observed until she catches sight of the porter, at which point the

music slows down in harmony with her tentative movements and the inquisitive look she launches towards him. True to her nature, she is inclined to engage in a friendly communication with him, but as she senses his desire to clear her off the street, she stares demonstratively at his imposing figure from bottom to top and rejects in this act both the position of the stranger who is usually stared upon, and the city's mechanisms of exclusion that would remove her from its range of vision. Her dance and Chaplinesque mannerisms, as well as her objectifying gaze becomes a crucial means by which she stakes out her presence, and the rest of the episode elaborates on this combined physical and visual way of possessing originally barred spheres. Contrary to Jessy, whom she reproaches for not watching out when she runs into her, Cabiria claims a right to look, and stares incredulously at Alberto Lazzari's sudden appearance while evoking his name to convince herself of the validity of her vision. His fame is conveyed both through her wide-open gaze and his central position in the frame, while she is displaced to the edges and eventually eliminated from the field altogether. Only at the end of the fight between Lazzari and Jessy do we realise that Cabiria has followed the spectacle from the margins, astonished by this exposure to her hero's private life. She immediately turns around and fakes a disaffected attitude, as if oblivious of the fact that she now is an object of Lazzari's clearly intrigued gaze. The role she plays in this episode as a displaced observer announces the less cheerful form of spectatorship she will experience when she follows their reconciliation through the keyhole of the bathroom door, being caught in a distressing passage from voyeurism to disillusion that only confirms her liminal status, as well as her tragicomic nature.

This is only the first of several episodes that show how Cabiria is able to move from "streetwalking" to *flânerie* by mobilising her gaze and assuming the *flâneur's* very own inquisitive attitude. If vision may be said to be the single most defining factor of her

transgressive character, it also explains how her exploratory approach to and escapist use of the unfamiliar interconnect with the disillusion she repeatedly faces in the end. From the very first sequence in which she stops to contemplate the river and is thrown right into it by Giorgio, to the final and similar situation in which she enjoys the view over Lake Albano only to be abandoned again, her voyeurism does nothing but negate potential for a better future. What repeatedly makes her seek new adventures despite the downfall they always lead to is precisely the desire to gain knowledge of her surroundings and of self, a dual urge that is played out respectively through her encounter with “the man with the sack” in Via Appia Antica, and the pilgrimage to the shrine of the Divino Amore. The unexpected exposure to the city’s homeless, displaced even from the displaced *borgata* we see in the background, takes place just before dawn as she is searching for a shortcut to get home. Cold and frustrated in the foggy urban desert, she is blinded by the lights of a car and can barely see the person approaching. As is the case with the ex-luxury prostitute known as “La Bomba” whom they soon will encounter, “the Man with the Sack” is modelled on a humanitarian known for his nightly visits to Rome’s homeless, as well as for the scarce sympathy he met among official charitable organisations whose affiliation he refused. The sequence was censored due to pressure from the Catholic Church immediately after the film’s presentation at the Cannes Film Festival in 1957 (Kezich, *Fellini*, 260). Fellini, who accompanied this figure on one of his nocturnal walks, endows this nocturnal wanderer with an evasive appearance that scares and confuses Cabiria and she immediately retreats from the light of his pocket lamp, assuming an air of hostility that leaves the stranger unaffected. This indifference in a moment she thought she had reason to be scared intrigues her and she follows him, first with an incredulous gaze that discovers an underworld she was not aware of, and then with tentative steps that get increasingly confident with the coming of day.

This episode distinguishes itself from all of Cabiria's other adventures, most significantly because it starts with scepticism and aversion and does not leave her with the agonic sense of destroyed hope. The passage from night to day points to the uplifting nature of this rare instance of unprejudiced charity, while it also suggests the illuminating effect of the direct exposure to a level of deprivation she so far has escaped. Upon their return to the city centre, she observes that "ce ne sono di morti di fame a Roma,"¹⁶ implying a conception of relative poverty and a distinction between "they" and "I" that however is questioned by the previous encounter with "La Bomba" - the most beautiful and prosperous prostitute Rome ever saw. Cabiria's sharp eyes do not fail to recognise her, despite her present state of physical and material decay, and her alarmed expression suggests that behind her measures for change, there is also a concrete fear for the very future towards which she projects her visions.¹⁷ Whereas "La Bomba" materialises her uncertainties, the unprejudiced philanthropist brings forth the latent humility in her character as she introduces her real name, Maria Ceccarelli, and narrates without any form of eccentric performance how she first came to Rome as an orphan. This momentary assurance of her repeatedly challenged faith in the goodness of humanity and in her own dignity is however questioned when she approaches the streetcar that will take her back to the outskirts and she vanishes, the way Antonio does, into the crowd in a manner that visualises her vulnerability and continuous marginalisation rather than her visions for change.

This experience with sincere human contact and sympathy in a moment when she least expects a miracle is underscored by way of contrast through the collective and much anticipated visit to the shrine that follows immediately after. Cutting from the solitary

¹⁶ "There sure are some penniless wretches in Rome!"

¹⁷ Her exclamation "Bomba, ma tu, qua stai?," [Bomba, but you, are you here?] curiously evokes Dante's nostalgic encounter with his venerated teacher ("Siete voi qui, ser Brunetto?," *Inf.* 14, 30). In contrast to Dante, however, who is assured he will never return to Hell's circles, Cabiria's future seems far less certain.

Cabiria who, saddened yet pacified, returns home, to the aerial shot of a loudspeaker and the commercially exploited sanctuary, this juxtaposition of images does little to conceal an authorial irony but also scepticism towards organised religion and suggestions as to the circumstances and ambiances under which miracles take place. A popular sanctuary on Via Ardeatina, the Divino Amore was founded in 1744 where a wanderer back in the fourteenth century was miraculously saved from a pack of wild dogs (Bondanella, *The Cinema*, 126). The portrayal of this popular shrine dedicated to the Virgin Mary announces the media-staged miracle in *La dolce vita* which, just like this unorthodox combination of the holy Madonna and the most profane gathering of prostitutes; pimps; and a pimp's crooked uncle, provoked scarce enthusiasm among Rome's official circles (Kezich, *Fellini*, 259). As a parallel to the juxtaposition of imagery stands a similar contrast between Cabiria's different forms of spectatorship and ways of relating to the human ambience. Whereas her walk along the caves was governed by her usually inquisitive attitude and search for contact along a dimension external to herself, now, when she follows the procession towards the candlelit and heavily decorated sacred image, she appears oblivious of the other participants, and her gaze searches instead a direct relation to the Madonna whom she asks not for any material concession as her friends do, but for the force to change her life. Cabiria's introspective vision runs counter to the inherently collective nature of the event and, on a larger scale, of Catholicism itself, as well as to her friends' approach to this pilgrimage as a social form of diversion rather than a search for a spiritual awakening. This, in fact, is a distinction she herself makes at the gathering after church, where after a moment of solitary reflection she observes in drunken despair that none of them has changed at all – that life will continue as before. In opposition to their indifferent resignation, however, Cabiria is not quite willing to accept a return to her daily routine, and her intention, expressed with frenetic energy, to sell

everything and leave them all, conveys the existential distance she assumes from the ambiance to which she economically belongs, but from which her vision of a materially and spiritually richer life distances her.

To sell her shanty cabin and leave the *borgata* is fatally what Cabiria ends up doing. More than any other episode, her humiliating participation in the magician's performance which Oscar cynically exploits to ensnare her in another illusion dramatises her inherent naiveté in combination with her vulnerability. A recurrent motif in Fellini's imagery, the variety show personifies the very spirit of the city as it is lived through the multitude of its citizens, and when Cabiria somewhat reluctantly enters this doubtful theatre at the city's edges, it is primarily to avoid a night of solitude after the ultimately disappointing pilgrimage, but it also expresses a desire to take part in the urban discourse on premises not determined by her stigmatised social status as well as to activate her voyeurism. The *flâneuse*'s intention is in fact to observe and escape, and if she nevertheless ends up as the one who amuses, it is because of the magician's ability to appeal to her weakest points - her solitude and desire for a man to love – and to lead her into a trance of confessions, to the great delight of the noisy and mainly male audience. Oscar's ability to lure her into his snare significantly rests on a far more cynical use of the very same means of persuasion. Seeing this dream falling apart before her eyes, she gracefully hands her purse over to her traitor while pleading him to end her life, apparently unable to begin a loveless life on the margins once again. Of all the abysses Cabiria's trajectory has led her through, this is the one that to the greatest extent reveals the contradiction between her ability for acute observation, and her incorrigible naiveté and conviction that life after all holds something good for her.

That Cabiria nevertheless resumes her walk and ultimately leaves the spectator with a smile has, following Bazin, traditionally been seen as Fellini's farewell to

neorealism (83- 92), while subsequent interpretations have identified in it a completion of his trilogy of grace or salvation (Bondanella, *The Cinema*, 121), a view that owes much to the director's own observation that in spite of everything "Cabiria still carries in her heart a touch of grace. We must not try to discover just what is the nature of this grace" (Fellini, 66). Regardless of its nature, however, it cannot be seen to involve the concrete change she longs for and, as Sheil observes, while clearly negating the possibility of social mobility, it also refuses to suggest what, if anything, she has learned (120), leading her trajectory towards a just as ambiguous, albeit more optimistic, conclusion, as the essentially tragic ends of *La Strada* and *Il Bidone*. What distinguishes her spiritual awakening from the miraculous redemption that the passive and solitary Zampanò and Augusto seem to achieve, is the vision she manifests when she, despite herself, rises from the ground and lets her tragic walk merge with and gain life from the cheerful strides of the young musicians. It is the last of three processions her *flânerie* brings her in contact with, but while something held her back from following the pilgrims she saw on the Passeggiata Archeologica and in the fields where they had lunch after the pilgrimage, now, when she finds herself most alone and has nothing to loose, she abandons herself to a completely new and fundamentally collective form of experience. Apart from the group's cheerful indifference, when she joins its procession, "aware of herself, of those around her, and of the renewed possibility of love," it is, as Claudia Gorman has observed, the music that drives her (93), and it is as always her gaze that defines her presence and reception of the external. However, as she alternates between observing and exchanging looks with the musicians, and retreating in humorous introspection that is ultimately conveyed through a self-conscious glance at the camera, her gaze is no longer split between external observation and introverted exploration. For the first time, it superimposes the two dimensions. What after all seems to be a road of change in Cabiria's walk relies on the

way her understanding of self no longer presupposes a wealth she does not possess or a social status she does not hold, but rather, a different ability to relate to her surroundings based on a new way of seeing.

1.7 The Prostitute, her City and her Audience

When Fellini accepted his Oscar for lifetime achievement as director, he confessed that of all his characters, Cabiria was the one that worried him the most. If the last view of Cabiria's smiling glance, despite its air of optimism, perplexes the spectator it is not as much for the fact that her return to *Passeggiata Archeologica* is as inevitable as Antonio's return to the employment office, but for the idea that her continuous search for happiness will never succeed, that every pleasure her walk brings her will lead to a greater disappointment. The refusal to provide an unambiguous ending is coherent both with the episodic narrative, structured as it is around Cabiria's impulses and chance encounters, and with her repeated failure to turn the course of events to her favour, a characteristic that aligns her walk to that of Antonio. Their respective modes of *flânerie* demonstrate the irresolute character and the unresolved narratives Deleuze associates with the break of the "movement-image." To an even greater extent, however, Cabiria's visually constituted presence emblematises "the cinema of the viewer" where perception leads to thought rather than action, as the final definition of a new perspective indeed indicates. What crucially distinguishes her from Antonio, and underlines her affinity with the classic *flâneur*, is her ability to interact with the city and live its stimuli not as alienating shocks, but rather as intriguing impulses, despite the antagonistic effects they often have on her participation in the urban discourse. Cabiria's inquisitive attitude also gives her *flânerie* a picaresque quality and her engagement with the spheres it leads her into evokes the

flâneur's sense for chance encounters, while the room it established for reflection also allows for interrogation into her self and her surroundings.

Among the many recurrent elements that compose Fellini's warehouse of images, the woman is granted a position none of the director's other obsessions enjoys, and her narrative and discursive function creates a network between his most celebrated films. As for the prostitute more specifically, she is launched with Cabiria and is successively seen lending her shanty lodgings to Marcello and Maddalena in *La dolce vita*, while making a far more spectacular appearance as Saraghina in *8 ½* (1963). Brothels dominate entire sequences of *Satyricon* (1969) and *Roma* (1972), the latter of which presents a singular prostitute of captivating beauty who could be considered a young version of the mythical "La Bomba," or the classy counterpart to the animalesque Volpina in *Amarcord* (1973). The woman ultimately dominates the director's field of vision altogether in *La città delle donne* (1980) where she presents a collective claim to a city all her own. While none of these figures is as carefully developed as Cabiria, she, for her part, embodies aspects of them all, from Saraghina's passion for dance, to the brothel-prostitutes' expressive performances and the beauty's singular gracefulness, and Volpina's visual mode of communication. Ultimately, she conveys the claim to the urban habitus dramatised by the prostitutes and the feminists who trouble the by-now-middle-aged Marcello in *La città delle donne*. In all these films, the prostitute is anchored to the urban ambiance, whether it be that of Fellini's hometown Rimini, or to Rome. Through her interference with a range of physical and social ambiances, Cabiria personifies the Eternal City in its most divergent manifestations, giving visual form to a spatial and social formation that is fickle, ungovernable, relentless, and essentially female.

Beside her voyeurism and her material need and desire to make use of a range of urban spheres, Cabiria's ability to give visual form to a city in transition is also embedded

in the ambiguous nature of her character and her profession. A marginalised figure with a suppressed yet distinct voice within the urban discourse, the prostitute achieves a privileged position in the *Arcades Project* and is the closest Benjamin comes to defining a female counterpart to the *flâneur*. While he discusses her in terms of her trade, rather than as a type with unique features, proving no better than Baudelaire whom he accuses of having failed to write “from the point of view of the whore” (436), she becomes important to his reconstruction of Baudelaire’s Paris since she “may be considered, from early on, a precursor of commodity capitalism” (*AP*, 348) and as such presents a metaphor of the metropolis as the site of commodification and mass production (Wilson, “The Invisible *Flâneur*,” 71). Both her nature as an element of primal history with life within modernity, and her ambivalent constitution as “seller and sold in one,” make the prostitute a dialectical image with a critical function vis-à-vis urban modernity and “the ambiguity peculiar to the social relations and the products of this epoch” (*AP*, 10). When Cabiria to some extent manages to move beyond the forms of prostitution that reduces the woman to a “mass-produced article,” it is thanks to both her eccentric presentation of self which refuses any conformist appearance associated with her profession, as well as the consciousness she has of the need to liberate herself from it (*AP*, 346). This insistence on distinction allows her the passage from “streetwalking” to *flânerie*, but she fails, despite her efforts, to escape “the proletarianization of the producers” wherein resides the “stigma” of the commodity (*AP*, 347). As it increases coincidences between the city’s opposed geographical and social spheres, this stigma creates barriers that reinforce the status of the city’s privileged, protecting their purity from contamination. Cabiria’s liminal status enables only a temporary transgression of these barriers and does not ultimately grant her the desired participation in the life of ‘The City.’

Cabiria's constant movement between the *borgata* and the city centre carries the same critical function as Antonio's trajectory, but way of connecting Via Veneto and the caves; of linking Lazzari's villa and the variety show; and of juxtaposing the sanctuary of the Divino Amore to the Passeggiata Archeologica; visualise to a greater extent the contradictions of a city that lives uneasily between tradition and modernity as well as between recently acquired wealth and centuries-old poverty. The passage, furthermore, that Rome's city centre has undergone from a middle-class sphere that closes its doors on the unemployed worker to a society of consumption that receives the low-class prostitute as a temporary vehicle of pleasure, displays both what processes of modernisation and urbanisation are at work in the crucial years 1948 – 1954, and how these processes have served to reinforce social disjunctions left unresolved by the Reconstruction. Cabiria's desire for a normal life and an emotionally richer existence comes also to underscore the costs of economic development on an analytical level that Antonio's predominantly material search never reaches. More than merely shedding light on the class distinctions by which she is displaced to a life on the margins, Cabiria also exposes the spiritual poverty of the social class in whose favour these distinctions work. If the Piccadilly nightclub appears to linger in tedious anticipation of an apocalypse that will never materialise, announcing the decadent urban life we will see at the centre of *La dolce vita* and *La notte*, Lazzari is bored by both his wealth and fame, but he is unable to change the routine of success and material extravagance. His passive return to the apparently accomplished but completely uninteresting Jessy highlights the self-awareness and sense of pride inherent in Cabiria's determination to rise and go on in a moment in which her vision of a new life seems to be denied once and for all.

The clownish wanderer's continuous passage from comedy to pathos is emphasised by the disappointing outcome of the encounter with Lazzari just when they have arrived at

a mutually rewarding point of communication. Her expulsion on Jessy's account from his perfectly sterile world points however also to the dialectical nature of her *flânerie*, as well as to the less overt function she assumes within this urban narrative. In contrast to the character that from Fleur-de-Maria of Eugène Sue's *Mystères de Paris* (1880) to Julia Robert's *Pretty Woman* (1988) has given life to the good-hearted prostitute rescued by an equally good-hearted but significantly better-off man, Cabiria's wealthy hero does not save her the way she, for a fleeting moment, might have wished. When Lazzari sees himself forced to pay her for an unconsumed service so that he can wash his hands both of her intrinsic innocence and of his own conscience there is a clear indication to Cabiria's distinction from these melodramatically coined characters. As Bazin observed, Cabiria enables Fellini to infuse the film with "the tension and the rigor of a tragedy" without resorting to elements foreign to the film's "universe" (Bazin, 85), and the dignity with which she faces both this and later betrayals, giving her umbrella a quick polish before exiting what she momentarily thought was the door to something new, recalls that of a tragic heroine capitulating to the forces of her fate. That her character is assigned a morally superior position over her rich and admired hero is clear, but as a discursive strategy, she is not there to arouse compassion or patronising pity (Bondanella, *The Cinema*, 125), nor is her ultimate function to offer a politically charged image of modern capitalism in the line of Godard's *Vivre sa vie* (1964) and *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* (1967), but to allow both an exposure and a spectatorial access to the 'the city' that from the view point of 'The City' does not exist.

Cabiria's continuous transgression between marginal and central urban spheres illustrates the ideas Michel de Certeau presents in his essay "Walking in the City" regarding the ways in which the official "concept city" is constantly challenged by the citizens' actual spatial practices. Her appearance within forbidden spheres is executed

through a series of “speech acts” based on the gaze and on the attitude of the body that runs counter to normative modes of enunciation but that nevertheless is part of the city’s complete repertoire of spatial possibilities. In that, her discursive function goes beyond the mere and momentary “appropriation of the ‘I’” as it draws attention to the city’s most marginal realities by bringing them into and in contact with accepted spatial codes (94-8). While exposing the world she unwillingly inhabits by means of juxtapositions, she also allows the spectator to transgress into her world and comes as such to assume the function Peter Brooker discerns within the prostitute of the 19th-century French novel. This figure is similarly inherently idiosyncratic and essentially “theatric,” as she narrates “the ostensibly unnarratable [...] the deviant, shameful, criminal, that which most clearly diverges from the ‘simple, calm, happy life’”(Reading for the Plot, 155). While the “unnarratable” for most audiences always will have far more narrative interest than the calm and the cute, it is, according to Brooks, in particular to the bourgeois need for exotic escape that the prostitute’s devious trajectory will appeal (*Ibid*, 156), a view that echoes Benjamin’s notion of how the pimp’s commodification of his girlfriend “have so inflamed the sexual fantasies of the bourgeoisie” (*AP*, 345). Cabiria’s continuous transgression from the city that resides outside-the-law and into the upper-class that resides decadently in moral loss dramatises precisely the exciting potential of her deviant character. It is significantly also in such an audience that her *flânerie* might move beyond the scandalous and reveal the relations of inequality and exploitation that exist between these social and geographical opposites, ideally creating critical awareness of “of the causes of that deviance which is the object of representation” (Brooker, *Reading for the Plot*, 156). This commitment to question a specific set of socio-economic and historical circumstances as they are lived by a personally resourceful but socially deprived subject reveals the film’s neorealist legacy, as does the choice to use the postwar city and its spatial dynamics as a stage for this

drama. The constant alteration between the clown's world and her social world and the interference of the mystic and the surreal within an essentially neorealist setting, on the other hand, indicates that this, indeed, is the end of neorealism and the start of something which for Fellini increasingly will evolve as a self-reflexive cinema of fantasy and dream states.

Tentativi di questo genere vanno stroncati immediatamente perchè risultano altamente corrosivi [...] e infiltrano nelle nuove generazioni il tarlo della vita facile, materialista, priva di ideale, contribuendo di fatto all'opera disgregatrice di forze politiche sovversive.¹

Parlament interpellation (re: *La dolce vita*),
February 9, 1960

CHAPTER TWO

Views from Within: Commodification and Alienation in the Miraculous City

2. 1 Introduction

If the passage from neorealist film to modernist cinematic practices generally may be said to have involved a change in perspective that moves away from economic and social issues related to material destruction for a critical exploration of existential and moral conditions of a recently and rapidly modernised society, this perspective is accompanied by a different type of character and a new cinematic gaze that both foreground an emotionally charged and visually lived cinematic space. As both *La dolce vita* and *La notte* illustrate, the modern city figures equally prominently as setting and discursive entity within the 1960's avant-garde cinema which in its very deconstruction of narrative and formal conventions seems to reflect the flux of urban life, visualising the modern condition as it is lived, fragmentarily and incoherently, by its subjects. With the exception of some singular works such as Visconti's *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (1960) or Pasolini's *Accattone* (1962) and *Mamma Roma* (1964), which still rest on a neorealist commitment to represent the economic miracle from the point of view of those who

¹ "Attempts of this type should be trounced immediately because they result highly corrupting [...] and infiltrate the worm of an easy, materialist life deprived of ideals in the young generations, de facto contributing to the disgregating work of subversive political forces."

remain at its margins, the city dwellers featured in 1960's art film tend not to be underprivileged outsiders but "insiders, fully created and deeply affected by the cultural reorientations brought about by modern lifestyles" (Bertellini & Giovacchini, 103). With the shift in focus from peripheral and neglected urban areas to modernised and constantly expanding inner-city ambiances, there is thus a similar shift in the perspective of the urbanite who rather than approaching the cityscape as an exclusive symbol of a desirable but ultimately unachievable social mobility, will tend to live it with an uneasy sense of loss over something inherently human which progress and modernisation cannot offer.

The discussion of the postwar *flâneur* and *flâneuse* showed that physical marginalisation encapsulates their status as victims within the society of the reconstruction. Some 15 years later, Marcello's and Lidia's position at the centre of Rome and Milan respectively reflect their nature as products of the miracle, formed, like the cities themselves, by processes of industrialisation and urbanisation. When they appear to be out of tune with these urban labyrinths - no longer merely on the verge of, but in fact embodying modernity itself - their displacement does not reflect an objective status as stranger, as they are both accomplished according to bourgeois standards and enjoy access to upper-class circles, but rather, their ambivalent stance in relation to the hollow culture of the miracle. Boredom over an emotionally barren consumer society and nostalgia for a past to which they no longer belong make them seek alternative realities of the city, engaging in detached and disillusioning quests that cannot but reveal the limits of a material progress that provides no means by which to draw spiritually more rewarding experiences from the modern condition.

The inadequacy of the *flâneurs* of the miracle to act constructively towards a solution to alienation, emotional or moral loss, and lack of purpose, recalls the social immobility of their poverty-stricken counterparts in ways that crucially indicates lines of

development of the urban narrative and the modern subject within Italian postwar cinema. In his discussion of “the crisis of the action image,” Deleuze notably draws a line from the narratively unmotivated rainfall that interrupts Antonio’s search, and *I vitelloni* (1953), which, as in so many of Fellini’s films, is constructed around the lack of connection between events and their insignificance “to those who experience them in this new form of the voyage” (*The movement-image*, 211-12). The picaresque voyage-*flânerie* that brought Cabiria through a series of seemingly unrelated episodes becomes even more dominant in *La dolce vita*, where Marcello’s dwelling and passage from one encounter to another creates the only unifying principle within fragmentary narrative apt to present social disintegration at a time when Rome emerges as the habitat both for international film industries and for a new international jet-set. That they all engage in aimless modes of *flânerie*, whether as excluded from or integrated into the city centre, create a more general discourse concerning the alienating effects of urban stimuli, and of the uncertainty of the modern subject. Whereas Antonio’s lack of direction depends on his unfamiliarity with forces of modernity and Cabiria’s whimsical passage from pleasures to disillusion is motivated by a set of naïve hopes, Marcello and Lidia have no innocence to lose and no desires or convictions strong enough to identify a permanently viable alternative to the city’s moral wasteland. Where the latter is unable to take a decisive step in any direction other than confirming the end to her marriage, the former moves from dissatisfaction with a scarcely challenging profession only to end up in indifferent conformity with the logic of commodity exchange.

As their quests are defined with less precision and, most importantly, lived much less as a concrete dilemma than those of the postwar *flâneurs*, so too are their interactions with the cityscape more detached, conveying the impassive attitude that Simmel presents as a presupposition for metropolitan life. Following Simmel’s notion of the importance of

vision over hearing in the metropolis, Benjamin observes how the urbanite's eyes have become "overburdened with protective functions" (CB, 151), an idea we see personified in Marcello and Lidia who both have come into the city centre as grownups, and who no longer react to urban stimuli the way they did at that time. If it is thanks to their trained eyes that they avoid Antonio's traumatising shock-experiences, it is equally what deprives them from Cabiria's joyful and transgressive discovery of the city. Despite their awareness of the emotional and spiritual poverty and their access to the material prosperity, Marcello is more coherent in his ineptitude than in his ambitions, while Lidia is consistent in her detachment without however being able to react with anything but quiet resignation to what her exploratory walk presents her with of losses in her own life. Blasé and disillusioned, what sets them both back in their search for change is a sense of indifference and ennui peculiar to the insecurity and loss typical of the modern subject. However, where Marcello abandons the search for an alternative road and capitulates to a compromise with the city's superficially successful sociality, Lidia refuses to conform and is able to turn social alienation into chosen distance and a claim to subjectivity through which to lay bare and call attention to the effective truth of personal and public life.

2. 2 From via Veneto to San Pietro

Inherent in the view of *La dolce vita* as a cultural phenomenon that reaches beyond the art of visualising a given zeitgeist there is first and foremost a recognition of its ability to speak to and of a country in transition, while it also points to its landmark status in relation to experimental tendencies within European art-house cinema in the 1960's. Both the record box-office figures following its release in February 1960, and the award of the Palme d'ore at Cannes some months later, underscore the film's timeliness. If *La dolce*

vita “ha fatto epoca,”² as Fellini’s biographer, Tullio Kezich writes, announcing in flamboyant visual forces a decade that would evolve through incessant changes (Kezich, *Su La dolce vita*, 13), it is in particular for the dialogue it establishes with a cultural climate in which, as film critic Gian Luigi Rondi points out,

si cercava di frenare l’inizio della corruzione pubblica e di tenere un accento sulla moralizzazione anche nel cinema [...] Da un punto di vista ufficiale ci fu un richiamo alla severità [...] Dal punto di vista dell’opinione pubblica ci fu molta curiosità per ‘I vizi privati e le pubbliche virtù’, diciamo. (qtd. Calvani, 385-93)³

The ‘scandals’ that so much alarm the Church and what after the formation of the Christian Democratic government in 1948 had become increasingly reactionary governmental circles, are also what attract the public, initially driven towards the movie theatres by rumours that the film will be confiscated, and subsequently by how it continues to stir up public debate: “su *La dolce vita* [...] scrivono, parlano e litigano tutti [...] Federico è intervistato, osannato, vilipeso e beatificato” (Kezich, *Fellini*, 291-93).⁴ Among the most perceptive contributors to the debate stands the always acute Pasolini who against most voices claims it a Catholic film, while concluding with a note on its barren ambience:

un’aridità che toglie vita, che angoscia [...] Ma come essere riusciti a vedere purezza e vitalismo anche nella massa piccolo-borghese che brulica

² “marked an era.”

³ “one tried to repress the start to public corruption and to emphasie moralisation in the cinema as well [...] From an oficial point of view, there was a recall to severity [...] From the point of view of public opinion there was much curiosity around ‘private vices and public virtues, to put it that way.’”

⁴ “About *La dolce vita* [...] everybody writes, talks, and argues [...] Federico is interviewed, cheered, despised, and beatified.”

in questa Roma arrivista, scandalistica, cinematografara, superstiziosa e fascista ... (58-9)⁵

Pasolini might be amazed by the “neodecadent” contradiction between temporal vitality and spiritual devastation of Fellini’s Rome, but this juxtaposition was, as we have seen, already present in *Le notti di Cabiria* and if in *La dolce vita* it comes to dominate the picture entirely, it is partly a reflection of the radical changes the city undergoes in these very years, changes we see expressed in the city dweller whose position and perspective distinguish him radically from the naively inquisitive and voyeuristically motivated trajectory Cabiria.

Having abandoned a Community-life in the province, Marcello has adjusted to an ambiance where “surface splendours” are celebrated as the “shrines to the culture of pleasure” (Kracauer, “Distractions,” 92), living successfully by exploiting the vices of the rich and famous, while occasionally producing the type of journalism that may touch even selective readers like Steiner. His present workstation and immediate sphere of association is the via Veneto - a fancy upper-class habitat that emerged between World War I and World War II and affirmed itself as a cultural phenomenon in the 1950’s and 1960’s when Rome becomes a stage for international cinema and for an expanding entertainment industry and intelligentsia (Kezich, *Fellini*, 272 – 73). Major parts of Marcello’s nocturnal life take place within the circle of this cafe-society, while both his work and personal events – the latter ranging from a night with Maddalena at the prostitute’s place, to the home he shares with the suicidal Emma - frequently lead him away from the city centre towards various sites of the Roman periphery, in effect moving in the opposite direction from that of Antonio and Cabiria. However, with the exception of the prostitute’s shabby

⁵ “an aridity that deprives life, that causes anguish [...] But how can someone have managed to see purity and vitalism even in the petit-bourgeois mass that swarms in this careerist, scandalmongering, cinematographing, superstitious and fascist Rome ...”

apartment in via Cessati Spiriti, and the countryside where he covers a media staged sighting of the Madonna, an utter degradation of the already fake pilgrimage Cabiria takes part in, his trajectory does not encompass her world, neither does it linger between the marginal and the central, but rather, between past and present.

This temporal paradigm is established in the very first sequence where the partly demolished yet still imposing classical ruins of the San Felice aqueducts are juxtaposed to a helicopter carrying a figure of Christ the Labourer. Modelled, as so many other of the film's events and characters, on a photo Fellini came across in the tabloid papers (Kezich, *Su La dolce vita*, 10) the statue is being brought to the Pope, or so Marcello claims to the group of sunbathing women who show far more interest in the religious figure than in the jaded journalist asking for their telephone numbers. While announcing the edgy fusion of the holy and the profane that is explicitly visualised in the cassock-dressed Sylvia's visit to San Peter – a spiritual centre of some distinction which she however confuses with the Florence Cathedral - this implicit note on the state of religion in modern Rome introduces a discursive practice that throughout the film will juxtapose the city's modern face to the enduring scenery of its ancient and Christian past (Bondanella, *The Films*, 73). What emerges from these constant juxtapositions is a cinematic city that partly rests on cornerstones of Roman history and of Western civilisation, including the Appian Way, the Baths of Caracalla, Saint Peter's; and the Trevi Fountain sites that as they all appear in Marcello's picaresque *flânerie* establish a network between republican, imperial, Christian and papal Rome respectively (*Ibid.*, 90). At the same time, it is also founded on an emergent urban culture that in adapting to radical socio-economic transformations leaves room both for a declining aristocracy and a rising group of newly rich. It is mostly within the spheres of the latter group that Marcello locates his professional and social existence, while his vague and ultimately inadequate desire for an intellectually more challenging

profession than that of a *cronista* makes him out of place within its flamboyant ambiances and scarcely sophisticated ways.⁶ Both his isolation and desire for change recall the marginal position of Antonio and Cabiria, the difference being that while they attempt to escape economic deprivation and social stigmatisation, the *flâneur* of the miracle seeks to create a niche of integrity within a consumer society where the sincere relations and intellectual endeavours he seeks are undermined by highly marketable scandals and a perpetual state of moral loss.

In a comparative study of *La dolce vita* and Eliot's "The Waste Land," Richardson perceptively notes how Marcello, like Tiresias, is more a spectator than a character within the spheres to which he socially, if not existentially, belongs, constituting a "suitably ambiguous figure" through which to project critical visions of the modern condition (105). Fellini talks of his role as director in similar terms, noting how this "large allegorical fresco" of via Veneto is based not on participation but on distanced observation on life in via Veneto and the work of the scandal press (Fellini, 67). Both tabloid photos of the Anita Ekbergs and the severely exploited "Montesi affair" evoked through Nadia's annulment party (Kezich, *Fellini*, 274-86)⁷ show how Fellini used the works of people like Marcello as the basis for his film. It is in fact only at the "orgy" in Fregene that he starts participating in the social vices he mostly covers from the margins, with nonchalance and constant boredom. During Sylvia's much anticipated visit he observes her arrival at the airport from a distance and does not intervene in her press-conference, but seeks in more

⁶ As Pinkus shows, the journalists known as *cronisti* were engaged to write human interest stories, a journalistic strategy that emerged in the 1950's to resist "the lingering tinges of Fascism." Fellini would allegedly have known Fabrizio Menghini, a *cronista* central to the Montesi Scandal, and it is likely that Marcello is modelled on him (17).

⁷ See Karen Pinkus, *The Montesi Scandal: The Death of Wilma Montesi and the Birth of Paparazzi in Fellini's Rome*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003; and Francesco Grignesi, *Il caso Montesi*. Roma: Marsilio, 2006. The obscure death of the 21-year old Wilma Montesi, found at a beach in Ostia in April 1953 following a party at a nearby aristocratic villa, was never resolved, and the 1957 trial saw the accused, among whom the son of a high-level politician, acquitted. Fellini draws in particular on what the wide and long-lasting coverage of the tragedy came to reveal about vices and corruption among the city's rich and famous.

private moments both to seduce her and to assimilate her mysterious vitality. Somewhat more passionate is his passive presence at Prince Mascalchi's palace to which he is driven along by peripheral acquaintances. As he witnesses the ridiculous habits of Rome's decaying aristocracy, he is himself reduced to talk to the walls as his apparently serious intentions fail against Maddalena's more licentious desires.

Aided by his work as a reader and creator of urban text, as well as by his restless nature and search for a purpose neither his present work nor his private life offer, Marcello is exposed to a range of physical and social ambiances that are not exclusively defined in terms of the antique and modern, but also are shaped by the characters with whom they are associated. Apart from the always juxtaposed Maddalena and Emma – the latter viewed against the house, or the countryside, the former against her convertible or the most hollow and exclusive social circles – he moves from Sylvia's nocturnal and deserted city streets, to Steiner's bourgeois home in EUR, a modern district originally founded by Mussolini, to the less flamboyant Kit-Kat club where he takes his father. While indicating the prevalence of encounters over events in the formation of the film's notoriously fragmentary narrative (Reich, 90), the range of spheres these characters introduce compose an uncontainable city which the *flâneur* views from the margin, aware of his complicity in its cultural and moral degradation, as well as his displacement within its frenetic manifestation. As landmarks within his walk through modern Rome, the characters he meets represent “le vie che si offrono a Marcello per arrivare a pacificarsi con se stesso e con il mondo: ma sono tutte vie chiuse” (Kezich, *Fellini*, 287).⁸ Between Emma and Maddalena - one too possessive, the other too confused to represent a realistic alternative to a life of tedious scandal - these ‘character-roads’ vary from the vulgar yet childish

⁸ “the roads offering themselves to Marcello to reconcile with himself and with the world: but they are all closed roads.”

impulsive Sylvia to the quasi-intellectual Dolores whose Anglo-Saxon accent cannot but reinforce the bizarre nature of their extraordinary brief encounter.

While it is Sylvia who first makes him aware of his errant ways (“Certo, sto sbagliando, stiamo sbagliando tutti”),⁹ luring him into the clear and fresh waters of the Trevi Fountain which however denies him the sweetness of purification, it is the hard-working and curious Paola who makes him critically aware of what losses his errors have led to. Seen against the sunlight, she reminds him of the angels of Umbrian frescoes, and her innocent appearance along with the ocean and the quiet restaurant where she works are all set in direct juxtaposition to the glamorous superficialities of Via Veneto. Paola and Marcello’s father both represent the genuineness of a Community life he has let go of with the result that he now finds himself in an uneasy state of loss and with no concrete directions for a new start. This becomes particularly clear from his father’s visit; a far more disconcerting encounter as his hasty departure following a light heart attack and unfulfilled adventure with Fanny deprives Marcello of the reconciliation he desires. The troubled end to their encounter can hardly be reduced to Marcello’s discovery of his father’s adulterous inclinations - probably these were no news, and why would he then insist on him staying? – or his father’s wish to “creep away” from a shameful appearance, as Stubbs suggests (83). For the aged reader of Dante who aligns with Conte Ugolino’s agony over a fatally ended fatherhood, preferring not to relive the “disperato dolor che ’l cor mi preme” (*Inferno*, XXXIII, 4-5),¹⁰ what is at stake is perhaps not even to realise irreversibility of their mutual estrangement, but the painful thought of a past in which rapprochement still was possible. For Marcello, the dilemma stands between the Community-world to which he no longer has access, and a deceptively flourishing Society

⁹ “Of course, I am erring, we are all erring.”

¹⁰ “the desperate pain that burdens my heart.”

formation whose scandals he observes and nurtures from the margins. They both live the encounter with a disquieting sense of having arrived too late.

The most significant crossroad in Marcello's trajectory is however Steiner, who with his versatile play of jazz and Bach, and lucid mind in combination with a devotion to his family presents an apparently healthy counterpart to the barren carnival of via Veneto. It is to him that Marcello confesses his desire for change, and their last encounter incites him to leave the city's chaos for a quiet place at the ocean where he may find inspiration to write – the only instance in which he intentionally seeks to reach a more sincere and rewarding use of his talent. The impact Steiner has on him underscores the proportionally disillusioning effect of his betrayal, an act of destruction that however was suggested by their last and retrospectively sinister conversation in his children's bedroom. Steiner's view out of the window presents in fact a denial of the external world, and evocative tones of chiaroscuro foreshadow the effective result of his need to live "distaccati" [detached] from a society where, as he describes it, a single phone call would be enough to bring it all to an end. This anticipation of an apocalypse that will eliminate the future carries clear allusions to anxieties about the atomic bomb that in the 1960's were actually felt (Testa, 2003), while it more generally demonstrate an incapacity to face an uncertain existence and thus, to act as a Virgil in the modern world. Deprived from a model and a convincing reason to change, for Marcello it becomes far more easy to conform than to rather than to discern a viable niche within an urban culture which is not laid down once and for all, the way Steiner would wish, but that is constantly emergent.

2. 3 Commodified *Flânerie*

They both end up betrayed – Steiner first, by Marcello’s passivity towards his offer of help, the latter by practical helplessness of a disorganic intellectual who prefers mediated sounds of nature and the scarcely communicative Sanskrit to dialogic exchange. The span from conformity to denial of their actual surroundings indicates the two polar points of weakness that make them equally unfit to engage constructively with the present life of the city. Apart from the loss of his major source of inspiration, Marcello’s resignation to slumber and appearance relates most crucially to an inherent ineptitude we will come back to; for now, my concern is how the city’s recent and accelerated adjustment to modern capitalism effects his failure to embark on an alternative road. In difference to Antonio’s and Cabiria’s endless walks between underdeveloped outskirts areas and socially exclusive inner-city circles, both of which are motivated by a determination, however unsuccessful, to alter their situation, Marcello lacks their curiosity or despair, and his walk is essentially mediated by factors external to himself. That he tends to go by car and to dwell within tedious indoor settings, thus excluding an immediate and searching relation to the cityscape, is only one aspect of his unresponsiveness to urban stimuli. More important is the blasé attitude of a detached insider, of someone who has already seen everything for himself and who devotes his trained gaze to profitable events solely for the public’s indulgence.

The predicament to trace sensations and to stage some where in fact there are not any is a crucial factor in Marcello’s dispassionate interaction with a fragmentary and contradictory cityscape where the only integrating force is the media. Both its past and present manifestations, from Rome’s cultural patrimony and the alleged sightings of the Madonna, to public scandals and personal tragedies, seem to be staged by the tabloids and

become as such the calculated motivations for Marcello's *flânerie*. His interaction with the cityscape is practical in nature and would have been rather tedious were it not for the tendency of his professional activities to evolve into alteration with private moments of a far more unpredictable nature. Maddalena and Silvia offer distraction from monotone frenzy in lavish nightclubs as they both lead him to historical sites and to outskirts areas left untouched by the *boom* - respectively the Piazza del Popolo and the Trevi Fountain, both deserted at night; and the somewhat developed *borgata* where the prostitute lives and the foggy Appian Way where Silvia holds a sermon to some wild dogs. The significance of these encounters lies in the way they interrupt Marcello's predictable hunt for sensations in favour of impulsive visits to alternative spheres of the cityscape. His father's unexpected appearance in via Veneto and the view of Steiner outside the church where he directs a photo session, have the same effect of suspending his work for moments of reflection and self-awareness that, however, cannot lead into action or reaction to his present situations or on the world he inhabits.

In contrast to Antonio and Cabiria who themselves direct their walks to unusual and exclusive spheres, only through these encounter-roads is Marcello led towards spaces from the city's past and present that resist conformity with his work-locations. His *flânerie* shares their aimlessness, but it lacks the element of geographical discovery. Even when he is lead to alternative spheres, he fails to seize the opportunity they offer for a re-positioning and redefinition of self in relation to the cityscape. The church and the ocean are particularly illustrative: associated with Steiner and Paola respectively, these locations represent an alternative to via Veneto but their tendency to appear as mere backgrounds to his encounters suggests that he is only registering them without really seeing. What guide and structure his trajectory are rather the work-related spaces defined as events where his presence is calculated, and these locations he observes with the detached gaze of an

accepted outsider, collecting “all the evidence of his visual experience” (Gleber, 155) to produce texts of high commercial but scarce cultural and personal value. His dispassionate approach to these ambiances equates the aversion to the texts he creates, a manifestation of ambivalence that however does not originate in moral scruples. Only when Steiner’s happily unaware wife is being harassed by reporters like himself does he feel the moral implications of what he earlier humorously referred to as the duty to keep the public informed. Rather, this reservation towards his occupation reflects its personal meaningless and intellectually reductive nature, and the intersections he constantly arrives at between public and private “roads” reinforce cumulatively the agonic sense of having wasted time and talent and having lost irrecoverable opportunities.

The determining role Marcello’s occupation plays in his presence within and reception of the cityscape - calculating or absent and oblivious, but never inquisitive in the way of the classic *flâneur* - illustrates Benjamin’s reflection on what effects the structures of modern capitalism actually would have had on this figure. When throughout the *Arcades Project* he holds considerable reservations towards romanticised images of the leisurely voyeur Benjamin himself, perhaps unintentionally, continues to be responsible for perpetuating, this is in recognition of how the introduction in the 1860’s of Haussmann’s boulevards would have made inquisitive strolling “go unfashionable” and unsafe in increasingly trafficked streets just at the time when the arcades - his preferred habitat - were replaced by department stores (CB, 51). Even more crucial, however, were the socio-economic context within which the reorganisation of the city took place. For Benjamin, it is in particular the awareness that, contrary to the idealised image Baudelaire would present of “the last flicker of heroism in decadent ages” (“The Painter ...,” 421), the urban artist’s relationships to the city is better understood in terms of the need to sell both his work and his public persona (AP, 336-7). The demise of *flânerie* is thus associated

with his first advance towards the market where the increasing demand for “abstract knowledge” about life in the city made the fatal passage from decipherer to seller of urban text hard to resist. Commercial exploitation of voyeurism implied not merely that the wanderer’s peculiar inclinations would be reduced to that of a sensationalist urban chronicler lending his expertise to the feuilletons and the “physiologies” of urban types (CB, 29-35), but also the end to an era in which the *flâneur*’s idleness presented a “demonstration against the division of labour” (AP, 427). To maintain a position of autonomy vis-à-vis the metropolis’ social and economic structures was, in essence, his only reason of being.

Forced to turn his leisure into working time, the *flâneur* loses his unworried and unpredictable use of the city as well as his inquisitive voyeurism and spends, instead, hours in the street to show off his activity as a mediocre “man of letters” (CB, 29), as if aware of Marx’s maxim that “the value of each commodity is determined by [...] the working-time socially necessary for its production” (qtd. AP, 446). Whether Marcello is aware that the number of his hours spent observing, often to the annoyance of his objects, might increase the value of his work is doubtful - this idea falls perhaps closer to Steiner’s suggestion he abandon those “semi-fascist” papers for an occupation that allows time to observe more worthy phenomena. However, Marcello’s desire to elevate his writing from its current level of sensationalism and work as an independent author presents an implicit understanding of his intellectual potential as being reduced and commodified, just as much as his interaction with both human and physical surroundings is conditioned by the commercial constraints of his occupation. Through a rationalised and scarcely heartfelt career as “a spy for the capitalists, on assignment in the realm of consumers” (AP, 427), the *flâneur*-journalist offers himself and his intellect to the market as combined seller and commodity the way the prostitute does. Their ambiguous nature

and the liminality of their quintessentially urban professions bring them in contact with a range of social spheres and human experiences which in juxtaposition to each other lay bare disjunction within the cityscape. Apart from expose mechanisms of social injustice, Cabiria's view from beyond comes also to shed an estranging light on the squalid moral climate that Marcello later will approach from within, and with an aimlessly eclectic mode of *flânerie* through which "far-off times" emerge with the cityscape and with "the present moment" (AP, 419), forming a dialectical opposition to a contemporary culture that degrades everything to languid appearance.

2. 4 The *Flâneur* as *Inetto*

The discursive potential of the *flâneur* of the miracle lies in the central socio-cultural role he assumes in the market-dominated consumer society he keeps informed and where disjunction between material progress and moral decay are largest. Equally significant, however, is also his detached irony and existential displacement that estranges him and grants him a clear-sightedness by which to juxtapose the city's antithetical manifestations – antiquity and modernity; Community and Society, socio-cultural degradation and intellectual narcissism. Marcello sees all this and fails to react: the lack of agency that makes him miss the alternative 'roads' he encounters is also what hinders him from reacting to external stimuli and exploring the cityscape to which he has unlimited access. Whereas deprivation from agency in Antonio and Cabiria was socially defined, Marcello's immobility is existentially determined and stands as such more clearly than theirs at the centre for a "cinema of the viewer." If Fellini's *I vitelloni* (1953) is one of the films that first present the "crisis of the action-image" – Deleuze points in particular to the insignificance of the film's events and the uncertainty of their connection, as well as of

“their non-belonging to those who experience them in this new form of the voyage” (*The Movement-Image*, 212) – Marcello, who was perhaps a ‘vitellone’ before he left for the city the way Moraldo does, lives this type of voyage through a series of “*pure optical*” situations to which he has “no response or reaction” (*The Time-Image*, 2). When even in the final moment of errant resignation he remains an out-of-place insider within a world of unconcerned frenzy, it is precisely because of his inability both to ignore and to fill a lack of meaning with anything but utter emptiness.

Marcello’s inability to react to encounters and establish himself as an agent of the change he desires is articulated in several sequences where he remains frozen in situations which could possibly have altered the course of events. These “*pure optical*” moments typically cut into a completely different situation where, however, he appears equally passive. Convinced of his own error by Silvia’s unconcerned and sensual immersion in the Trevi Fountain, he follows her out into the waterfall and is about to kiss her when nearby voices break their magic moment. The camera lingers on Marcello’s expressions of disappointment, before a juxtaposed shot portrays their return to the nightclub where he accepts a beating from Silvia’s drunken husband. This lack of reaction evolves into despair when his father leaves despite Marcello’s insistence to the contrary. Framed from behind, Marcello follows his taxi as it disappears in the light of dawn and in the successive scene, he is seen driving out to the fake sighting of the Virgin while the maternal Emma forces him to eat. Most disconcerting, however, is his last conversation with Steiner in the children’s bedroom, where neither his friend’s explicit offer of help, nor his intensely troubled reflections on the need to live detached, evokes any reaction in Marcello except for silence and an absent expression. His reaction comes first in the subsequent sequence which shows the only practical attempt of his to work on his novel but, despite his good intentions, quitting the city for a quiet site at the ocean, he yields both to external

distractions and to internal frustration and concludes his brief writing session with a bunch of crunched papers on the ground.

It is not so much the lack of agency in relation to his search for purpose, or of communication when he fails to reach out with more conviction to his father, that defines his sadly inert character, as it is his inability to *choose* an unambiguous position within the urban world and to commit to a defined way of life and set of values. Jacqueline Reich has aptly shown that Mastroianni's film characters tend to repeat the pattern of the *inetto* recurrent in the novels of Pirandello and Svevo - a quintessentially modern figure, passive, cowardly, and emotionally impotent - who, like the *flâneur*, observes social and personal failures with detached irony, aware "that his search for self will ultimately fail" (41). Marcello is too self-conscious to possess Cabiria's naiveté as well as her determination, both of which might have helped him to abandon comfortable conformity and face the risks involved in change the way she does. Apart from the commercial imperatives governing his interaction with the city, denying him both the autonomy and disinterested receptiveness at the basis for the urban artist's intoxicated encounter with the crowd (*CB*, 154), if the *flâneur* of the miracle becomes the antihero rather than the hero of modernity, it is even more crucially because an agonic state of disillusion enables him to see himself live, the way Pirandello's *inetto* does, while at the same time depriving him from the agency to unambiguously distance himself from the mediocrity of the world he projects.

It is with a notion of how a moral exhaustion might have hindered the allegedly autonomous and excited 19th-century wanderer's experiences of urban modernity, that Elizabeth Wilson talks convincingly of "The Invisible *Flâneur*," turning the tables on "The Invisible *Flâneuse*" that following Janet Wolff's seminal 1985 article, has dominated work on female urbanism. Contrary to Baudelaire's "passionate observer" who approaches the "the fleeting and the infinite" as a confirmation of his freedom and the domain of his

aesthetic enjoyment (109), the wanderer Wilson perceives of in less idealised terms is firmly anchored to a world in which

Meaning is obscure; committed emotion cedes to irony and detachment; George Simmel's 'blasé' attitude is born. The fragmentary and incomplete nature of urban experience generates its melancholy – we experience a sense of nostalgia, of loss for lives we have never known, of experiences we can only guess at.(73)

To place the *flâneur*'s experiences on the level of a more general experience with modernity allows us to recognise that his presence within the cityscape might have been rather anonymous and inconsequential. The *flâneur*'s existence is contingent not only on his financial situation and cultural function in the urban ambience, but also on his inability to assume an unambiguous position in relation to a fragmented urban ambience. Priscilla Ferguson notes in a similar vein how this figure increasingly served to expose “the uncertainty that attends life in the modern city,” whereas the hero of modernity, then as now, would have existed more as a discursive strategy within the emergent genre of urban text aimed at mapping out the metropolitan labyrinth (37-38). As a market, the city comes increasingly to take possession of the *flâneur* rather than the other way around, while as the messenger of the modern condition, it exposes him to encounters that never reach below the surface, leaving nothing but a melancholic awareness of always arriving too late.

Marcello's inability to seize and exploit the more promising moments of his trajectory points to the “psychological distance” that according to Simmel is provoked by the “disorder of metropolitan communication;” a “functional distance between people that is an inner protection ... against the overcrowded proximity” (qtd. AP, 448). While

several of Marcello's encounters create a caesura in his typically detached and indifferent attitude - Sylvia's instinctive immersion in the nocturnal cityscape incites an air of fascination in him, whereas the tragic view of Steiner and his children freezes him in a moment of incredulousness and quiet grief – they do not last long enough to enable more than reflection in the blasé and disillusioned city walker before they are interrupted by succeeding and qualitatively different impressions. Received as fleeting *Erlebnis* (lived experience) which tends “to remain in the sphere of a certain hour in one's life” without entering the continuous, cumulative *Erfahrung* (experience) (CB, p. 117), these and other potentially consequential urban stimuli cannot provide but a transitory image of the life he desires. The ability to live urban life at the level of *Erlebnis*, rapidly and superficially assimilating without internalising urban stimuli, reveals what processes of adjustment the once provincial young man has undergone to project the city with the efficiency of a journalist without being hindered either by the excitement of the kaleidoscopic nocturnal city, or by the negative shocks that drive Antonio out of the city centre. However, it also illustrates Franco Moretti's observation that the concept of exceptional and traumatic shocks might not constitute the most appropriate category for studies of the modern city where “gli stimoli esterni si presentatno come ‘occasioni’ da cogliere [che] possono sempre essere previsti [...] laddove allo shock è essenziale l'imprevedibilità” (147-48).¹¹ Both the rigid division between external and internal that is at the basis of the theory of shocks, and the dialectic between association and disassociation that structures his use of the city, are experienced as “quel continuum che ci si offre nella passeggiata di Leopold Bloom” (Moretti, 148).¹² Despite the range of spheres comprised in his *flânerie*, none of the contrasting geographical, temporal and social components make any particular

¹¹ “external stimuli present themselves as ‘occasions’ to be seized [that] can always be predicted [...] whereas what is essential to shock is unpredictability.”

¹² “the continuum that offers itself in Leopold Bloom's walk.”

impression on the wanderer but tend, instead, to be registered with a lack of engagement that reflects both his inertness and the scarcely stimulating nature of the world he inhabits.

A result of this continuous flow of stimuli is that with the exception of some influential but ultimately inconclusive encounters, they become less distinguishable and tend to be received through one indiscriminate veil of slumber and decay that tones out the disjunction between the prostitute's shack and the prince's residence, or Saint Peter and the Terme di Caracalla Nightclub. Marcello's indiscriminate visualisation of the city oversees potential sources for something solid and worthwhile, while facilitating an uncritical submergence to destructive currents of the urban flux. Contrary to Maddalena who, during one of their more serene and innocent encounters in Piazza del Popolo, confesses her wish to start a completely new life somewhere else she does not know, for the invisible *flâneur* who dreams of transforming urban life into text, Rome presents itself as "una specie di giungla dove ci si può nascondere bene,"¹³ privileging the journalist's need to observe unobserved, as well as the *inetto*'s inability to choose and to act with any degree of consequentiality for himself or for his surroundings. This conception of the metropolis as a hiding place more than a phantasmagoria is, as will be shown, particularly pertinent to the detective, whose attempt to trace the malefactor's steps is hindered by deceptive forces in the crowd or mechanisms of exclusion within the concept-city. Marcello's observation also points to Benjamin's shifting view of the crowd. If, in the late 1920's he had spoken of the streets as "dwelling place of the collective" where the masses are seen as an constantly frantic entity that moves within the cityscape like an individual (*AP*, 423), in a later note, Benjamin perceives of this collective as mere "appearance" (*AP*, 345) while the streets have been reduced to a "dwelling for the *flâneur*" alone (*CB*, 37). This change in emphasis from immersion to isolation reflects Benjamin's awareness of

¹³ "a from of jungle where one may hide one self well."

how the recently established totalitarian regime in which he lives, as well as more universal processes of commodification, have eliminated the conditions for a collective spirit in the city (Buch-Morss, 307).¹⁴ Marcello associates with several ambiances that each may be seen as a stage for the dramatisation of a group identity, but the common indulgence in some form of fleeting material or social pleasures tends to result in tedious conformity or anguished isolation and offers no experience of lasting impression or creative inspiration for the urban writer.

What could be said to present a coercive force among the frivolous birds of modern Rome is the chorally dramatised experience of what it means to be modern – to “be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, ‘all that is solid melts into air’” (Berman, 15). For the aristocracy, it means the start of a long decline, whereas for the new rich, privileged by the ‘miracle,’ it becomes the very basis of existence even though, unconcerned and unaware, they do not realize this fact themselves. Marcello does reflect but cannot confront this universe with the desired integrity, as opposed to Steiner, whose integrity eventually takes over when he categorically refuses to face this universe. Marcello and Steiner do both live the modern condition as a lack of certainty and incapacity to identify or commit to a constructive social function, a sensation that might find expression either in the unconcerned abandonment to extravagant means of escapism, or in the anticipation of a catastrophe that occurs only if you destructively seek it. In either case it will tend to be accompanied by an existential form of boredom that, according to Benjamin, arises under the influence of “the baleful eyes of a satiated reactionary regime” (CB, 37). A possible answer to Benjamin’s question as to what would be the dialectical antithesis of this form of boredom (AP, 105) may be found both in Silvia’s spontaneous and animalesque

¹⁴ Buch-Morss traces Benjamin’s initial position to the years 1927-29, whereas the disillusioned view that “This crowd, in which the *flâneur* takes delight, is just the empty mold with which, seventy years later, the *Volksgemeinschaft* ‘People’s Community’ was cast” (AP, 345), would be datable to 1937 (Buch-Morss, 307).

pleasure, as well as in Paola's curiosity and desire to learn typewriting so that she can improve on her condition. What limits Marcello's *flânerie* is precisely the lack of curiosity and interest that paradoxically appears in response to the range of crossroads and points of encounters that emerge with the transition to modernity. Whether it is the proliferation of centres of interest that leads to boredom (Lefebvre 194-5), or boredom that creates a need for the type of "distractions" found in the urban flux, or in the entertainment industry (Kracauer, "Distractions ..."), in Marcello's Rome, the modern condition manifests itself as ennui turned into a frenetic vigour that threatens the *flâneur*'s distinction, reducing inquisitiveness to apathetic collection of urban impressions and indifference with regard to the urban crowd and to his own dislocated position within it.

While the overarching atmosphere of apocalyptic vitality reflects an authorial wish to capture certain socio-cultural effects of the 'miracle' and as such has sociological motivations, it is also a result of a related artistic approach to the world portrayed. As Pasolini immediately observed, Fellini's "neodecadent" aesthetics rests on an extravagant use of actors and expressionistic delight in flamboyant costumes and locations ("La dolce vita," 58-9), but even more decisively, on an authorial sympathy with decadence that expands "to the intolerable," revealing "beneath the movements, faces, and gestures a subterranean extraterrestrial world" (Deleuze, *The Time-Image*, 18). This taste for exposure and a refusal to pose a more moral judgement than the essentially ironic portrayal may be said to reflect Fellini's confessed understanding of decadence as a presupposition for rebirth (Fellini, (156) - a view that is more explicitly voiced in *Satyricon* (1969) and *Roma* (1972). Processes of moral and cultural degradation seem however to carry few promises for the apathetic wanderer who at the disconcerting, albeit essentially ambiguous, end of his walk, has lost even the faculty to see clearly. While the lack of senses Marcello manifests may be explained, as it often has been, in terms of

socio-cultural disintegration and failing communication, it more precisely underscores how his inertness is always at its strongest when faced with signs of the change he seeks. It is symptomatic that after having been energetically in charge of the most decadent of all the parties, he should retreat to solitude at the ocean he had sought out to previously in search of artistic inspiration. Even more disconcerting is his last encounter with Paola. A revelation in the light of dawn, Marcello senses something familiar in her angel-like features, but the signs she are beckoning him with, asking him to teach her typewriting, and her words, drowning out by the sound of the surf, all escape him. The pure-optical-sound situation her appearance creates does not even incite through in the errant wanderer who not only fails to seize, but also to recognise, this last road to change and novelty. Whatever this neodecadent fresco of modern Rome suggests about rebirth is encapsulated in the very last of this final succession of time-images which is entirely dedicated to Paola who cannot but remain inert and observe, with a smile and a wink, the oblivion of her interlocutor.

2. 5 From the City Centre to the *Borgata*

Between *La dolce vita* and *La notte* the urban narrative moves from Rome to a Milan that in 1961 approaches the peak of its economic miracle. Focusing on the social classes privileged by the *boom*, while also resorting to physical and social metropolitan ambiances for a context to existential questions, *La notte* is no less epochal in its thematics nor in its visual construction. While Antonioni's previous film *L'avventura* explores typically modern ills of ennui and alienation within the frame of a loose narrative situation defined by tension more than by action, *La notte* avoids any dramatic pretext for a study of the emotional inconsistencies at the centre of the modern subject. Both films bear witness

to the director's conviction of the urgent need facing post-neorealist cinema to relocate the analysis of social relations toward individual experiences with recent historical events ("La malattia...", 70-1). In *La notte*, the study of the individual's mental life is anchored to a focus on streets and buildings designating both private and public spheres, showing how spaces of modernity serve as landmarks both in the actual and the mental aspects of their urbanite's exploratory walks.

What role architecture and geometrical perfection will come to play throughout *La notte* is suggested in the title sequence, where a two-minute-long, descending tracking shot captures the windows of a skyscraper onto which is initially projected a vast cityscape of scattered buildings and roads, in effect foreshadowing the suburban wasteland toward which Lidia's walk will later lead. At a certain point, however, the camera changes position so as to move along the building's surface and include in the shot the surrounding city centre. Constructed over the years 1955-58, the 127-metre-high Pirelli skyscraper became an architectural equivalent to Rome's via Veneto - an emblem of the country's recent socio-economic transformations, and more specifically, of Milan as Italy's centre of commerce. If its style was intended to respect the city's architectural traditions, designer Gio Ponti also conceived of the crystal-like purity and lightness of its transparent surface as a manifestation of modernity (Arnardóttir, 90-3). An even more significant discursive function of the skyscraper is its communicative appearance as an individual statement more than an invitation to dialogic exchange (*ibid*): its distinct placement in the cityscape – above and separated from other buildings – conveys the culture of individualism, as well as the experiences of solitude and social disintegration that for many became the non-material results of the *boom*.

Although we never see the Pirelli Tower again, its isolation and irrelevance vis-à-vis both the physical and human surroundings are evoked throughout the film (Chatman,

103). This is done most obviously in the direct parallel it finds in Lidia's quiet tendency to walk her own way, but it also appears in the indifference of the social world she distances herself from, as well as in the inconsequential nature of the events to come - from Marcello's easy submission to the nymphomaniac in the hospital and Lidia's apathy towards his immediate confession, to their reciprocal, yet for both unfulfilled, temptation of an affair. Within the physical ambiance, however, the imposing, impenetrable and freestanding building will most noticeably be evoked by way of contrast. Its direct juxtaposition through a cut to the hospital room where Tommaso gracefully fights a terminal disease, visualises a critique of modernisation and economic progress that the patient expresses in observing how modern hospitals are modelled on nightclubs to keep the dying entertained. The patient's preferred form of distraction is however the contemplation, mediated by the window, of a 19th-century Venetian-inspired edifice recalling times far removed from the era of skyscrapers. A reader of Adorno and himself a critical observer of cultural modernity, Tommaso is clearly associated with the former building, while Lidia, led towards the window by the disruptive sound of a helicopter, stands between the two worlds, living a life anchored within contemporary urban society that will be questioned by her attempts to recover material and sentimental rudiments of her past (Bernardi, 170-74). The exploratory walk she initially and unintentionally embarks upon will significantly see her move both mentally and physically between the old and the new, forming a dialectical trajectory that enables her to visualise the contradictory nature of the miraculous Milan while at the same time redefining her own position within it.

That *La Notte* more than any of the films examined so far will evolve around a relation of association and identification between the physical cityscape and the city walker is made clear from the episode in the hospital, where Lidia's decentred position in

and eventual exit from Tommaso's room convey her emotional imbalance and tendency to escape from the constraints of social gatherings. While Giovanni takes a share in the champagne and sits down at Tommaso's bedside, Lidia distances herself from them both and remains instead attached to the window which provides a material articulation of the getaway she searches. Her vague refusal of champagne ("non potrei") and sudden departure ("io devo andare")¹⁵ both go unexplained, but reveal an agony derived from something more than the awareness of the inevitable end to his illness. Only when Lidia towards the end confronts Giovanni with both their friend's death and that of their marriage, do we understand Tommaso's agonic farewell and her equally troubled and hasty retreat. His transfixed expression and longing gaze, excused by their shared intuition that this may be their last encounter, relives forgotten times in which the only pain he knew was his devotion to her – unrequited and, she realises now, far more enduring than her marital love. No other of Antonioni's characters embodies his dual concern with existential reactions to processes of modernisation and contemporary philosophical currents (Bondanella, *Italian Cinema*, 211) the way Tommaso does. His greatest debt to the Frankfurt School, more than the critique of industrial society, is the elegy of memory (Bernardi, 174) and it is as a momentary bringer of a past that still promised something for the future, that he subconsciously moves her troubled self so deeply, instigating a quest for inner clarity that will benefit considerably from her return to spaces as well as memories of the past.¹⁶

This increasingly outgoing quest is, however, launched as an escape from a traumatic encounter, and she has neither the force to actively handle it nor the indifference to bury it in oblivion, retreating to a solitary spot in the patio where her need for isolation

¹⁵ "I couldn't"; "I have to leave."

¹⁶ In noting the crucial catalysing function this confrontation with death comes to have in Lidia's mental trajectory, Tassone aptly refers to *Blow-up* (1966) where Thomas prizes the clarifying effect of disasters: "Non c'è niente come un disastro per chiarificare le idee." (105).

finds visual correspondence in a desolate wall of bricks and glass. The opposition between the wall onto which she momentarily unburdens her anguish, and the naked, white wall, shown through an intercut, in the nymphomaniac's room, juxtaposes the latter's disturbed seduction of Giovanni to Lidia's spatially articulated distress. Few if any of the film's single episodes visualises so eloquently Antonioni's idea of "la malattia dei sentimenti" - or the disintegration and distortion of emotional life that tends to result from the nothingness left unaccounted for by material progress and structural transformation.

Lidia's attitude at this very moment points to what Alberto Moravia observed in his review regarding *La notte's* tendency to reduce clearly motivated action and everything that produces movement in favour of the contemplation of objects, such as a wall, to convey an inert reality and the anxiety it inspires (23). It is debatable whether this reality excludes any other sentiment than anguish, as Moravia suggests. Loss and apathy are clearly what reduce drama and intrigue, but, as the following discussion of Lidia's mode of *flânerie* will demonstrate, contemplation of this very reality may also be serene and rewarding in its discoveries. Moravia is however right in observing that this absurd and visually manifested reality is infused by an air of stasis (23), an interpretation that in essence articulates what Deleuze later will define as "the cinema of the viewer." Its vibrant manifestation notwithstanding, this world mobilises the subject's vision rather than actions, and for Lidia, it is not ultimately the urban flux, but rather a deserted and demolished courtyard that proves most determining in making her aimless walk an act of reflection and recognition. Left to its own by the *boom* and by the Reconstruction before it, this isolated segment of the metropolis offers a point of identification with her detached attitude in social relations and preference for spatial interlocutors, while also reinforcing her need to reconnect with the past. She is immediately drawn towards its signs of loss and destruction, and the old clock left on the ground becomes an objective correlative of her

nostalgia and of her alienation from the city' social life. After a moment of tentative observation, she approaches a wall and starts tearing off small pieces of the decomposed painting. Her hand, framed in close up, works with a reflective, almost absent sensitivity that more than conveying anguish, as Moravia suggests (23), reveals a sense of familiarity strong enough to direct her walk into the areas where she grew up. What strikes an attentive viewer towards the end of her rediscovery of the familiar *borgata* is the resemblance the alien old house previously visited bears to the one she now recognises as a token of her past. If this apparently incidental occurrence incites an uncanny feeling of identification within the still tentative *flâneuse*, it is precisely because the unfamiliar, or the unhomely, embodies and brings her closer to something repressed that she has just begun to relive. The haunted house leads her back to a world that Tommaso has already evoked in her and that now she turns to for the awareness to address the present critically.¹⁷

2. 6 *Sola me ne vo per la città*¹⁸

Like Marcello, Lidia becomes the point of convergence between the various spheres and epochs through which modern Milan manifests itself and the city she visualises contains all of these contrasting temporal and social dimensions. The past she collects and juxtaposes to the utterly modern is, however, both more recent and more concentrated than the one Marcello's walk establishes, as it is traced with a curiosity towards the city's spatial and temporal dimensions that he never shows towards any of the

¹⁷ If for Freud, the exploratory walk through an Italian town that repeatedly brings him back to a brothel wakes a feeling of the uncanny – of the *heimliche* within the *unheimliche* – (143-4), so, too, does Lidia's encounter with an unfamiliar past touch on something familiar that suggests her appearance at this courtyard in this very moment is subconsciously intentional rather than incidental.

¹⁸ Mariangela Melato's canzone "In cerca di te" (1946 ["Sola me ne vo per la città, passo tra la folla che non sa ...,"]) captures Lidia's introspectively exploratory walk and isolation within the urban masses.

spheres he interacts with. Marcello's trajectory rests on his social connections and cultural function in the city and becomes as such more passively conducted, whereas Lidia's wandering evolves around a claim to autonomy as she repeatedly rejects the constraints of social settings in favour of elements as isolated and displaced as herself, or on the contrary, on spaces that lend themselves entirely to the urban flux. Her hasty departure from Tommaso's room is followed by one of these social occasions and it is the isolated position she assumes at the predictably tedious reception for Giovanni's book that provokes her critical mode of *flânerie*. While he attends to illustrious admirers such as Nobel Prize winner Salvatore Quasimodo and the editor Bompiani, Lidia observes, with an air of detached irony, the presumptuous socialites whose superficial chatting appears even more ridiculous in light of Tommaso's lucid sarcasm. Uneasy and bored, she leaves and starts walking without at first paying much attention to what is going on in the streets or to what she actually is doing there. That she chooses not to go home like Giovanni later presumes she would have, however, suggests that this apparently indifferent search for distraction is subconsciously motivated. As she soon starts to approach the inviting sunlit streets filled with cars and pedestrians with an attentive and far more reconciled mindset than she demonstrated earlier, the subconscious foundation for her wandering becomes a conscious desire to observe and familiarise in a more direct way the atmosphere of her own city's flux.

What exploratory value and revealing potential this spontaneous but increasingly responsive walk presents, is conveyed by way of contrast through an intercut episode tracing Giovanni's return to their apartment. His unexpected solitude incites a troubled restlessness in his otherwise apathetic self, but contrary to Lidia who turns a moment of emotional imbalance into a potentially more constructive energy, he remains inert, unable

to face, not to mention deal with, his own troubles.¹⁹ An intellectual in crisis, as he will explain to Valentina later, susceptible to the hindrance of a nymphomaniac, but annoyed by the hindrances of trafficked streets, Giovanni wanders agitatedly from one room to another in movements as limited in their scope as is his ability to engage both in consequential introspection and revealing observation.²⁰ Apart from the metaphoric representation of their oft-cited lack of communication – he seems to need her only when she is absent, while they choose opposite ways of handling what in essence are the same existential and interpersonal dilemmas. Whereas his domesticated *flânerie* confirms what Benjamin writes of the tendency among the bourgeoisie to resort to private interiors for compensation for the city’s “absence of any trace of private life,” (*AP*, 20), Lidia finds an unlikely distraction from loss and agony in what until very recently was exclusively male streets. Her choice to establish a mental space within the anonymous cityscape would seem to imply that alienation is not as much related to the external world or to the modern condition as such, but rather to certain social ambiances, including her own domestic and marital sphere, to which she cannot feel any form of connection.

Giovanni’s inability to face a moment of distress with an outward-looking and searching gaze is eloquently visualised when he lays down on a sofa near the window: he attempts to read, but throws the book away and falls asleep – although this we only see when in a successive sequence, he wakes up with the very same agitation. Then, another cut leads outside again, capturing first a massive, white wall before a descending tracking shot eventually reaches the streets where Lidia briefly enters the frame. For a moment she

¹⁹ As Reich has shown, ineptitude characterises not only Fellini’s Marcello, but to some extent all of Mastroianni’s film characters for other directors(xii).

²⁰ His is clearly not the imaginative indoor *flânerie* of Johannes the Seducer as described by Kierkegaard, to the fascination of Benjamin: “When Johannes sometimes asked for permission to go out, it was usually denied him. But on occasion his father proposed, as a substitute, that they walk up and down the room hand in hand” (qtd. *AP*, 421).

disappears behind this wall, then appears again with tentative steps that, according to what is set out in the screenplay, is intended to make her appear

completely alienated from the surroundings [...] She looks at the patch of sky above the buildings as though longing to flee these oppressive walls. Suddenly, a low-flying jet thunders overhead, filling the streets and the open space with a sinister roar. Lidia hurries away as though terrified.

(Antonioni, *Screenplays*, 225-7)

Chatman, whose reading would seem more in debt to these prescriptions than to the scene as it actually was shot, describes Lidia's appearance along the homogeneous and linear immensity of this building as "dwarfed, alien, unassimilable," observing, as he tends to in tripartite lists, how these convergent right lines "target her, fix her, nail her into place" (105). While the descending perspective through which she initially is framed as well as her diminutive figure make her appear overshadowed and overwhelmed, it is doubtful that this represents an experience of alienation. The white and dark shades of these massive surfaces find an harmonious correspondence in her hair and clothing, and her eyes, far from being mobilised by "terror," are directed towards the sky in obedience and curiosity towards the roar, suggesting on the contrary an affinity between space and wanderer. This is not as much a question of an alienated urbanite as of a *flâneuse* in the making who directs her gaze away from anguish and estrangement to a more confident and visually constituted interaction with the cityscape.

The parallel processes of mapping out the cityscape and defining her own position within a constantly emergent urban modernity eventually lead Lidia to spaces of the past – to the *borgata* where she and Giovanni grew up and met before they moved into the city. A suburban district of barren fields and randomly placed old and modern buildings, Sesto

San Giovanni presents a model for how Antonio and Cabiria's worlds would appear 15 years after their walks. This scene presents in fact a direct parallel to the outskirts areas featured in *La dolce vita*, as well as to the Roman *borgata* mythicised in these very years, and with much scandal, by Pasolini. That there is an element of a mythically archaic culture left in the world Lidia rediscovers is suggested by the ritualistic violence of the "ragazzi di vita" she in horror and disgust surprisingly manages to stop (Bernardi, 174). From these street boys and the bar where she is informed about a certain boarding house in case she would "need to meet someone," to what presumably is her old childhood home and the railway track no longer in use, the world she returns to after so many years is materially and culturally more displaced from everything the Pirelli Skyscraper stands for or the geographic displacement of 9 kilometres might suggest. To a significant extent is this a Community-formation where manifestations of urban modernity still have to start the processes by which, as Lidia observes with a mixed expression of nostalgia and horror, it will be altogether extinguished.

The impact both vibrant city streets and familiar peripheral urban areas have on her indicate the unprecedented nature of her walk, rooted in a latent exploratory inclination and a desire to establish an immediate relation to familiar surroundings. It is experiences of anxiety and alienation from interpersonal and social situations that lead her towards the streets, and both the attentiveness and the urge to interact with spaces of known and unknown pasts distinguish her from Marcello who tends to remain equally unaffected by the city's antique patrimony as well as by its manifestations of the modern, while his only way to relive a lost Community life is indirectly through Paola and his father. For Lidia, to rediscover the world of her adolescence and to see it at the verge of extinction confronts her, like the encounter with Tommaso, with previously ignored truths about her present life. The most crucial of her revelations regards her marriage, already approaching its end,

and not due to an incongruity in values, but rather to a loss of the values they once shared and which now have lost meaning while they are mutually incapable of establishing new ones. Even more important, however, is the rediscovery of spaces that witnessed the individual she once was, since this experience alerts her to the necessity of affirming her presence within the urban ambiance and interact with the modern without conforming, out of boredom and indifference, to its most degraded manifestations the way Giovanni is more inclined to do. This existential use of the past crucially aligns her with Katherine who, as the discussion of *Viaggio in Italia* in chapter 4 will show, embarks on an unintentional and introspective itinerary into foreign and faraway spaces. Lidia's walk more specifically evolves from a tendency towards auto-exclusion and a search for momentary distraction, towards a sudden desire to explore a highly diverse cityscape. It comes as such to activate the fundamental human need to "separate what is related and relate what is separate" (Simmel, "The Bridge ..." 408), establishing a dialectics between separation and association that ensures the progressively enlightening nature of her *flânerie*. This does not involve a liberation from the troubled mindset that initiated her walk in the first place, however, rather, it forces her to accept the impossibility of recovering times when interpersonal-and spatial relations still carried meaning and come to terms with a purposeless existence rather than seeking refuge in comfortable indifference and collective slumber.

Lidia's sense of anguish and estrangement points to a recurrent feature of Antonioni's cinema which, starting with the presentation of *L'avventura* at Cannes in 1960 and the subsequent releases of *La notte* and *L'eclisse* (1962), gave him the reputation of "the director of alienation" (*Fare un film è per me vivere*, 249). These films have for the very same reason become known among critics as his "existential-bourgeois trilogy" (Tassone, 104). Like *La dolce vita*, *La notte* deals with the dilemma of being materially

and intellectually but not emotionally capable of mastering the modern condition. More specifically, it relates both individual search for meaning and collective search for distraction to the indefinable feeling of ennui that Baudelaire described in terms of the “spleen” associated with life in 19th-century Paris, and that Martin Heidegger in his 1929 lecture “What is Metaphysics” recognised as a “profound boredom” traceable not within singular everyday occurrences, but within an overarching sense of nothingness, a “drifting here and there in the abysses of our existence [removing] all things and men and oneself along with it into a remarkable indifference” (101). Nothingness, or the agony over living an existence of lack and incompleteness, stands as the basis of Lidia’s *flânerie*, from the initial encounters with physical death and emotional destruction to her definite detachment from a culture of excess. The episode that best depicts this takes place in a night club she and Giovanni attend to avoid the nothingness between them. Evoking a similar scene from *La dolce vita*, the performance of some exotic dancers offers distraction from boredom that Giovanni gladly accepts, while for Lidia it provides another moment of clear-sightedness, inspiring the “little thought” she will disclose in the end. The atmosphere of nothingness is formally articulated through a consistent reduction of dialogue, a slow pace, and an essentialist imagery, all of which conveys the state of a city at a time when the miraculous Milan which De Sica and Zavattini had envisioned less than a decade earlier in *Miracolo a Milano* no longer is possible – neither conceptually, nor cinematographically.

One of the first to point to the theme and visual conveyance of loss, nostalgia and ennui in Antonioni’s films was Alberto Moravia, who in his contemporary novel *La noia* (1960) had presented his protagonist, Dino, as suffering from the very same condition. Ennui (*noia*) for Moravia resembles and is not contrary to fun or diversion (*divertimento*), in so far as this form of “insufficienza o inadeguatezza o scarsità della realtà”²¹ also

²¹ “insufficiency or inadequacy of scarcity of reality”

provokes the distraction and oblivion (7) that Kracauer associates with the cinema theatres and the essentially “*reactionary*” escapist possibilities it offers for the masses in 1930’s Berlin (original emphasis “Cult of Distraction,” 95). To observe that this modern and by nature static sensation of reality results in the film’s essentially anti-dramatic and anti-naturalistic mode (Moravia “La notte,” 23), as well as in the characters’ scarce ability for communication (Kezich, “La notte,” 23), points to the author’s own reflections on his films. The oblivion and reduction of love to pity in *L’Avventura*; the couple’s consciousness of their failure to go beyond pity in *La notte*; and the lack of faith in authentic sentiments in *L’Eclisse*; are, according to Antonioni, all manifestation of “la malattia dei sentimenti;” of an Eros gone sick in exposure to the insecurities facing the modern subject. Left in suspense between a Community world forever lost and a Society formation in which technological progress is negatively paralleled by moral stagnation (Antonioni, *Fare un film è per me vivere*, 240-51), the modern subject is deprived of the emotional stability needed to form lasting relations, and herein lies, it seems, the roots to nostalgia, ennui, loss and alienation.

Most studies of Antonioni’s 1960’s cinema, including Pauline Kael’s otherwise scarcely perceptive comments on *La notte*,²² have tended to follow this line of interpretation, focusing on “the perilous state of our emotional life” and the modern condition it may be traced back to (Chatman, 55). In a response to this, Peter Brunette has recently come to call for a “rethinking” of these films, arguing that a continuous emphasis on the alienation-thesis obscures their relevance outside the 1960’s art-cinema environment within which they were both produced and initially received (*Antonioni*, 2). The reading he offers of *La notte*, however, while acute in its observation of visual construction and informative for a foreign audience with regard to the context of 1960’s

²² “What kind of moviemaking, what kind of drama is this? Is the delicate movement of the derriere supposed to reveal her Angst, or merely her ennui?” (qtd. Chatman, 252).

Italy, fails to show how a rejection of the alienation thesis may offer a more insightful understanding of subjective experiences with modernisation, urbanisation and social change. A more useful solution may be to take an alternative approach to Antonioni's existential poetics and investigate these modern sentiments themselves. Both Bondanella's suggestion that "neurosis" in *Il deserto rosso* (1964) relates to the character's inability to adjust to forces of modernity, rather than to her "dehumanized and hostile surroundings" (*Italian cinema*, 218), and Kevin Moore's view of alienation in *L'eclisse* as "the beginning of a process which, ideally, re-places the self back into a world of its own devising and into a community of like-minded others as well" (23) allow for a more nuanced view of Antonioni's concern with urban characters and ambiances. None of these alternative readings seems applicable to Lidia, however, who as a *flâneuse* reaches a new awareness of spaces of modernity - of the streets and the flux of life - whereas alienation for her can never be a basis for unification. Alienation cannot, in other words, constitute a bridge when essentially it presents a closed door within the urban discourse. It is this door Lidia learns to turn into a constructive force and only if we recognise the complex existential formation of this character may we fully appreciate both the personal growth she undergoes and the film's more general reflections on interpersonal and social relations in modernity.

2.7 The Visible *Flâneuse*

The question whether there ever was a form of a *flâneuse* alongside the male figure has produced a wide theoretical debate over the past decades since Wolff first denied this hypothesis on the basis of the excluding function of "sexual divisions of the nineteenth century" by which women were confined to the domestic sphere ("The Invisible

Flâneuse,” 45). Social conventions and physical dislocation from the crowded city streets would not only have denied women the *flâneur*’s nonchalantly inquisitive stroll, but more significantly still, a participation in modernity which for the most part emerged and affirmed itself in the public sphere (*Ibid.* 37). Although middleclass women may be said to have achieved a legitimate public arena in the department stores that emerged in the mid-1800s, window shopping seems far away from the disinterested and unaccompanied stroll (“The Invisible *Flâneuse*,” 45; Gleber, 172), while representations of the *flâneuse* in French fin-de-siècle advertising more convincingly show how consumerism might have granted women a presence and a role in the urban discourse (Iskin, 113-128). Wolf affirms in a more recent piece that none of these activities would have offered neither the aimlessness of the male stroll, nor the reflectivity of his gaze (“Gender...” 21), while Wilson observes that the very private/public paradigms on which these studies are based never were as neat as to exclude all women from the city or indeed give every male, would-be- *flâneur* unconditional “visibility” (Wilson, “The Invisible *Flâneur*,” 65-9). The constrictions implied in male *flânerie* are demonstrated by Marcello’s troubled relationship to urban modernity, whereas the trajectories of Cabiria and Lidia illustrate the flexibility of the connections between *flânerie* and gendered space in a time when radical social change sees the presence of previously marginalised subjects .

More specifically still, these females wanderer’s claim to subjectivity and to an immediate visual and physical relation to the cityscape dramatise the circumstances under which Italian women gained access to the public sphere. Honest and unaccompanied female streetwalking started, as Bruno has shown, with cinema-going in the mid-1950’s – a limited form of *flânerie*,²³ but one that is crucially dislocated from the constraints of the

²³ Gleber similarly refers to female cinema going in Weimar Germany as a claim to the public sphere and mobilisation of the female gaze (186), while Anne Friedberg takes the idea of female spectatorship to draw a line of continuity between the 19th -Century department store as a locus female public life, based and postmodern cinemagoing located to shopping malls (423).

domestic sphere and motivated by the *flâneur*'s sense for voyeurism – and would indicatively culminate some 15 years later in feminists' collective city-walking (*Streetwalking*, 50-54). Seen within this context, Cabiria's transgressive and visually expressed manifestation of self appears less as a "streetwalker's" search for social mobility, than a *flâneuse*'s call for the right to access to the city. Lidia's rejection of superficially fulfilling social ambiances and distancing from the domestic sphere for an inquiry into alternative sites of the cityscapes, establish an autonomous voice within the urban discourse through which she redefines her sense of self independently from the identity a flourishing bourgeois culture ascribes to her.

The walk Lidia conducts, involving a passage from anguished alienation from her surroundings to a vision of clarity both of self and other, creates both a more complex and consequential mode of *flânerie* than the ones we have discussed so far. Differently from Cabiria, who in her final decision to rise from yet another fall directs a moment of self-awareness towards a collective dimension, Lidia's last steps only affirm her isolation and emotional distress, with the difference that her initially destructive sense of alienation now takes the form of a chosen distance. What becomes increasingly clear towards the end of her walk is the differentiating function of her existential ills, an aspect of her character that aligns her with Dino in Moravia's *La noia*. Speaking of his passivity during the *ventennio*, what saved him, he now realises, making him unsusceptible both to promises and threats of the fascist collectivity, was "soltanto la noia, ossia, l'impossibilità di stabilire un rapporto qualsiasi tra me e quel bando" (*La noia*, 12).²⁴ For the *flâneuse* of the miracle, however, the incapacity to engage in social relations not only eliminates an easy choice of conformity, but it also lays the premises for a relation of mutual adjustment to the cityscape. Contrary to the foggy Milan Antonioni set as the stage for criminal

²⁴ "only ennui, or, the impossibility to establish any form of relationship between me and that group."

investigation in *Cronaca di un amore* (1950), the city he presents in *La notte* as simultaneously the object of and inspiration for a wanderer's existential quest, appears through an overarching veil of lucidity where transparent surfaces and wide, spacious streets enable an immediate and a visual relation to spaces and spheres to which she previously would have been indifferent.

Lidia's response to the city's accommodating configuration consists in movements of liberation and a visually founded process of familiarisation and self-discovery. Her repeated disappearances – from the hospital, the reception, and lastly the party – suggest a tendency to avoid social gatherings that now takes a constructive turn in that it leads to association rather than separation, giving free space for her latently outgoing spirit driven by a different way of seeing. No longer evasive or distressed, and not satisfied by window shopping, her gaze presents an extraordinary receptiveness towards urban impressions, capturing as it moves along with increasing confidence a worker on lunch break; passers-by in lively conversation; a sunlit water-fountain and a clerk behind an office window. This attentive, partly voyeuristic and highly eclectic mode of *flânerie* leads eventually towards the improvised racket-show in her old neighbourhood. Apart from the ability of association and desire to participate in meaningful collective events her usual sphere of social interaction does not offer, this episode also demonstrates the sensitivity of this wanderer as she visualises a fleeting encounter between the traditional and the modern in the passage from Community to Society. Lidia stands on the margin between these two worlds, as is the *flâneuse's* nature. Her nostalgia over an irrecoverable past does, however, not alienate her from the intrusive elements of urban life, as her quiet fascination for the rackets demonstrates. This scrutinising, vertical perspective alludes to the moment in the hospital when the sound of a helicopter distracts her away from the room, and later when yet another aircraft interrupts her still tentative walk among massive structures. That her

gaze in all of these cases is directed towards signs of the modernity to which she has just claimed a right to access, reinforce the impression that her sense of estrangement is less related to modernity itself and to the physical manifestations it takes, than to the socio-cultural losses involved in material and technological progress.

The emotional balance she develops in these moments defined by discovery and voyeurism compared to earlier also shows a receptiveness towards urban impressions lived not as shocks but rather as a “continuum” of urban life (Moretti, 145) to which she adjusts, as described by Simmel, by observing a variety of urban impressions while becoming less effected by external individuality and more intensely aware of “personal subjectivity” (*MM*, 178). In commenting on the emotional dilemmas portrayed in *La notte*, Antonioni noted how everything between Marcello and Lidia happens independently of money (*Fare un film è per me vivere*, 199), and that is true of her claim to the city as well. Not driven by the pretext of work but by an unconditionally exploratory approach to the external, Lidia is far more attentive towards urban space and manifestations of the city’s past and present than Marcello, while her bourgeois blasé attitude makes her less intrusive than Cabiria and both less expectant and despairing than Antonio. The balance she finds between these divergent modes of observation allows for an analytical detachment that, as she moves towards inner clarity, enables her to discern the homely within the unhomely, or, on the contrary, to see with a gaze that distorts and causes sensations of estrangement what she previously did not question in both private and public urban life. Developing from alienation and search for momentary distraction towards the universally human need to “separate what is related and relate what is separate” (Simmel, “The Bridge ...” 408), her tendency to separate herself from certain social spheres and engage instead with alternative and physical aspects of the cityscape allows a clearer view of the city’s many realities and the spatial practices it offers.

To see with such unprecedented involvement and attention and to position herself within urban modernity gives her walk a feel of purpose that in many ways recall's Cabiria's act of self-affirmation. The irony is of course that she has everything the marginalised nocturnal city-walker aspired to except her spirit to move on when everything around her collapses. Lidia's existentially motivated use of the cityscape finds a closer parallel in Agnes Varda's contemporary *Cleo du 5 a 7* (1961), where the fear of a terminal disease leads the unaware and materialistically driven urbanite towards her familiar metropolitan surroundings. Cleo's walk along Parisian boulevards starts at the passive level of window shopping and leads her from objectified "spectacle-woman" to a *flâneuse* with the right to "look without being looked at" (Mouton, 8). Common between Lidia and Cleo is, in particular, their gradual immersion into the streets which, as it assures self-awareness through a new way seeing, becomes the basis for the film's respective experimentation with female subjectivity. In *La notte*, both the framing of Lidia's character – often straight on and at the centre of the image – as well as her tendency to generate the cinematic gaze, underscores Antonioni's intentional foregrounding of her gaze and her distinct physical presence within the urban environment (Brunette, 56-9). Moving from detached irony and insistence on personal distinction, as during the reception, to the analytical observation that leads her from the streets to the nightclub and ultimately to the industrial tycoon's decadent party, this newly mobilised gaze demonstrates a considerable affinity with the classic *flâneur*, although her existential exhaustion denies her his sensual experience of viewing the city through the illusionary veil of the crowd (*AP*, 21). What Lidia does develop beyond the *flâneur*'s own capacities is the differentiating nature of voyersitic wandering which allows a clearer view of the city's many realities while also granting her the privilege to relate to them all from the

vantage point of a 'room on her own,' a singular position from which she may choose to observe unobserved, or on the contrary to, make herself visible.

These two manifestations of her subjectivity are both dramatised during the Geradini's party where she ends up observing, detached and slightly ironic, an extravagant social rite, while she walks between and momentarily possesses one solitary spot after the other, in effect conducting an indoor *flânerie* of much more consequential nature than Giovanni did in their apartment earlier. It is from one of these hidden spots that she is able to look down on the floor beneath and observe Giovanni's less successful seduction of Valentina, but only when their kiss is consumed and the camera withdraws and places itself behind Lidia's shoulders, do we realise that it is her unnoticed and sadly unaffected gaze that projects their encounter. Following this episode, her mode changes to involve presence through distinction, as we see it happen during the rain-sequence where she first observes the dancers from a distance and enjoys the jazz rhythms at the piano. Upon reflection, she accepts an invitation to dance but continues on her own until a sudden rain-shower leads the partygoers towards the swimming pool. Assuming an attitude of transitory and unworried pleasure unfit to her contemplative character but well suited to celebrate the death of her marriage, Lidia is about to give in to the frenzy when Roberto tells her not to act like a fool, indirectly appealing to her very distinction. Their successive elopement is poetically rendered by a visualisation of their light-hearted conversation through rainy car-windows, while their voices are muted to favour a purely visual understanding of the *flâneuse's* last attempt to escape in distraction. Whereas her entrance into the city and claim to subjectivity were facilitated by sunlit surfaces, the impossibility of revenging a betrayal that awakens nothing but pity appears to her in the light of transparent, nocturnal rain that rather than conveying a new start, announces the disillusion her search has brought forth. More than indifference, it is a resignation to and

an exhausted relief over her own clear-sightedness that makes her accept Valentina's awkward solidarity. Its unlikelihood notwithstanding, their encounter remains a rare manifestation of sincerity within an ambiance of appearance and masquerade, as well as of human understanding. They both isolate themselves from this world by physically retreating to solitary spots where they see and reflect; Valentina with unworried and alert sarcasm; Lidia with troubled but equally resistant analysis. To Lidia's desire for a death which would at least bring about something new, Valentina is soon to remind her of the possibility that it would not lead to anything at all, establishing a cosmic understanding of the ennui that tends to exhaust modern earthly life.

Lidia's existential distance from her social surroundings is a presupposition for her ability to see what she previously left unquestioned and establish a new subjectivity in relation to what she is *not*, and where she does *not* belong, while at the same time seeing beyond the limits of this world and discover alternative and more viable spheres of aspects of the cityscape. Observing from the vantage point of the estranged, her steps of association and separation found an eclectic city that rests not on traumatising or phantasmagorical shocks, but on a continuum of impressions connecting what she has lost or rejected with the not-yet-known. In contrast to Marcello, who tends to visualise the city through one unifying veil of socio-cultural degradation, Lidia's city emerges in the light of external lucidity and personal disillusion and presents a neat distinction between signs of destruction and sources for growth or inspiration to search. It is in the complexity of urban spheres unified through her walk towards self-discovery, that her *flânerie* manifests itself, enabling her to turn anxiety and "out-of-placeness" into a position and a perspective of autonomous discovery. Isolated from and simultaneously inquisitive towards manifestations of the modern, Lidia achieves a singular diegetic and non-diegetic presence within the urban ambiance that cannot be reduced to notions of her body as an object for

the director's or any other male gaze, as has been suggested (Brunette, 60). Rather, as an extension of her observing and revealing gaze, her body manifests itself as the "obstinate and stubborn" entity that "forces us to think" as it relates the cinema to "the spirit" or, as Deleuzes writes, to thought itself (*The Time-Image*, 189). Lidia's tiny and reserved, yet unfringeable presence, calls attention to itself from her first encounter with the cityscape, where it is highlighted by way of its contrast to massive structures and deep city streets and subsequently, to the endless fields in the outskirts areas. It is, however, in the spacious golf court where her trajectory finds a unique field of cleared landscape, that her body assumes an unmistakable dramatic and communicative effect. As we see her approach the decisive moment of revelation her walk has build up to, she first turns her back to the usually and perplex Giovanni, absently playing with the branches of a tree, before she sits down, as if physically resigning herself to the state of loss she is about to reveal. Giovanni, who in previous settings has only noticed her absence, ignoring her attempts to make him see her, is now troubled by the way she escapes him, and a desperate attempt to hold on to her body becomes for him the only possible way to deny the awareness of having seen her too late.

Resisting the comfortable illusion that there still is a way back, Lidia's body responds to Giovanni's desperate desire with a fusion of past and future agony that crucially encapsulates what according to Deleuze constitutes Antonioni's "method" – a body that rather than residing in the present "contains the before and the after, tiredness and waiting:

no longer experience but 'what remains of past experiences', 'what comes afterwards, when everything has been said', such a method necessarily proceeds via the attitudes or postures of the body. This is the time image, the series of time. (*The Time-Image*, 189)

A seer unable to act in reaction to urban impressions but who by observing and reflecting is able to establish a consequential presence amidst them, Lidia's encounters with the cityscape establish a series of "purely optical situations" - now silent, now accompanied by distinctly urban sounds, from aircrafts to jazz music - that correspond to the spatial fragments on which this cinematic city is founded. Completely different from the concept-city associated with the Pirelli Skyscraper, Lidia's Milan excludes recognisable sites and landmarks and evolves instead from a series of unspecified and indefinable "any-space-whatever" (*Ibid.* 5) that all become charged with meaning by the city walker's presence in them. What connects them to her and to each other is her gaze and her body as she manifests herself through an urban "nomadism" that allows her to cross, mentally or physically, borders between past and future spaces (*Ibid.* 196). As a nomad, viewing from the margin and calling for reflection within and outside the world of the film, the *flâneuse* manifests herself through postures and movements by which she conquers "the source to her attitudes," and if in Lidia's case, this "female gest" is not strong enough to overcome "the history of men and the crisis of the world" (*Ibid.* 196), as Deluze suggests, it enables her to visualise and challenge and ultimately break open the protective veil concealing the presence of both this history and the present crisis in the city of the economic 'miracle.'

This old man,' I said at length, 'is the type and the genius of deep crime. *He is the man of the crowd.* It will be in vain to follow for I shall learn no more of him nor of his deed.

Edgar Allan Poe, *The Man in the Crowd*

CHAPTER THREE

Views from Beneath: Deception and Misrecognition in the Noir City

3. 1 Introduction

Inherent in Benjamin's notion of the detective as "preformed" in the *flâneur* there is an idea of how idleness evolves into shadowing destructive elements within the urban masses (AP, 442), a view that is particularly relevant to the present discussion of Mario Bava's *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* and Dario Argento's *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* - films we often see evoked as respectively the archetype and the quintessence of the cinematic *giallo*.¹ That the *flâneur* would sense

¹ Labelled after the yellow-covered pulp fiction published by Mondadori in the 1930's and 1940's, the *giallo* identified its first cinematic counterparts in thriller/noir films such as Visconti's *Ossessione* (*Obsession*, 1943); a translation more than adaptation of James Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934); Alberto Lattuada's Kafkaian *Il delitto di Giovanni Episcopo* (*Flesh will Surrender*, 1947) based on Gabriele D'Annunzio's *Giovanni Episcopo* (1891) and Pietro Germi's *Un maledetto imbroglio* (*The Facts of Murder*, 1959) which gives some sense of order to the chaotic atmosphere of Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* (*The Awful Mess on Via Merulana*, 1957), just to mention a few. When *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* often is considered the origin of the *giallo* it is partly due to its self-reflexive presentation as such, through its literary references and explicit homage to Hitchcock. Equally significant is however its reliance on elements from the literary *giallo* - the travelogue framework, the apparently normal serial killer; the innocent eyewitness as well as the urban context - in effect offering a model for a *filone* or current of similar films of which Argento's forms one of the most emblematic and critically acclaimed examples. For insightful treatments of respectively the literary and cinematic *giallo*, see Luca Corvi. *Tutti i colori del giallo*. Venezia: Marsilio, 2002; Gary Needham, "Playing with genre: defining the Italian *giallo*." *Fear Without Frontiers. Horror Cinema Across the Globe*. (Ed) Steven Schneider. Godalming: FAB, 2003: 134-144; and Mikel Koven.

a need to legitimise his existence and lend a randomly observing gaze to problems of crime in the emergent metropolis implies that the demise of disinterested wandering did not exclusively depend on his encounter with the market. When the *flâneur* started to exploit his expertise in the city's life to sell street-gossip, it was with a notion of what Simmel and Benjamin later came to see as the "uneasiness aroused in the urbanite by other people" (AP, 447) in times when

the masses appears as the asylum that shields an asocial person from his persecutors. Of all the menacing aspects of the masses, this one became apparent first. It is the origin of the detective story. In times of terror, when everyone is something of a conspirator, everybody will be in a situation where he has to play detective. (CB, 40).

Everybody, but the inquisitive *flâneur* in particular; a unique connoisseur of urban types and ambiances who in the encounter with a dodgy and deceptive urban ambiance lends his scrutinising gaze and ambiguous omnipresence to trace the city's criminals, in effect serving attempts in the concept-city to create and recreate the illusion rather than actual existence of "transparency where there is none" (Frisby, 56-7). The demise of *flânerie* is thus also a result of a public need for a form of social order and urban control that descends deeper into the city's labyrinthine underworld than the journalist would tend to do.

When observation and unlimited access to the cityscape cease to be a source for disinterested inquisitiveness and personal fulfilment, scrutiny becomes more systematic and the city more concentrated. These changes in mode of perception correspond largely to the passage from Poe's "man in the crowd," one of the first

La dolce morte. Vernacular Cinema and the Italian Giallo. Lanham: Scarecrow, 2006. Koven, it may be noted, cites *Oessione* as the first *giallo* while locating the "classic" period to the rather brief time-span 1970-75 (3-7).

literary incarnations of the metropolitan spirit, to the professional ‘private eye’ and eventually to the Hitchcockian man or woman ‘who knew too much’ - a recurrent figure within the *giallo* where it will tend to stand at the centre for narratives focusing on questions of knowledge and ways of seeing. The innocent urban wanderer who enters apparently harmless streets and becomes an eyewitness to a crime will tend to engage in an obsessive and solitary search, along with or in opposition to official forces of investigation. Often a foreigner and in a privileged position of independence, the amateur detective is aided by his or her liminal status within the diegesis and by an inherent naïveté and curiosity towards the world that manifests itself in all its obscurity (Koven, 85-7). It is also these characteristics, along with a distorted vision and instances of misrecognition in relation to the original crime or to clues ignored or misread, that may lead to a failed search and question rather than confirming the status of panoptical surveillance in urban modernity.

Sam and Nora who we follow in respectively *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* and *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* have both arrived in Rome with a tourist's preconception, but they are soon faced by the effective truth about the *bel paese* when their nocturnal walks entangle them to the mysterious work of a serial killer. As the urge to fully comprehend what they have witnessed incites an amateur's detection, their searches evolve as a process of initiation that invests their gaze with inquisitive alertness to reach beneath deceptive surfaces and read antagonistic urban signs.

Whereas the next chapter will discuss the strangers in *Morte a Venezia* and *Viaggio in Italia* in terms of a sensual foundation of the city, the concern here is the interaction with an urban space that both threatens and attracts through scary stimuli and lack of social coercion. For the stranger turned detective, the attempt to map out an opaque and fragmentary “Society” formation requires a constant movement between exteriors

and interiors; between entities of urban control and the hidden underground, shedding light on discrepancies between official and effective spatial practices. Their experiences as city-dwellers are, however, slightly different – for Sam, it is the masses that set obstacles in his search, whereas for Nora, it is the mechanism of exclusion within a male gaze of power that opposes her wandering. To develop an alert gaze is thus much more a question of establishing a space in which to act and to look on her own than it is for Sam who remains more detached from the mean streets than she is from the noir-interior she inhabits. Their failed readings and last confrontations with their adversary which see them inert and saved by external and more powerful forces, prove an affinity between the *flâneuse* and the *flâneur* who are both mobilised by the vision of death without being able to act or react so as to autonomously bring about a solution to the mystery or to map out structures within the city's deviant spatial and social elements.

3. 2 Objects and Spaces of Crime

When Sam finally boards the plane to New York following two postponed returns and three attempts on his life, he recalls how someone had praised Italy as the country where he might find the right conditions and inspiration for his writing, describing it to him as “un paese tranquillo dove non succede mai niente.”² This idyllic image guides the foreigner's superficial discoveries until it disintegrates against the maniac Monica Ranieri whose scheme deceives him, while paradoxically guiding him through his creative crisis. What he brings home to America - the start to a new novel consisting of 40 pages of urban text - finds a counterpart in the painting

² “a quiet place where nothing ever happens”

that accompanies his search. A naïf artwork which in itself presents and incites deception, it portrays an idyllic park with children playing and where a peaceful city is seen rising in the background. Only a closer viewing will disclose the grotesque knife attack on a young girl by a maniac disguised in black,³ a recreation of the assault Monica suffered 10 years earlier. It is the incidental exposure to it in an antiquary trade that has brought forth the suppressed trauma and incited her own sadistic killings of young women. All the diegetic and nondiegetic clues and connections tied to this painting – the girl who sold it to Monica became her first victim; the original in Monica’s office finds its reproduction in Sam’s apartment; the lullaby that recurrently accompanies and forms a counterpoint to Sam’s contemplation of it is also played when he leaves Rome – suggest his blindness towards a mystery that provides him with particulars for creative urban text, but that only incidentally reveals itself to him as a coherent image.

A parallel entity of connection and revelation is found in the bird with the crystal feathers. Despite the arctic and antisocial creature’s limited sphere of viability, one exemplar is extraordinarily kept in Rome’s zoo and that is where Sam’s ornithologist friend, Carlo, brings him once he has identified its quirking sound on the murderer’s taped phone calls. As it appears, the arctic *Hornitus Novalis* now stands below the window of the Ranieri’s apartment where Sam remembers having seen the phone. This unexpected solution to the sound-enigma points back to the opening where Sam collects a check from his editor, not even bothering to pick up a copy of the bird-manual he has written in lack of more rewarding engagements. Having financed the return fare to America, he strolls nonchalantly through the nocturnal and apparently harmless city centre, whistling unaware of how his “idleness” soon will be

³ Both the deceptive composition and function of the picture recall Antonioni’s *Blow-Up* (1966) where Thomas’ photo upon magnification proves to have cover a murder

“accredited” (*CB*, 41). Seeing what appears to be an attack on a woman, Sam rushes to enter the chic art gallery only to see his act of rescue cut off short by Ranieri’s strategically manoeuvred double glass doors. Excluding his voice from the deserted, murky streets and his movements from intruding into the deceptively illuminated surface of the couple’s world (Koven, 129), the abruptness leaves him caught like the caged arctic bird in a liminal space, alluding to his unchangeable status as a stranger while also foreshadowing the dialectic nature his forthcoming search will take as it moves between the interior and exterior. Thus, apart from betraying the husband-wife complot where the one’s psychosis is assimilated and covered for by the other, the bird also embodies the stranger’s own ambivalent position within the Mediterranean city where he is entangled to dangers through a mystery protected by its opaque and labyrinthine layout.

The immediate result of having seen too much is an ambiguous position as suspect and eyewitness, involving a night of interrogation and the bizarre experience of having to possibly recognise the criminal among a selection of the city’s perverts. The formulaic love-hate relationship to official and sadly less enthusiastic forces of investigation wins him an initially unappreciated admission to the inner circles of urban surveillance, whereas Rome’s police force, even more degraded than in the era of stolen bicycles, exploits the stranger’s professional innocence and fascination with what is carefully excluded from tourist publicity. The news covering every front page and causing a state of collective terror among Rome’s citizens is, as Morosini explains, the recent assassination of three young women with no traces left of the killer. Sam’s determination to leave decreases with the curiosity incited by access to information and means of inquiry, and the cooperation that emerges opens the door to a range of contrasting interiors, leading him from Ranieri’s apartment in the exclusive

embassy-area of via Bruxelles to a miscellany antiquary trade; to the prison; a gunman's shabby cabin, and the painter Consalvi's hayloft. Moving away from where the killings are both planned and conducted towards the more remote periphery, his inquiry also involves increasingly useless informants. "Addio," mistakenly charged for the murder of the second victim points Sam to Faiena – himself a *flâneur* who covers his encyclopaedic knowledge of Rome's underworld in a cloud of *omertà* and gets 100, 000 lire for disclosing the whereabouts of a dead gunman. Chaotic and distracting to the stranger-detective's gaze and movements in both its spatial and human constitution, the city manifests itself through an inscrutable and aversive veil, an impression that to the spectator is reinforced by the spheres to which he has no access - spooky gardens and old apartment buildings where the victims are located and sadistically killed. While creating an urban ambiance that acts as an accomplice both in the assassinations and Monica's efforts to get him out of the way, these spheres also announce the nature of his inquiry which will prove him at fault due to lacking comprehension and visibility as well as to antagonistic forces in the metropolitan crowd.

Frustration over hostile interiors and bizarre interlocutors is channelled in Morosini's offices where he is given assistance in his search but where matters are also complicated by two additional victims and no significant findings. His apartment more clearly represents this ambiguity of reflection and of obstacles. It is here that he reconstructs the crime scene; gets ideas for his inquiries; and receives his helpers, but this abandoned building is also where the killer communicates her threats and comes to assault Giulia, disconnecting phone and electricity and hacking on the door. A far less competent Watson than Carlo, Giulia embodies the ambivalent nature of this domestic sphere, distracting him from the mystery and suggesting, with a wording

that presages Monica's telephonic threats, he stop playing "amateur detective". While her reading of newspaper reports of the various victims sets him on the path of various informants, she mistakenly relates the first murder in a park to a romantic encounter, distracting him from seeing its solution in the painting he brings back from the antique trade. What for Giulia is just a creepy and "perverted" image becomes a source for his obsession, and its connection to the original – kept, as he later will realise, where Monica selects victims and weapons - suggests an affinity between her "work place" and his apartment as loci of their mutually aversive brainwork, the one far more acute in its insanity than the other, that finds a third locus of manifestation in the gallery where their initial and final encounter take place.

The mental trajectory of identification is tied together by two actual assaults, respectively executed and arranged through a hired assassin by Monica, within the city's exteriors. The first attempted murder takes place at dawn following the incident in the gallery. While the dense morning haze suggests his lack of clear vision and the obscurity within which his search will be conducted, its physical function is to cover the killer's black disguise until she is right behind him, when the warning from a similarly black-dressed old lady saves him from the assault. The assassin she sends out for him, on the other hand, exploits the deserted nocturnal streets, as well as Giulia's distractive presence and the illusionary shield of Morosini's bodyguard. More than serving as the fatal threat it is intended to be, however, this interruption of the romantic stroll for two both alerts and engages the detective who in his fascination with the dangers he faces is just as able to make use of the shadowed cityscape. A hidden entrance in the narrow alleys provides a shield for Giulia while Sam lures his pursuer into a classic hide-and-seek-situation at a parking area before ending up within more frequented streets and ultimately an active night-life. Here, the masses

may hinder the malefactor in shooting, but, as Benjamin suggests, it also provides him with a shield: no one is ready to believe Sam when he asks for help, since without a gun, the gunman looks like any other passer-by – even with a flamboyant yellow jacket. A visual trope that self-consciously refers to the film's generic belonging, his outfit is carefully chosen so as to mislead Sam to a convention of similarly dressed ex-boxers where the detective, incredulous over the red herring, is the one who is set on the spot. The disappointing conclusion to the duel with an enemy he does not yet know captures the detective's general sense of being at loss in a labyrinthine and inscrutable ambiance which leads him deeper into Monica's entanglements while hindering the visibility he needs to trace her steps and hide his own from her.

3. 3 *Flânerie* and Optics of Detection

The continuous oscillation between interiors and exteriors; between urban flux and increasingly remote and repulsive peripheral locations, aligns the cinematic city in *Uccello dalle piume di cristallo* with the polycentric and borderless ones in *Ladri di biciclette* and *Le notti di Cabiria*. Sam's ambivalent sensation of attraction and displacement recalls Antonio and Cabiria's situation, but whereas they are socio-economically excluded from a Rome that is rapidly adapting to modernity, the amateur detective's sense of alienation has cultural and, more importantly, epistemological foundations, as it reflects what 20 years after their wandering has transformed itself into an inscrutable metropolis. For the stranger incidentally turned into critical observer of urban life, to trace the criminal involves more than anything else to map out a city that through processes of deception continues to exclude and displace. This twofold line of inquiry, split between the mystery proper and the

structures that protects it, reflects the ambivalent position of the detective-*flâneur*, whose immediate search and steps of detection in themselves might be defined and resolute, but whose wandering in the encounter with antagonistic manifestations of the city's life – criminal and not – is too distracted to achieve the errant and personally fulfilling nature of *flânerie*.

The changes that take place in the visualisation of the urban ambiance, from a sunlit accumulation of foreign stereotypes about Italianity to an opaque, fragmentary and variably deserted and crowded noir-city, simultaneously opposed and accommodating to the wanderer's dual quest, underline the passage from writer in crisis to the urban "hunter" that Benjamin locates as the origin of the detective story (AP, 439). In his study on the cinematic *giallo*, Mikel Koven describes Benjamin's "equation" of the *flâneur* with the detective as "highly problematic" and a result of him tripping under his own "rhetoric," since the detective, in contrast to the *flâneur*, is paid to conduct his exploratory walk (92-4). If the amateur detective falls closer to the *flâneur* than the professional, it is, according to Koven, because of the leisure time available to conduct an unpaid search, as well as the ambivalence this figure shows towards "the modernity of the *flâneur*" (94). This misinterpretation of Benjamin who never "equates" the two figures (in his schema of urban types, the one derives from the other), is however in itself problematic. In the first place, Koven relies exclusively on critics of Benjamin and does not quote the allegedly misleading rhetoric. In the second place, he ignores the complexity of both the *flâneur*, defined precisely by his ambiguous position vis-à-vis modernity, and of *flânerie*, which, as Benjamin became increasingly aware, historically would tend to take a far less disinterested form than an unconcerned indulgence in leisure. Detection on the other hand, at least the way it is portrayed in modern fiction, is rarely only or even mainly about payment for a

mission. One single common feature that may be said to relate such different figures as Sherlock Holmes, Sam Spade, James Bond and George Smiley, is precisely the lack of consideration for what may be a modest pay and scarce, if any, credit for cases they have completed with other than material motivations.

Left with no choice but to extend his stay in Rome after having just managed to finance his return-ticket, the foreign *flâneur* turned “into an unwilling detective” (CB, 40) has initially no time nor money and no desire to tail a sadistic serial killer. When he later gets his passport back, the labyrinth of killings, threats, and deeper and darker streets, has captivated him to such an extent that he risks Giulia’s life, and he determines, as he explains to Morosini, to continue thinking “ma per motivi miei,”⁴ revealing both an attachment to the case and a desire to challenge obstacles and question his own abilities for detection, a desire he shares with his professional counterparts. The passage Sam undergoes from a foreigner’s detached and unconcerned form of *flânerie* to the search for a criminal spotted within the deceptively clear and harmless cityscape, illustrates the derivation of the detective as a more systematic use of the *flâneur*’s “clerical dignity” and “detective’s intuition,” making him a “priest of the genius loci” like Chesterton’s Father Brown (Benjamin, “The Return of the *Flâneur*,” 262-72). This position involves in particular the visual mastery of space associated with the *giallo*’s protagonist who embodies the ambivalent experience of having seen *too much* while desiring to see and know *more*. His obsessively scrutinising gaze notwithstanding, this mastery remains an illusion. Convinced that he saw an attempted murder involving a black figure, a knife, a black glove, and a wounded woman,⁵ he is unable to fully conceive of the relationship between these particulars. Sam’s subsequent search and projection of the city suffer

⁴ “but for personal reasons”

⁵ With these visual tropes, the film presents itself as a *giallo*. Needham traces the origin of the recurrent black raincoat to 1960’s continental fashion trends (136).

from experiences of misrecognition typical of a gaze that while it penetrates is also penetrated (Needham, 140) and that originates in his position of displacement and deception during the original crime. Trapped between Ranieri's sliding doors - twice a spectator but with no agency - the only working sense he is left free to use is a vision that creates confusion in himself and suspicion in others. Morosini asks with disbelief over the foreigner's testimony whether "l'assasino sarebbe sceso da qui?" in response to which he confirms that "Non sarebbe, è sceso da lì,"⁶ still unaware of being guarded as a likely suspect and preoccupied rather with the moment *previous* to the evanescent black figure's jump down the stairs. As he will realise in a moment that seems to announce the end to much more than his relaxing holiday, he does not have a clear image of who is actually attacking whom.

The scene, tediously reconstructed through interrogations, continues to haunt him in the form of flashing still images that deny him a distance from the event and as such become decisive in leading him on his inquiry. Visually, these "mental snapshots" establish a mode of perception that, along with the painting he examines for intuitive clues, the perverts' stage performance, and the constant reflection of isolated images in windows and doors, all position the detective as spectator to a two-dimensional discourse (McDonagh, 54) – to fragments that as building blocks in an urban patchwork underscore the city's resistance to surveillance. Only when the maniac is mistakenly identified in the at that point deceased Ranieri do we get a panoramic view where the Tiber and Saint Peter feature as the only monumental sites and unambiguous indicators to the film's setting. Rising above the detective who, for his part, is led deeper into the narrow labyrinth in search for Giulia, this aerial-view creates a counterpoint to his oblivion both to the trap he is about to enter and to the

⁶ "the killer would have come down from here?;" "He would not, he *did* come down from there."

criminal network he has been drawn into without being able to map out its logic. If this idyllic travelogue image may be said to represent Sam's initial view of Rome, the contrast this perspective creates to his scrutinising gaze along dark resembles the change in vision described by Poe's "man in the crowd:"

At first my observations took an abstract and generalizing turn. I looked at the passenger in masses and thought of them in their aggregate relations. Soon however I descended to details and regarded with minute interest the innumerable varieties ... (108)

As Tom Gunning has shown, the change in perspective from a "bird's eye view" to the "mole eye's view" illustrates the difference between the *flâneur's* "holistic" approach to a superficially ordered cityscape, and the detective's paths along "hidden tunnels" leading towards its darkest and deepest spheres ("From the Kaleidoscope ...," 37). Whereas the one emphasises exterior "spectacle" and "appearance," the other will be drawn towards the "effective" inner stratum of invisible and enigmatic urban realities (*Ibid*, 38). The latter perspective suggests the acute and selective gaze characteristic of the *testimone oculare* whose search for a visual epistemology tends to be conveyed through fast zooms leading into extreme close-ups of the detective's eyes where the eye-line match spots the object of discovery (Koven, 149). Sam's entrance into Monica's office is entirely constructed around this technique: from Julia, tied up on the floor, to the painting and to Carlo, killed in a chair, his gaze moves so as to encounter the laughing, cloak-covered maniac who only then enables him to see what was wrong with the scene in the gallery. The succession of revelations suggests a moment of an acuteness his errant search so far has lacked, causing in him a blindness towards connection that now appears all too obvious.

Only a few details are needed still to piece the mystery together in a coherent picture. Monica's hidden world in a lugubrious apartment complex manifests itself as the backstage to the gallery where their acts of shadowing come together in a wrap-up scene embodying both spatial and iconic affinities. The grotesquely formed statuettes displayed there earlier now gain meaning in light of the sadistic deformation of the victims' bodies, whereas the relief – a modernist piece covered by knives of which Ranieri had previously given him a sidetracking excursus - proves to have a very practical purpose. As it appears, Sam's view of the "effective" city has moved along an exposure to Italy's most unconventional art forms; pieces of morbid creativity that have all incited a voyeuristic desire to see the killer and the spaces she uses but that has been complicated by estranging circumstances. The antique-seller's advances distract him from the connection between the painting's buyer and the girl who was killed the night she sold it, whereas Consalvi's incidental mentioning of its real-life inspiration fades in the light of his monstrous habit of eating and serving cats. Other and more accessible clues wake a momentary attention without him being able to see their interrelated meaning: he inquires about Ranieri's height and notes his smoking habits but fails to connect it to the police's clues, or to his suspicious appearance just after Monica was attacked and his later reluctance to let her talk to Sam. One of Morosini's few correct assumptions about the serial killer would have completed the image for him, but that the maniac is hiding behind a mask of normality becomes an increasingly implausible presupposition for a voyeur who, in a mixture of fascination and frustrated loss of clear-sight, entangles himself into peripheral locations and disturbingly eccentric but innocent informants.

3. 4 The Man and the Crowd

Caught by the lethal quality of his adversary's abstract art, it is not by superhuman inference that the eye-witness finds himself in a mutually desired Moriarty/Holmes confrontation, but a result of a search unwittingly aided by Carlo, complicated by Giulia; and resolved by the apathetic police, ready to accept Ranieri's false confession and let a serial killer go free, while ultimately running off with the credit for apparently having restored order. As for the sincere but ultimately errant detective, his fallacious inquiry reverses the function of the literary detective as a figure of social control intended to reassure readers that the "chaos [...] in the nineteenth-century metropolis was both intelligible and legible" (Frisby, *Cityscapes*, 56). And in part, it is the inability to decipher the city that makes him perplexed during his search for its most wanted criminal. As a derivation of the *flâneur*, the detective inherits in particular his faculty to read "from faces, (AP, 442) and discern individual types within the crowd, developing a more acute gaze to go beneath disguise and read from the inside of potential malefactors (Gunning, "From the Kaleidoscope ...," 37). The scientifically inclined private eye of whom Morosini represents nothing but a degradation would as such align with the larger powers of surveillance in creating an illusion of urban control and transparency (Frisby, 57). Finding himself reduced to a tool of inquiry and disclosure rather than an independent entity within structures of deficient panoptical power, the eyewitness of modern Rome proves to have fewer affinities with the 19th-century detective than with the errant journalist-*flâneur*. Like Marcello, Sam is a writer in crisis finding legitimisation for idleness through unaccredited service to an alienating cityscape, and if the creation of artistically worthless urban texts emblematises the commodification of *flânerie*, its

rationalisation through the attempt to read urban signs presents a parallel and complementary process of demise in the encounter with the social and geographical disintegration of the modern city.

Apart from the fallacy in reading, Sam's sense of alienation also depends on his distance from the masses. Contrary to what Kracauer writes of the "flow of life" as a source that "creates kaleidoscopic sights," casting "its spell over the *flâneur*" (*Theory of Film*, 72), the solitary and unlikely eyewitness is haunted by the hostility of the streets from the moment when he struggles to call attention to his confinement between Ranieri's windows. There is no crowd there to help him, and Morosini will subsequently state the nature of his isolation as a foreigner when tedious interrogation is justified with reference to the maniac of which he is unaware, but that has caused collective anxiety among Rome's citizens. Front pages and alarming posters both reflect and perpetuate the state of crisis, as do the TV-news where a deceptively confident Morosini encourages public prudence and assures that the nets are entangling around the maniac. How, in times of crisis, the public becomes private and interiors evolve into exteriors, is suggested by the anxious spectators who gather around this newscast projected in a display window. This liminal space of momentary collectivity excludes the stranger, however, who rather than being ignorant of their fear, knows too much to take part in it. Not only has he seen and felt the indifferent inertness of a corrupt gaze of power, he has, more crucially, felt the illusion of this collective which in providing a fertile ground for antisocial elements perpetuates its own destruction. The gap between the life-threatened *flâneur* fatally attracted to the "effective" city, and the masses, more resistant towards foreign elements than to the deviant entities that destroy from within, appears in particular from the episode when he seeks to turn the tables on the hired assassin and fails to locate any forces of

assistance. The ex-boxers' yellow uniforms protect the criminal just as much as their cheerfulness reinforces Sam's agony over the threatening defeat he has just suffered in losing track of him. That the detective is hindered by a collective state of insensitivity or indifference is implied in the visual composition of his movements where the mean streets in which he conducts his gum-shoeing appears as a detached background to his anxious movements. At a certain point he walks by a crowd of unconcerned cinemagoers waiting to watch *La donna scarlatta* (Jean Valère, 1969) – a comedy where Monica Vitti's character, Diana, resolves to murder her unfaithful lover and then to commit suicide, before a new flame distracts her from the idea altogether. His distance from the crowd has remained exactly as it was when he started his inquiry, but the situation is reversed: the stranger who used to be oblivious of the threats posed to the city's safety is the one who now lives in terror, whereas Rome's collectively anxious citizens can escape from their fear by reducing a state of crisis to romantic comedy.

This discrepancy in experience points to Benjamin's increasingly disillusioned view of the *flâneur's* position in the cityscape, as his "thirst for the new is quenched by the crowd, which appears self-impelled and endowed with a soul on its own (*AP*, 345). As noted in relation to the *flâneur* of the miracle, this idea of the crowd as mere illusion reflects Benjamin's pessimism over contemporary processes of commodification and, more crucially still, over political developments in Weimar Germany (Buck-Morss, 307) while it more generally recognises how disintegrative forces of modernisation exclude the collective urban spirit that would enchant and accommodate the *flâneur's* ambiguous position as enchanted and unobserved observer. No more a source for intoxication, the urban masses are united enough in their obscure surface to obliterate "the individual's traces" (*CB*, 43) but inadequate to

accommodate both irresolute searches for the city's essence and the more scrutinising attempt to establish an urban epistemology. Both the hostility Sam meets within the Roman crowd, and the circularity of his trajectory, leading back to the deceptively transparent sphere of the gallery and to the position in which he first appeared, confined both in movement and vision, aligns his *flânerie* to Marcello and partly also to Antonio. Their respectively epistemological, existential and material searches might have made them more aware of their situations, but they have achieved no agency or a potential thereof to alter it. In contrast to the strangers addressed in the next chapter who both undergo a sensual and consequential immersion into the Italian cityscape, he remains confused by spatial practices that deviate from and are overshadowed by the structures of the concept-city. Sam is the only of the eight city-walker who we see leaving the city; something that in particular distinguishes his *flânerie* from Aschenbach's trajectory which concludes with deadly submergence to the plague-ridden Venice. For Sam, between experiences of confinement and exclusion from the urban flux, and his own failing vision and fatal insensitivity towards traps, there is no room for immersion. Sam may have developed a more nuanced perspective on a city that confines and deceives, recreating its own threats through the lack of a collective spirit and deficient structures of surveillance, but these discoveries have only provided him with material for the type of urban text Marcello futilely seeks to produce, but there is nothing suggesting that the transformation and reinvention of urban life into fiction will invest the eyewitness with a lastingly new way of seeing.

3. 5 The City as *Giallo*

What in particular characterises Nora's Rome from the mean streets of Sam's metropolis is the total absence of the masses. Bava's choice to construct *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* around a stranger as the city's fatally intrigued and naively blinded decipherer lent itself fruitfully to recreation for Argento's urban drama, but as cinematic cities lived and visualised by a *testimone oculare*, the two films work differently. The only place where the young and far more innocent tourist is surrounded by a crowd is at the airport and it is perhaps due to its transient and trans-national nature that the mass of foreigners fails to provide a shield for the criminal. Nora's apparently sympathetic travelling companion who previously offered her a packet of cigarettes now fakes a mask of innocence as he is haled, disclosed and arrested, to the shocking surprise of the ingenuous traveller to whom he had just given the "disinterested" advice of never walking alone in Rome. While presenting the audience with a red herring – the smuggler disappears, whereas Nora's marijuana cigarettes will ultimately fall into the hands of a priest – the episode presents an ironic contrast to what the narrator has introduced as the start of an idyllic foreign vacation; "una vacanza a Roma, la meta sognata da tutti gli americani dai sedici ai settanta anni, e Nora Davis ne aveva venti."⁷ For the avid thriller-reader the experience of Rome will oscillate between these two polar positions – between the romantic but limited dream, and the dark city that, far from curing her from her addiction, will give life to her world of fiction and leave an unhomey "room-for-play" for the amateur detective's gaze.

⁷ "A vacation in Rome, a dream-destination for every American between sixteen and seventy and Nora was twenty."

The effective city that it takes Sam months to see is thus imposed on Nora from the moment she arrives, but in contrast to Sam who, in adopting a mole's eye-view discovers the non-existence of the tourist paradise, Nora's trajectory never excludes the superficial idyll she originally came to see. Rather, this stereotypical vision proves capable of coexisting in an uneasy dialectical relationship with the nocturnal façade which, as it activates her gaze and movements between interiors and exteriors, forms a frame to her spaces of inquiry. Deprived of the narrow alleys and crowded metropolitan ambiances of Sam's nocturnal walks, her Roman *giallo* presents a spacious, unpopulated city-centre or gloomy interiors where dark shadows and closed rooms are what provide a shield for the criminal, carefully hidden and protected by a "wrong man" convicted for her sins. The noir-city rests on a stylised use of monochrome photography, adopted perhaps mainly for budgetary considerations, but also to closer recreate the atmosphere of Hitchcock's *Psycho* (Howarth, 73), a model that in particular has inspired the episode at her dying friend's place. An outdated, wooden-style apartment constructed around light and dark and sounds of harsh weather, it bears few signs of being situated amidst Rome's most affluent and urbanised areas. Rather, as walls and windows speak in thunder and lightning's shadows, the home achieves a disquieting sense of being as isolated and secretively threatening as Norman Bates' house. When lights go out and the old lady calls on Nora with the voice of Norman's mother, the American Dream abroad starts to take the form of haunted world where interiors and exteriors call attention to themselves as arenas for assassins and stages for urban legends.⁸

⁸ Besides these stylistic references to *Psycho* (1960) and the even more obvious reuse of the eyewitness abroad in *The Man Who Knew Too much* (1956), Hitchcock's cinema is present in the young and innocent girls exposed to both an indefinable human presence and a spooky ambiance in *The 39 Steps* (1936) and *Rebecca* (1940), while the button found in the murdered woman's hand points to a possible case of cross-influence in *Frenzy* (1972).

The nocturnal face of the city has a sunlit and transparent counterpart which Marcello introduces to Nora the following day, doubting, as everyone else, that she possibly could have witnessed a murder on the Spanish Steps. In daylight, this centre of the rhetorical city where she ran out in terror manifests itself in a postcard idyll of flowers and water fountains, offering the right atmosphere both for fashion photography and for tourists in search for the quintessence of Italy. Parts of Nora's trajectory follow this line as Marcello takes her around in an attempt to lead her away from the dangers of investigation and assume instead the predictable position of a female tourist occupied with the city's clichés. Gary Needham has pointed to this "selling of Italian-ness" as a recurrent aspect of the *giallo* wherein is reflected 1960's Rome as a popular destination for mass tourism and a habitat for a new international jet-set (136). As a spatial anchorage for the romantic comedy that constantly interferes with and contrasts the thriller, however, these spaces are repeatedly called into question by those of crime which Nora mostly explores on her own, achieving an autonomy in vision she fails to transfer over to tourist city where the possibilities for female spectatorship are severely constrained. Frustrated by hearing her testimony reduced to mental instability, she conducts Marcello to the exact spot where she saw the murder take place and tries, without much conviction, to reconstruct the scene. Her dramatisation fails to come across as anything but a poor adaptation of a cheap mystery novel, however, since it is both taken out of its darkly surreal context and deprived from the immediacy of impression with which she witnessed the scene.

Besides the palpable difference between night and daylight and the urban stimuli that distinguish the city's two faces, following the night of the murder, the spaces of crime and detection are nocturnal and mainly located to interiors. At the centre of these stands Laura's house; where she killed her sister, first, and

Straccianeve's daughter, last, and where she now is planning the end to Nora's life as well. This locus of her scheme, motivated in greed and fear of being disclosed as the maniac she is, becomes however also a sphere of hidden interactions with the house-sitting eye-witness, unaware of inhabiting the spaces in which the killer hides and operates. Laura's house fuses thus in one interior the function of Monica's office, Sam's apartment, and the gallery, channelling communication from killer and detective and establishing a form of identification that in particular is associated with the closed room. Laura presents it to her as her husband's studio, as if the secrecy around it was a matter of professional confidentiality, but Nora is instinctively drawn towards it by energies she cannot rationalise. She tries to open the door and senses its haunting forces as the handle springs back up; the second time it fatally opens, gradually revealing the particulars of the alphabet mystery through the depth of a room within a room. By not transgressing into this forbidden sphere, despite her sense that it is connected with the murders, Nora comes in effect to serve the same function as Laura's husband, engaging in an act of unwitting collaboration Laura reciprocates by using the house to intentionally warn her through signs she ignores or misinterprets.

This internal space of interaction tends however to expand into an external dimension, leading the detective back to the scene of the murder and to a series of interiors deceptively or actually associated with Landini. The journalist who covered the alphabet murders and caused the faulty conviction of Straccianeve - mad but no assassin - Landini becomes a common external point of interest between criminal and detective as he shares Nora's desire to know the truth, whereas Laura seeks and eventually succeeds in transferring suspicion over to him. Having been directed to an apartment associated with the journalist, Marcello and Nora search for him at a series

of misleading locations, most notably a lugubrious hotel where the porter suggests they need his room for less honest purposes, and Ostia, where their visit to the beach distracts them from the investigation. It is Landini himself who finally detects them at Laura's place, and by fusing the internal and external dimensions of communication, he directs Nora's search towards more consequential results, inevitably also confirming its fallacious nature. Landini is just as mistrusted within the spheres of official surveillance and investigation as she is, and what they discover together about Straccianeve's daughter, killed by Laura for having tried to establish her father's innocence, remains irrelevant until the end when it enables Nora to prove the validity of her vision. At that point, the only resourceful helper she found and the only one who believed in her testimony and investigative abilities has already been punished for seeking to redress injustice. Beneath the ironic detachment from the world depicted and from the film's own modes of representation there runs a less comic vein than the thriller/romantic comedy apparently allows for, exposing a concept-city that creates and recreates the appearance of social order and justice, while in fact its structures protect for malefactors and for its own corruption and mechanisms of exclusion.

3. 6 Optics of the *Unhomely*

As the fundamentals of a failed criminal investigation, the continuous misreadings and inertness towards antagonistic stimuli, as well as her tendency to isolate herself and what she discovers, are portrayed as an inability to grasp the extent of a crime that lures the eyewitness into the evidently deceiving and threatening. The scarcely disquieting male voice-over commenting on her reflections emphasise this, as

do the elements of slapstick comedy that see her construct a crude snare modelled on her last detective novel, *Ariadne's Thread*, only to have Marcello feel its surprising efficiency. That an ingenuous fascination with detective fiction severely distorts her relation to the real world is implied in the police investigator's assumption she is a reader of *gialli* and his advice that she abandon such a bad habit. Apart from establishing a room for detachment from the innocent eyewitness and the surreally constructed spaces she inhabits, these instances of "*mise-en-abîme*" and overt staging of the film's literary origins (Needham, 136) also present a more critical commentary on authorities that dismiss the credibility of female testimony, while themselves resorting to the reassurance of "wrong men" rather than confronting social transgressors as she does. The opposition that emerges between a deficient gaze of power and the excluded eye-witness lead her into a trajectory that, more than developing into a detached detective's search for interrelated clues, evolves as an intrigued *flâneuse*'s search for "a room of her own" where the definition of territory is located to the city's most unhomely spheres and spatial practices.

The formation of a new way of seeing starts, as noted, when she first arrives. During her flight, she is too captivated by *After he got the Knife* which assumingly will be her last thriller to even notice the man beside her, and his unmasking as a wanted smuggler alerts her initially evasive and dreamy gaze. Her suspicion following this episode in orienting herself within the crowd of travellers is captured by a series of shots that isolates her within the frame while emphasising her edgy movements and her eyes' changing expressions. Scanning the crowd anxiously before she fakes an attitude of innocence in deliberately dropping the marijuana cigarettes, she ultimately remains alarmed when a man returns them to her and she realises that she is being observed. The unsettling situation evolving from disclosure of disguise and an

increased sense of distrust and isolation towards the external, as well as the feeling of herself being exposed and detectable within the masses confronts her with some disquieting aspects of metropolitan life. What recalls a familiar world of crime novels terrifies Nora when it appears out of its fictitious context as the first manifestation of a city expected to offer peace and romance. Rather than distracting her from destructive readings, Rome presents her with “something terrifying” that leads back to something “known” and “very familiar”, the very essence of the “uncanny (Freud, 123-4).” What in particular alerts the absentminded reader is the way the “flashing” moment of “recognisability” brings the close past of a world of fiction together with an unfamiliar present (*AP*, 473). This dialectical constellation illustrates not only how “a great deal that is not uncanny in fiction would be so if it happened in real life” (Freud, 158), but also how distortions inherent in urban optics mobilise to form a new way of seeing where the interrogation of the external world becomes a way to position oneself vis-à-vis spaces of exclusion.

Only when she is left alone, however, and with a corpse in what some minutes earlier appeared to be rather welcoming lodgings, does the *flâneuse*'s gaze begin to form a personal space of the unhomeliness unfolding before her. The view of death is constructed around expressionistic contrasts between gloomy interiors and the intrusion of thundering exteriors where windows become eyes – penetrating and penetrable – of the haunted house. Their lightning flashes serve both to illuminate Nora's face and to direct her gaze towards alarming manifestations of the interior, moving from the deceased woman's intensely vivid look, staring straight at her in the darkness with the despair of her last vigour, and the immobile cat looking at her with an air of wickedness. Besides the specific allusions to *Psycho*, the episode alludes to the function of the haunted house within nineteenth-century fiction, where, as

Anthony Vidler observes, it provided “a favoured site for uncanny disturbances” through its ability to evoke the apparently domestic and intimate of private history and family life (17). An element of suspense that points towards further unhomely vision and an increased awakening of the visitor’s gaze, the house also establishes the continuity between interiors and exteriors that will direct and obfuscate her search in a city where one confrontation with death transforms itself into another, leaving no spaces reserved for protection. Gloomy and deserted, the streets into which she rushes provide no help, and, in absence of the crowd that will appear instead in daylight, it is the interiors, respectable in its superficial normality, and the constructions of the Spanish Steps themselves, that cover up for petty thieves and serial killers alike.

Still unprepared for the city’s dangers and with a look blinded by horror, Nora does not consider that she may be observed and runs down the stairs exposed to the light without herself observing the robber until he stands ready to attack. While both the dumbfounded criminal in a striped prisoner’s sweater and their confrontation over a purse are overtly staged as a comic counterpoint to the visions of death that precedes and follows it, her loss of consciousness has more than a comic function in that it obfuscates her look and distorts the crime scene she wakes up to. Whereas Sam’s vision is mediated by transparent doors that both excludes and gives passageway for his observation, once Nora gains consciousness and directs her wide-open gaze according to sounds in the environment – the strikes from the clock first, a woman’s agonic scream next – she sees through an immaterial veil deforming material manifestations. An impressionistic imagery formed in particular from the use of out-of-focus-lenses serves to visualise the subjective nature of her impressions (Koven, 147). Within the diegesis, the distorted basis for her testimony becomes the major preoccupation of authoritative voices concerned with labelling the self-proclaimed

eyewitness' state of mind, whereas in the formation of the *flâneuse*, these images convey an affinity between the stylised urban ambiance and the gaze it both mobilises and misleads, suggesting that both the murder scene and the nocturnal city itself are infused by and in part products of her familiar world of fiction.

The circumstances around the screaming woman's emergence in her field of vision are unclear, but as she approaches and bends over, it appears that she has just "gotten the knife." Transfixed by this materialisation of the title to her last thriller, the eyewitness mistakenly assumes that the man furtively removing evidence is the murderer, while, more careful now to make use of the surroundings, she hides behind shadows that protect her from being observed, while also denying her gaze a free passageway. Moving forwards to allow further insight, however, the scene turns hazy again and she faints and is left with no recollection of the direction toward which the man disappears. Something unhomely in the entrance instinctively draws her towards the house the following day, but Laura's sudden appearance scares her away, and when she invites Nora in some days later, Laura's deceptive hospitality obscures the haunting nature of her house. Only when the eyewitness finally enters the closed room where the man she thinks is the murderer himself has gotten the knife can she map out the spaces she has investigated in oblivion not only of what every *giallo* teaches about the least likely suspect, but also of the detective story as originating in the "interior" where it inquires into the "traces" and follow the "tracks" of the individual who inhabits it (*AP*, 20). Benjamin's observation that criminals in detective novels are "neither gentlemen nor apache but private citizens of the middle class" (*AP*, 9) finds confirmation in Nora's mystery as is does in that of Sam. What her trajectory identifies without enabling her to act upon the clues discovered is, however, that detection is not merely a question of panoptical scrutiny and surveillance, but also, as

Gunning notes, of “the optical exchange between interior and exterior,” where the complexities of spaces and optics of modernity – of dialectical images and “the uncanny experience of transformed vision”n - ultimately evolve into an investigation of the detective’s own point of view (“The Exterior” 110; 127).

3. 7 Failing Vision; Visible *Flâneuse*

It is significantly in opposition to panoptical power and to its patronising attitude towards female testimony as inherently irrational and indisputably defective, that the amateur detective gravitates toward unhomely interiors in a search that is less about surveillance than about a personally motivated quest for truth, as she states when trying to distract Laura from her murderous intentions. Whereas Sam is driven by the urge to understand what he saw, Nora is herself not in doubt of her vision, and her secret inquiries are rather motivated by a desire to establish the authority of her gaze, an act of resistance that can only originate within a space distinct from exclusive male spaces of enunciation. The immersion into the killer’s spaces forces her to activate her gaze, without however enabling her to discern the communicative quality of the signs accumulated in this interior. She is too fascinated by the modern and deceptively illuminated atmosphere of Laura’s home to take notice of the oddly placed bed in the middle of the living-room; nor is Laura’s intention to catch her asleep, but to threaten her through defenceless exposure to a haunting message. Among such messages are the letter dices Laura keeps together with Landini’s articles on the alphabet murder, signs displayed with the intention of dislocating her vision to the murder of Laura’s sister, occurred under identical circumstances 10 years earlier. Nora finds all this absurd, but not categorically unacceptable, until a disquieting voice

on the phone asks for her name and connects the 'D' in 'Davies' to "delitto [crime]." That the criminal is somewhere nearby and perhaps not a man, as she assumes, is beyond her sphere of deduction, however. Cuttings, dices and the tape recorder will later disappear, and Landini finds the light on and the doors open when he comes searching for her, but she stills does not act upon the sensation she has that the unhomely quality associated with Laura's home has its origin in the closed room.

As a locus for the systematic display of and the simultaneous misreadings of signs or clues, the house becomes itself an active complicit force in Laura's insanities and of the *flâneuse's* "room of her own." Its stimuli are set into motion when Nora is alone and received as voices of her own habitat that, however, tend to loose their intended threatening meaning. A 'D'-dice falls down from the cupboard and lands right in front of her; the locked room answers her sense for its terrifying impulses; the button she furtively seizes belongs to a jacket Laura removes when showing her around in the house. It is in particular the portrait of Laura's husband, fading in the moment she looks at it, that shows how these objects "molded" into the interior speak of the criminal (*AP*, 20), while they also reinforce the sense of there being an affinity between surreal spaces and the astonished look that selects, distorts and excludes. That the *flâneuse* manifests herself within given spheres where she can activate non-official spatial practises available in the cityscape, appears from her continuous passage from spaces of dark shadows to those of sunlit facades; two faces of the city that coexist but that never elide within her trajectory. The tourist city is visualised for her by Marcello in an attempt to displace her away from the noir-city according to conventional perceptions on gendered uses of space, as it happens when he interrupts the search and takes her to the beach, only to reduce her to a sunbathing tourist objectified by his gaze. In the previous scene from the restaurant she finds herself

caught between him and the professor who previously had explained her vision in terms of alcohol-related psychosis while he now allows for the more generous hypothesis of a “trasposizione mediatica.”⁹ Perplexed by their shared romantic interest in her and philosophical interest in her vision and their lacking concern for her own reflections on what she has witnessed, she distances herself from their discussion and gazes and reclaims a quiet position of autonomy, staring right ahead into the camera while the voice-over states her conviction of being left alone in the search for truth.

Against strategies of exclusion and objectification by male spheres and observers, the claim to subjectivity is ultimately not as much a question of knowledge as it is of forming an autonomous and authoritative voice in the urban discourse. Nora’s transgressive approaches to the effective city take the form of the “singular and plural practices” which have outlived processes of decay within the concept-city and escaped regulation by panoptic administration in order, ultimately, to develop and insinuate themselves “into the networks of surveillance (De Certeau, 96). Her activity as an amateur detective becomes as such pretextual more than functional, it “accredits” her deviant “idleness” as it did for the *flâneur* (CB, 41); however, whereas the male city-walker never had to justify his presence in the cityscape, but only his unproductive and unprofitable use of it, the female urbanite needs a social legitimisation for her transgression into male spheres. As long as the mystery is unsolved, she has a pretext to move and to look unrestrainedly and within the darkest spheres of the urban ambiance, and the desire to keep the mystery alive is one of the reasons why her search tends to deviate from and ignore traces and tracks laid down in the interior. The episode from Landini’s apartment is particularly illustrative in this regard: returning from her first sightseeing with Marcello with the intention of

⁹ Translated in subtitles with “psychic travel.”

abandoning detection for tourism, a phone call leads her out again and towards another spooky interior that continues the awakening of her naively unafraid and wide-open look. A ghostly elevator and sterile corridors lead toward the targeted apartment where hanging light bulbs, wind-talking windows, and a voice reminding her of her name, welcome her. She is about to leave without disclosing the last room where the voice comes from, when Marcello appears and resists her objections, entering only to discover an empty room and a tape recorder. Her battle over this space indicates the counterproductive tendencies within her search: to leave would have meant, as she herself notes, to miss the only tangible proof in her case, but her *flânerie* would still have been activated without a loss to a space she now has to share and no longer is in charge over. As a projection of her dislocated gaze, the spaces of crime and detection exclude antagonistic, male spaces and forces of the concept-city, and the desire to keep these spaces alive is ultimately also a question of creating and recreating the territory of her gaze.

The formation of a subjective sphere from which to engage in the urban discourse, isolated from and in opposition to the concept-city, at the cost of a clear vision and the risk of her and others' lives, establishes the major difference between Nora and Sam, who fails to define his own territory in opposition to antagonistic forces in the foreign city. He is driven by a subconscious identification with the killer, but for Nora, the visualisation of the city is concentrated upon the spaces in which the maniac operates, and their last confrontation rests entirely on the territorial anchorage of her gaze. Rather than running away, as Laura suggests she will, she remains transfixed by the maniac's dramatic explanations of the alphabet murders and follows her instead back into the locked room where the eyewitness remains inert, unable to internalise this materialisation to all the threats she has received. To read this

confrontation between detective and killer exclusively in terms of “naivité;” inability “of acting” and a salvation, ultimately, “by the intervention of a man,” as Troy Howarth does (71), curiously leaves her no worse or better off than Sam. It ignores the fact, however, that his status as both an invaluable eyewitness and a supported and exploited investigator, is a position she struggles, vainly, to achieve, and that he never faces the *flâneur*’s need to identify “a social legitimation of his habitus” (AP, 442) the way she does.

It is thus not merely the blind inertness towards a situation of lethal deception that aligns Nora to Cabiria, but more crucially the way mechanisms of exclusion incite a change in perspective, turning the prostitute and the tourist into inquisitive city-walkers. For both figures, it is their encounter with an estranging, hostile, and essentially male cityscape that mobilises their gaze to claim a subjective space and trace the hidden and the deviant covered by structures and substructures of urban modernity. This critical function of Nora’s immersion into the unhomely noir-city becomes even clearer if seen in light of Lidia, who, as we saw in the last chapter, searches for the *déjà vu* within a familiar urban ambiance with the result of exposing existential and interpersonal losses involved in miraculous economic growth. Where Nora fatally differs from Fellini and Antonioni’s *flâneuses* is in the inability to maintain the space and gaze she has made claim to, since predictably, the solution to the mystery causes a disintegration of her space. Back in the tourist city, she seems prepared to accept the position Marcello seeks to impose on her; reduced from subject to object, her vision is no longer distorted but externally constrained, and all she is left with is a bird-eye’s contemplation of the city at sunset. As a not-too-curious or courageous tourist, deceived by Rome’s limpid sky, she starts herself to wonder whether visions and acts of tailing have not all been a dream and an effect of the

marijuana cigarette she mistakenly smoked on the plane. Both the failed inquiry and apparently domesticated *flânerie* are thus moved over to the film's comic vein, as the last image is devoted not to her nor to the city, but to the priest wandering beneath her, only too happy to collect her cigarettes.

This resignation to the surfaces of the concept-city is, however, portrayed as sceptical and ambivalent, as is the idyll within these spaces itself. Marcello's enthusiasm over the sunset literally fades in Bava's black/white image which, rather than celebrating what he presents as the best gift Rome can offer, cannot but confirm the continuity of the noir-city. When it comes to questions of agency and positions in space, the end to her holiday does not distinguish her so much from Sam, who at the point of completion leaves the city altogether. In contrast to the strangers we shall meet in the next chapter, neither character seems to have experienced a lasting immersion into the foreign city. What is more crucial still is how their shared inertness indicates gazes that, whether belonging to the *flâneuse* or to the *flâneur*, are mobilised by a vision of death, while their perplexity over questioning or proving this vision makes them essentially incapable of re-acting with any consequentiality. As visualisers within a "cinema of the viewer," the amateur detectives reverse the intended function of the 19th-century detective, denying both the readability of the metropolitan labyrinth and the powers of panoptical surveillance, while also raising more philosophical questions around the state of justice and of social knowledge in urban modernity.

Ogni abitante di Eudossia confronta all'ordine del tappeto una sua immagine della città, una sua angoscia, e ognuno può trovare [...] il racconto della sua vita.¹

Italo Calvino, *Le città invisibili*

CHAPTER FOUR

Views from Outside: Self and Other in the Unhomely City

4.1 Introduction

Considering the range of urbanites Benjamin cites to illustrate the diversity of 19th-century Paris – from the dandy and the *badaud* who both lack the *flâneur*'s measured nonchalance, to the derivations of this uniquely observant figure (the journalist and the detective), to his “last incarnation,” the sandwichman who, like the prostitute, is defined by the logic of “marketability” (*AP*, 448),² it is curious that neither *The Arcades Project* nor *Charles Baudelaire* leaves no room for the stranger. While both of these works, as has become clear at this point, rely on Simmel in their discussion of metropolitan life, Simmel's essays devoted to “the one who comes today and stays tomorrow” have apparently escaped Benjamin, as has his crucial observation that:

¹ “Every inhabitant of Eudossia confronts one of his images of the city, one of his anxieties, in the structure of the patchwork, and everybody may find [...] the story of his life.”

² For discussions of Benjamin's urban types see Susan Buck-Morss, “The Flâneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering.” *New German Critique*. 39. Fall 1986: 99-140; and Tom Gunning, “From The Kaleidoscope to the x-ray: Urban Spectatorship, Poe, Benjamin, and *Traffic in Souls* (1913).” *Wide Angle*. 19. 4 (1997): 25-61.

If wandering is the liberation from every given point in space, and thus the conceptual opposite to fixation at such a point, the sociological form of the stranger presents the unity, as it were, of these two characteristics. (“The Stranger,” 402)

A possibility is however to see the foreign wanderer, betwixt and between belonging and displacement, as embodied within Benjamin's conception of the *flâneur* – himself marginalised and estranged from his own city - and as such might be seen as implicitly present whenever he discusses this figure. Rob Shields, who more specifically misses a treatment in Benjamin of “the popular European fascination [...] with distant cultures experienced through rubbing shoulder with foreigners,” notes in this regard the potential in such a fascination with the foreign to incite a process of inversion by which the stranger becomes like a “native [...] whereas the *flâneur* is [...] a native who becomes like a foreigner” (68). As will appear from the following analysis of the foreign city-walker, the affinity between the two figures manifests itself not merely in their ambiguous nature and liminal position within the cityscape, but also in a sense of loss and unease that hinders them both in becoming “owners of soil” (Simmel, “The Stranger” 402). If the *flâneur*'s marginal position initially ensured him autonomous participation in the urban flux, allowing him to engage in studies of the crowd without conforming to its movements, the sense of being constantly “out of place in the city as in leisure” (*CB*, 129) became increasingly associated with his isolation within the urban collective - an illusionary entity indifferent if not utterly hostile to the sensitivities of the solitary wanderer. The city-walkers we meet in *Morte a Venezia* and *Viaggio in Italia* are both geo-cultural and existential strangers and their double “out-of-placeness” find expression in introspective and ambivalent approaches to the Italian city. If the physically

centripetal and culturally chaotic cityscapes of Venice and Naples present a “room for play” their usual surroundings do not offer, proving abilities to “impress, astonish, and surprise” the way Mediterranean cities, according to Lefebvre, will tend to do (*Writings on Cities*, 228-36), the estranged eyes of the cultivated German and British travellers initially face the manifestation of Otherness with superior annoyance and aversion or fear. Their wandering is thus set into motion by a mixed attitude of incomprehension and curiosity, illustrating how northern Europeans have tended to visit Italy to “acquire the cultural sensibility to establish power back home and to affirm the superiority of their nationalities” (Bruno, *Atlas*, 372). However, as the simultaneously destructive and reinvigorating urban ambiances awake latent exploratory desires and attraction towards what both pleases and causes aversion, external stimuli are absorbed through the essentially visual and bodily qualities of *flânerie*, creating a far deeper sense of alignment with the foreign world than Sam and Nora experience. For the aging German composer, the encounter with overwhelming urban decay and the view of the sensual form of beauty he always denied, leave no alternative but to surrender to Venice’s theatrical mechanisms of deception and let the moment of aesthetic perfection and physical destruction coincide. Katherine’s wandering similarly involves disturbing sensations of death and bodily beauty, but the exposure to impulses from beneath and on Naples’ ground enables her to face the foreign as a source for self-awareness and potential growth. To be present within and visualise the Dionysian city implies for both a process of recognition. As foreign and estranging sounds and visions bring forth something repressed within the strangers, their wandering evolves as searches for self and become focused and selective enough in relation to foreign stimuli to subconsciously locate “the stories of their own life” within cities they initially dismiss as too estranging to be relatable.

4. 2 City of Demons

Anything but anticipation over the forthcoming vacation sets the mood for Aschenbach's arrival at the Canal Grande. Freezing under layers of blankets and entirely unaffected by the growing sunrise and the calmness of sea, he seeks distraction from a book but fails to concentrate. The traveller's poor receptivity towards the unfamiliar surroundings appears even more striking in light of the enchanting morning haze and the shores some locals are already enjoying, while the melancholic adagio of Mahler's Fifth Symphony creates another counterpoint to his state of distress. It remains unclear why he has chosen to come by sea, or what has brought him to the quintessentially spectacular and musical city in the first place. He is just as insensitive to the serenity of its dawn as he is uncomfortable among the unconcerned group of mostly less well-off travellers, and, later, amidst the more vivacious atmosphere around the harbour. Only when he has settled into his suite at the Hotel des Bains and he recalls a severe breakdown following a concert, do we get a sense of his visit as a search for diversion and attempt to recovery. The first of seven flashbacks through which the film reveals the artist's physical fragility and rigid mental nature, this episode subsequently features Alfried playing the same Mahler piece while Aschenbach contemplates the disconcerting nature of an hour-glass. It is thus with a sense of predestination that the adagio's extended crescendo accompanies his arrival, announcing more subtly the mental and physical destruction he will approach as he moves further into and recognises himself within 'La Serenissima's' darker alleys.

The plague-ridden Venice that lies before him sometime after the city actually was hit by cholera in 1905 and the outbreak of World War I, is a unique cosmopolitan

formation, indulging in its economic and artistic fame and attraction as a habitat for Europe's intelligentsia. Aschenbach is immediately honoured as the most distinguished exponent of this group at the luxurious Hotel des Bains, but he receives the compliments with annoyance and is bored by the aristocrats' void and overlapping conversations, hiding behind a newspaper he picked up to conceal his unease. No less of a stranger within the languid fin-de-siècle atmosphere of the Lido area than he was in the more dynamic and socially diverse atmosphere at the Canal Grande, there is nothing in his destination that explains this unlikely appearance in Venice. A return to the initial passages of Mann's novella does, however, provide background information to the motivations for this alienating travel-experience. The decision of Mann's troubled artist to leave Munich is rooted less in poor health than in the disturbing encounter prior to his departure with a snobbish, red-haired man with an exotic straw hat and a Bavarian rucksack.³ This "itinerant appearance" of something so strikingly out of place, makes Aschenbach stare to the point of embarrassment, before he hurries home, seemingly repressing the occurrence. Later, however, he senses an extraordinary expansion of his inner self, a kind of roving restlessness, a youthful craving for far-off places, a feeling so new or at least so long unaccustomed and forgotten [...] he saw it, saw a landscape, a tropical swampland under a cloud-swollen sky, moist and lush and monstrous, a kind of primeval wilderness of islands, morasses and muddy alluvial channels...(Mann, 25)

³ Visconti did in fact shoot Aschenbach's walk in Munich but decided following an initial editing not to include the scenes (Micciché, "Visconti ...,"77).

The occurrence incites a search for something that is not merely geographically and culturally “far-off,” but that is also equally foreign to the artist’s obsession with dignity, unambiguity and self-control. Inherent in the apparent contradiction between the desire to explore the unusual and the destructive preconceptions he forms of the city which soon will prove “extremely injurious” both to his moral and physical condition (Mann, 52), there is a repressed awareness and wish that this temporary opportunity for a “dolce far niente” – a *flânerie* of his rigorous mind – might verify “his artist’s fear of not finishing his task” (Mann, 26-7). While ideas of predestination are more obviously an aspect of the novella than the film – Visconti’s visualisation of the literary inner monologue tends to focus on the wakening of the senses and the conflicting reception of external, mostly destructive, stimuli - the moral and physical disintegration he undergoes until he himself becomes one of these devil-figures, appears both as a Freudian longing for death, and a reconciliation with the foreign city, more akin to his inner self he consciously is able to recognise.

Although both the dirty channels and the density of suffocating sirocco reflects Venice as preconceived by Mann’s Aschenbach, it seems in particular to have been the unhomely stranger outside a mortuary chapel in Munich that has influenced Visconti’s re-creation of the novella. Not only does the film’s composer both feel and manifest a similar air of misplacement, but his presence in Venice is, as several critics have pointed out, constantly interrupted by a series of similarly infernal episodes, starting with the over-dressed old dandy on the steamer whose sinister laughter will be echoed in the musician at the hotel, and culminating in his own attempt to cover age and destruction by a mask that sadly fades in exposure to sun and his own body heat (Micchichè, “Visconti ...,” 76-8; Testa, *Masters of two Arts*, ..., 192). It is however the unauthorised *gondoliere* who disobeys his instructions in order to avoid the police,

that incites a sensation of having arrived in a city of daemons where a space for recovery and contemplation is denied by an overarching excess in decay as well as apocalyptic vitality. The perplexed German's silent resignation to the native's incomprehensible ways is rooted in a Nordic sense of superiority which, contrary to Carlo Testa's view of Visconti's Aschenbach as being equally at home in Venice as in Munich, defines most of his observations of and confrontations with the Mediterranean Other (*Masters of Two Arts*, 187-92). The stranger's sense of unease and repetitious complaints over everything from the weather to disorganised management, as well as the inflexible attitude towards people he sends away with a dismissive wink, are rather faithful to the novella's "Italophobe situations" and to the limited "cultural passport" of Mann's character (*Ibid.*). Aversion to everything foreign rules out any form of social interaction, not only within the city centre where signs of Italianess and of decay clearly concentrate, but also at the more cosmopolitan Lido, where his distance from the hedonistic aristocracy demonstrates that contempt and frustration are not reserved to mischievous Italians.

How the stranger's physical, cultural and intellectual auto-exclusion interferes as a complex and ultimately existentially determined isolation within the surrounding social ambiance appears in particular from a crucial scene in the elevator. Aschenbach enters relieved over the solitude it offers only to be invaded by Tadzio and his noisy friends. Their invasion squeezes him in among them, bringing him closer to and in longed-for but embarrassing eye-contact with his object of desire. His furtive looks and awkwardness do not escape the boys' whispers and laughing comments, and, unable not to enjoy the painful situation, the superficially unambiguous Northerner now finds himself frozen in all his contradictions. The incomprehensible exchanges of these boys who talk to Tadzio in his native Polish recall previous disturbing situations

where the stranger's sense of alienation is materialised in language, from the fusion of tongues on the steamer and the *gondoliere* who murmurs his aggravation over the pretentious tourist in Venetian dialect. At the Lido, the chorus of foreign voices is omnipresent and often abstracted from its sources, creating what Michel Chion calls "acousmatic" or "*ambient sound*" that, as it originates in an off-screen space, serves to reinforce the camera's will to isolate the quiet musician (original emphasis, 71-5). This Babel of languages indexes a locality – a hybrid formation of temporary and cosmopolitan strangers who in contrast to Aschenbach "come today and go tomorrow" (Simmel, "The Stranger," 402) - and his isolation from them suggests that estrangement, more than reflecting an objective position as a foreigner, is rooted in his own obsessions with purity in life as well as art. The liminal nature of the city – Italian and European; decaying and flourishing - threatens more than the pestilence he soon will discover, creating a pervading sense of physical and moral contamination he seeks to resist through despitful distance and by evoking the arguments he has put forward in favour of the unambiguous artist in debates with Alfried. The discoveries Aschenbach makes in Venice regard not only his illicit passions, but also a gradual adherence, despite himself, to Alfried's conviction that honest art originates in ambiguity and contamination.

The disquieting effect of the chance encounter in the elevator – itself a liminal space, as are the stairs and bridges Aschenbach later will walk in pursuit of Tadzio - lies precisely in the contradicting sensations it awakes in him. This proximity and voyeuristic interaction with the boy who he has heard talk in mysterious syllables and who has spoken so decisively to his illicit passions creates an instance of *Erlebnis*, of lived, momentary experience, which in its lingering between existential and emotional pain and aesthetic delight embodies the very ambiguity he rationally would dismiss

and deny as being a part of himself. With his exit from the elevator the magic meets its counterpart in a moment of agitation over his weakness and a hasty decision to leave and thus avoid threatening external impulses and the reception they find in the aesthete's hidden self. This troubled moment of indecision leads back to one of several episodes in which Alfried accuses him of neglecting the senses for the very ascetic ideals of creative and moral perfection, and it is these ideals he now sees severely challenged unless he escapes. Only a stroke of the Italian disorganisation offers him the desired excuse to stay on, an occasion he seizes with anticipation of a sensual pleasure not even a plague-victim's death in the train station can destroy. Giving room to a rare and fleeting moment of sincere joy over *being* and *being present*, his return to the hotel on the *vaporetto* marks a turning point with regard to both his forbidden passions and presence in space, two aspects of the stranger that from this point on will be connected through a selectively searching and visually driven *flânerie*.

4.3 Beauty in the Body

While it is only at this second entrance in Venice that Aschenbach starts to move and see as a *flâneur*, facing the city as something else than a source to destruction of his moral integrity, a mental and increasingly troubling mode of *flânerie* expressed through flashbacks was already set into motion when he first arrived at the hotel. Based on the first chapter of Mann's novella, these episodes from his private and professional past are remote in spatial and temporal dimensions, but their tendency to be keyed unchronologically and by analogy to present situations and sensations, makes them an integral part of the Venetian trajectory. The juxtaposition between past

and present moments of his life whereby the encounter with his homoerotic self is seen in light of memories of conventional and apparently happy family life reinforces the tension he lives between reason and the senses while also making his gradual reception of the decayed city and the parallel abandonment to sensual imperfection fatal and irreversible. As the two levels of *flânerie* collide in the final, delirious renunciation of both his private life and career, it appears that underneath the pretext of physical recovery in an objectively foreign ambiance, there is a search for a geographical and cultural counterpart in which to experience a purely existential change.

It is Tadzio however and not the mercilessly candid Alfried's shadow who ultimately confronts Aschenbach with the practical fallacy of his rigid ideals. Young and uncorrupted but far too aware of his appearance to be innocent and unaffected, he presents a vital counterforce to the self-indulgent aristocracy and intrigues the stranger's repressed senses for his distinctive nonchalance. What mobilises Aschenbach's gaze when he distinguishes Tadzio from the hotel's crowd is in particular his Hellenistic beauty and absent manners, the awakening virtues of which is rendered through a considered subjective use of the zoom lens. What the novella would convey through free indirect discourse is, as Wilson has showed, rendered through POV's directed towards Tadzio where the transition from long shot to close up expresses Aschenbach's concentration of visual attention ("Art is Ambiguous," 153). Repeated zooms underscore what impact the blasé, candid-looking boy has on the troubled artist, allowing a crucial insight into how the exposure to physical perfection develops into a voyeurism so contrary to his conviction of beauty as being a product of labour. On the other hand, these initial episodes also demonstrate how the gaze works along with the stranger's increasingly selective use of the decaying city's

spatial possibilities. In the hotel's dining areas, he gets seated so as to hide while simultaneously aiding furtive looks, and, less concerned about the sirocco after having observed Tadzio at breakfast, he approaches the beach - the boy's favourite habitat. The composer's work - assumedly an attempt to create beauty abstracted from the senses - is soon abandoned for the distraction offered by perceptions of youthful beauty. When the sun starts to fade, Tadzio's objectified body takes on the statuesque perfection of a David-figure, convincing the voyeur to leave his isolated position for a spot in the waterfront where the proximity between the gaze and the body foreshadows their very last encounter and his definite surrendering to the senses. While it immediately is the not-yet-grownup body that wakes the sense for visual pleasure, Aschenbach relates just as much to the manifestation of a balance he himself never found between the active and contemplative life, between presence and isolation in relation to the languid ways of the aristocracy to which they both are associated. Himself observant and self-reflective, Tadzio is instinctively alert to what impact his appearance may have, and as he deliberately seeks to provoke Aschenbach's evasive gaze and reluctant presence, there emerges a dialogue between observer and observed that we later see at work as the guiding force of the stranger's *flânerie* in the city centre. At the Lido, Tadzio's manipulative presence appears in particular through his ability to alter Aschenbach's perception of his surroundings. In contrast to when he first arrived at the hotel and saw the world outside his window as covered by the "cloud-swollen sky" Mann's Aschenbach assigns to Venice (21), what he sees after having arrived a second time is an unambiguously sunny sky where Tadzio runs towards him and he greets him complaisant with a wink and a gaze directed exclusively towards the fleeting moment of unworried pleasure.

With this outward perspective emerges a physical form of *flânerie* that parallels Aschenbach's mental trajectory within spaces associated with mostly disconcerting memories. While the happy return to the Lido recalls a moment of family idyll, the successive flashbacks conduct his mind from debates with Alfried to his daughter's funeral and lastly to a disastrous directing performance that only confirms the failures of laboured beauty. This crescendo in past agony underscores the impression that his present liminal situation and abandonment to spaces of fatal beauty is the only way to escape the rigidity of an idealised but ultimately self-destructive existence. Inherent in the gradual alignment with the Dionysian Venice, so contrary to the Apollonian Munich as well as to his artistic ideals and moral convictions, there runs yet another dialectics between Dionysian and Apollonian forces. Whereas the latter, as Umberto Eco describes in his *History of Beauty*, "pleases and attracts" through harmony and measure, the former is sensual in nature and represents the intrusion of chaos into beauty. Within this dichotomy, Apollonian beauty is associated with vision, whereas the sensual, Dionysian chaos that interrupts it manifest itself through hearing (53-8). What mobilises Aschenbach's gaze is precisely Tadzio's classic features and proportioned body, whereas the city, apart from its smells,⁴ is lived through voices and music as well as a range of other sounds originating from the sea or from the urban flux. This dual exposure to aesthetic sensations his art never reached or never recognised is what sets his passions so decisively into motion so as to live the dilemma of whom, as August von Platen wrote in the most famous of his Venetian poems, "die Schönheit angeschaut mit Augen," and as such, "ist dem Tode schon

⁴ Aschenbach's exposure to the unpleasant smell of disease hints in extreme ways to why this would be the mode of perception the Greeks held less of (Eco, 5).

anheimgegeben" ("Tristan").⁵ For the one who has seen beauty with such a proximity as to be beheld by death, there is now way back. Aschenbach's decision to arrive in Venice a second time reflects precisely this awareness of the impossibility to repress the connivance he now has established with beauty and decay and return to a clean and unambiguous existence in Munich.

Once ideals of reason and balance are set aside by the simple pretext of misplaced luggage, to live as an artist in search for contaminated physical art, or a lover in search for his beloved, becomes a game of interchanging looks that makes him blind towards the city's objective conditions, while distancing him from a past he evokes with increasing discomfort. The fusion of Apollonian and Dionysian forces in Aschenbach's experiences of Venice is illustrated in particular by an episode where he is drawn towards a solitary drawing-room by Tadzio's piano music. The simple and disharmoniously performed "Für Elise" alerts the famous composer's senses so intensely as to make the amateur player turn around and look back, registering the unobserved observation with the usual quiet unconcern that would seem to legitimatise Aschenbach's desire. What disrupts the enchantment is the memory it evokes of a prostitute who once welcomed his visit with the very same Beethoven tune and who, as she now reappears to him, bears a striking resemblance to Tadzio. What in all appearance remained an unconsumed encounter must be seen as a failed attempt to assimilate Alfried's Dionysian stance (O'Leary, 113), and the "contamination" she represented now reminds him of the illicit nature of his present

⁵ Both Mann and Visconti saw the fatality of the aesthetic shock described in Platen's poem as encapsulating Aschenbach's presence in Venice (Visconti, 117).

chance encounter.⁶ Tazio for his part recalls the past and decisively more shameful encounter through a sensation of recurrence and involuntary return that, as Freud describes it, would result in a “feeling of helplessness and of something uncanny,” where the uncanny or the unhomely, is nothing new or unfamiliar, but rather “something repressed which recurs” (144- 48). Manifestations of beauty would thus seem to confront the stranger with denied desires that bring him much closer to the Dionysian urban ambiance than he would like to admit, and to acknowledge his neglected self will therefore also imply to recognise the homely within the apparently unhomely city.

The tension Aschenbach lives between past and dignified existence and the new, fatal life he is discovering is articulated through errant oscillation between moments of illusionary pleasure and agony over his inability to fully live the illusion. While this dialectical mode of *flânerie* finds its most central stage in the city centre, it starts at the hotel, and more specifically, at the presumptuous and excessively decorated terrace where the troubled Northerner’s misplacement is appalling. Aware still of the hazardous risk he is running in staying on amidst physical and sensual dangers, he walks back and forth in agitated indecision before retreating to solitary nocturnal spaces where a chance encounter with the object of his desires temporarily resolves his doubts. If a moment earlier he had contemplated departure, this is once more made impossible by Tazio’s smile and a suggestive gaze he quietly reproaches him for,

⁶ In response to Micciche’s observation that the juxtaposition of these two episodes made “Tazio un poco prostituta e la prostituta un poco Tazio,” [“Tazio a little bit prostitute and the prostitute a little bit Tazio.”], Visconti, affirms that “È quello che volevo. Mi premeva, in fatti, unificare ed al tempo stesso sdoppiare l’elemento della “contaminazione” e dell’attrazione dei sensi e quello della purezza infantile. D’altronde, la ragazza del bordello ricorda un po’ Tazio perché ha un volto puro di bambina...” [That was what I wanted. I felt in fact the urge to unify and at the same time double the element of “contamination” and of the attraction of the senses with that of the infantile purity. Anyway, the girl from the bordello recalls Tazio a little bit because she has a pure child’s face ...” (Miccichè, “Un incontro...,” 117).

aware of the destructive nature of the passions he evokes and the spaces within which they unfold. Increasingly however, he proves just as unwilling and unable to act against his own fatal inclination towards these spaces. When he, the following day, pursues the boy's steps around the square of San Marco and its elaborated surroundings, what he upon arriving found to be a hostile and frustrating formation is now seen "as the realization of that ancient dream of humanity, the labyrinth. It is this reality to which the *flâneur*, without knowing it, devotes himself" (AP, 429). The chaotic, Dionysian city is viewed as a liberating entity that accommodates his furtive gaze and movements. If the voluminous and candlelit Gothic interior of the cathedral offers an appropriate setting for a distant and spiritually inclined contemplation of Tadzio's angel-like features, the layers of passageways facilitate a communication between pursuer and pursued, providing him both with a shield and a "room-for-play" for senses he increasingly lives as a physical affinity with masked spaces of destruction.

Driven by a spatially perceived desire that beyond the evanescent possession of beauty leaves nothing more to search for, Aschenbach is both more determined and far more limited in his *flânerie* than the essentially errant city-walkers we have encountered so far. However, while Venice is a far more walkable city than Rome and Milan, its network of stairs and bridges serves more to separate than to associate, as he distances himself from the external realities for a retreat into a "room-of-one's-own;" a space of chosen more than imposed exclusion from which to vaguely perceive of a city dense and deep in its decay. In opposition to the always lit, spacious and crowded Lido, the dark and narrow alleys in the city centre are surreally deserted, reflecting both the actual state of the plague-ridden city, as well as the voyeur's narrow and focused range of vision. In the most felicitous moments of his trajectory –

when Tadzio waits for him to appear around shadowed corners only to disappear before he can reach out to him - this solitary space becomes a room for two, where to meet the boy's gaze is the only desirable of infinite spatial possibilities. Mostly, however, it leaves him drifting alone between muddy channels; smell of disinfection; piles of garbage and of burning cloths - signs not merely of the sickness he has suspected, but also of the more general state of disorder he has despised from his arrival but that now, when he has it all confirmed, leaves him inert as he tends to prefer the protection inherent in the city's mechanisms of deception.

4. 4. Dialectics of *Flânerie*: Homely Destruction

Not by accident is it a British travel agent akin to his own sense for the unambiguous, that reveals the details of the Asiatic cholera to him, and their encounter constitutes Aschenbach's last attempt to view and handle a state of external chaos as the rigid and rational being he is. If the uncompromising truths at first make him want to warn Tadzio and his family, good intentions prove short-lived in light of the consequences this will have for the stranger who in the encounter with a foreign world has seen *too much* and who has become far more fatally struck by the unusual view than Sam and Nora. The atmosphere of *omertà* that so far has denied him insight is now seized as a comfortable veil beneath which to cover what his walk has clearly detected, along with his own intolerance, fear and conscience. It is significantly a barber and master of disguise who initiates him into the city's illusory practices, relying more on his rhetorical skills than his aesthetic taste as he reduces the self-controlled puritan to a self-indulgent Narcissus. Contemplating his new look in the aptly muddy water of the channels, the masked stranger waits for Tadzio to appear on the bridge above him; the

boy's reflection is superimposed onto his own, allowing a transient moment in which his perfect profile stands entirely at the voyeur's disposal. This moment of mediated aesthetic enjoyment launches the final phase of Aschebach's *flânerie* where Tadzio leads him into darker and narrower paths that tend to dislocate his pursuer from himself while reinforcing his destructive immersion into the cityscape. In the light of dusk, the boy's tiny and dark-dressed figure is perceived as a vignette that elides with the smoke-filled alleys, and it is just as much the apocalyptic city itself that leads him towards the most remote and deserted piazza where columns and a massive well offer a hiding-place and a much needed physical support for the wanderer's tired body. This scene, the last from the city centre, recalls a parallel episode in which he incidentally walks into an isolated piazza just when a similar well is being disinfected. The attempt to get an explanation for the pervading smell of illness from a street-vendor is met with a conspiratorial silence Aschenbach accepts without much insistence, and the encounter is less marked by their divergent interests than by some crucial similarities. In contrast to the grey, conservative outfit he wore upon arriving Venice, the blue linen suit he now wears is practically identical to that of the street-vendor, as is his straight-brimmed straw-hat, a visual trope that significantly associates them both with the stranger Mann's character saw in Munich. Thus, when he finally arrives at the centre of the deceptive urban labyrinth and falls down at the second well, white from layers of disinfection just like his white suit covers the contamination of age and forbidden desires, this appears as another stage in an ongoing process of familiarisation by which sensual external stimuli are no longer received as antagonistic shocks but as elements of identification and recognition. Inherent in this moment of juncture between his physical and mental *flânerie*, resides perhaps the major point of affinity between the stranger and Benjamin's *flâneur*, a

figure who prior to the commodification of the city and the transformation of inquisitiveness into surveillance, distinguished himself from the crowd for his aesthetic and bodily interaction with the cityscape. The tendency of this figure to infuse the city with its spirit while at the same time retaining a position of detachment to its life is, however, an ability Aschenbach does not possess. On the contrary, the delirious laughter over his last and fallacious orchestra performance effectuates a total adherence to the city's Apocalyptic nature, as well as to Alfred's sense for contaminated and ambiguous art.

Despite the errant interaction with spaces of the city, Aschenbach's *flânerie* does not achieve the aimlessness we have seen characterise the other male city-walkers in particular. What appears is rather its subconsciously intended direction, moving towards the Dionysian city along a *vis abdita* constructed from an inherent affinity between the stranger and the deteriorated urban labyrinth. A secretive, trans-national island physically reliant on pilings in the sand and culturally on faded economic and artistic fame (Ritter, 14), the Apocalyptic "concept-city is decaying" along with its physical structures, leaving a wider room-for-play for "the microbe-like, singular and plural practices which an urbanistic system was supposed to administer and suppress, but which have outlived its decay" (De Certeau, 95-6). Faced with an incarnation of the ambiguities and the form of beauty he has always denied, the stranger seizes the liminal state of the city as his life's only opportunity to engage in transgressive "pedestrian speech acts" (*Ibid.* 97). These spatial possibilities are associated with the "theatre-city" - a social formation that, as Lefebvre writes of Mediterranean cities, tends to become "the site of a vast scene-setting where [...] rhythms, codes and relations become visible and are acted out" (Lefebvre, *Writings*, 236). It is the culture of excess in deception and appearance, mediated by the sensation of mortal beauty,

that makes him seek refuge in the city's illusions and cover inherent processes of deterioration behind a mask of youth.

This physical congruence between cityscape and city-walker evokes a series of artists from Shakespeare and Goethe to Mann and Visconti themselves, who would associate with this theatre-city as a source for artistic inspiration. A part from Platen's fatal beauty, Aschenbach's trajectory also materialises the *liebstod* of Wagner's "Tristian und Isolde," an opera partly composed in Venice and that similarly treats the destructive force of non-realised desires (Heller, 109). What transformations take place in the traumatically self-constrained Nordic artist, incited by but not ultimately reliant on what after all remains a Platonic love, becomes clearer in comparison to similarly nihilistic characters of Visconti's German trilogy. It is not within the diabolical family relationships of *La caduta degli dei* (1969) nor in the insanities of a king trapped in the discrepancies between life and art in *Ludwig* (1972) that we find a counterpart to Aschenbach's fatal aestheticism, but in *Il Gattopardo* (1963) where the dignified Prince of Salina contemplates the end of his life and his class with the very same resignation to fate and premature desire for death. Where Don Fabrizio resigns to Sicily's age-long somnolence and refuses a role in the formation of Italy, Aschenbach chooses oblivion towards both his national formation and the career he came to save for a *liebstod* only the Dionysian city may offer. Shared between these two characters, inclined respectively towards the aridity of rural fields opposed to any form of improvement, and oppressive city streets contaminated by foreign plague, is in particular the agony over a miss-lived life of futile work and lost opportunities that as the present offers no means for modification.

Both aesthetes, the one convinced, the other reluctant, live the potentially reinvigorating force of the divine and uncorrupted Angelica and Tadzio as a

momentary sense of intoxicating vigor that however fails to produce a lasting effect other than to reinforce their longing for death with the “idea or rather the revelation that something arrives too late” (Deleuze, *The Time-Image*, 96). Conveyed through “crystal-images” that are “still present and already past,” this agonic sensation of irremediable loss is recurrent in Visconti and, according to Deleuze, the most important element of his cinema (*Ibid.* 78-9; 96). Achenbach’s exposure to young beauty is experienced sensually as a “shattering revelation” of what his cerebral work has lacked, whereas, as a “perceptible revelation,” this moment of inert too-lateness presents “the unity of nature and man, as world and milieu” (*Ibid.*, 96). If the passage from alienation and aversion to unity in destruction may be said to present a passage from *germanitas* to *latinitas*, a binarism which for Mann corresponded to Nietzsche’s distinction between the Apollonian rational control and Dionysian ecstatic sensuality (Bacon, 140-1), it is not as much a question of the stranger having “*become Italian*,” or of an original “de-Germanization” of the cinematic character that would have made him at home in the first place, as Testa writes of respectively Mann’s and Visconti’s *Aschenbach* (*Masters of Two Arts*, 187-91). Inherent in the inseparable relation between the “crystalline environment” and the “decomposition” that eats away at the character from within (Deleuze, *The Time-Image*, 94) there is rather a sense of identification between the stranger and his “double” - a “ghastly harbinger of death,” but also an entity that objectifies the ego, ultimately allowing a self-observation that brings the repressed at the level of conscience (Freud, 141-2). It is an existential rather than an intellectual or cultural sense of having come home that incites the physical and ultimately unmediated participation in the urban discourse.

4. 5 City of Voices

A drastic removal from the contemporary reality surrounding the city-walkers discussed thus far, Visconti's retreat to a fin-de-siècle Venice and to highly subjective experiences rests on a need to explore more private and particular matters neglected in the years of neorealism where the priority was dialogic exchange (Miccichè, "Un incontro ...," 124). Seen in light of the urban modernity portrayed in *La dolce vita* and *La notte*, however,⁷ a parallel that becomes even more apt if we relate the concern with *noia* to Visconti's conception of decadence as a "communal *taedium vitae*:" as the accumulation of symptoms suggesting a society exhausted and collapsing (Marrow, qtd. Galerstein, 29), *Morte a Venezia* no longer appears as a withdrawal from the present, but as a response of "mystic pessimism" to the culture of the "miracle" which in the late 1960's culminated in a state of social and political crisis (Aristarco, 137). In particular, the disillusion of 68' denied the viability of the Gramscian stance that characterised *La terra trema*, *Bellissima*, and *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (Aristarco, 138) which all raise questions of social injustice, the way Rossellini's *Roma città aperta*, *Paisà* and *Germania anno zero* and the more recent *Era notte a Roma* (1960) are defined by an overarching concern for everyday experiences of war and resistance. *Viaggio in Italia* shows a different approach to urban modernity than Rossellini's neorealist masterpieces, continuing the trend of his previous films with Ingrid Bergman, *Stromboli* (1949) and *Europa 51'* (1952), to let

⁷ Just like *Morte a Venezia*, these films may both be considered parts of trilogies on urban decay; *La dolce vita* being completed by *Satyricon* (1969) and *Roma* (1972) and *La notte* by *L'avventura* and *L'eclisse*.

the collective voice of a country in transition leave way for introspective visions with greater relevance to more universal dilemmas of life in modernity.

This change in direction of the one who for many was the father of neorealism was met with the same notions of betrayal of the neorealist credo (Gundle, 74) that some years later would evolve around Visconti's decadent turn and Fellini's increasing sense for spectacle and fantasy. The first to note both the thematic and aesthetic uniqueness of *Viaggio in Italia* was not surprisingly the group of French critics who in the mid-1950's gathered around the *Cahiers du Cinéma* embracing, like Jacques Rivette, Rossellini as "the most modern of filmmakers" and this film in particular as opening "a breach" through which all cinema will have to go (192). If Eric Rohmer - as enchanted by the magic three-dimensional imagery as he was distracted by its loose narrative structure - concedes to labelling the film "neorealist," it is because Rossellini himself saw in it a "purer and deeper" form of neorealism (205). It is a "bicycle-less neorealism" - the formal structure, loose and episodic, is still the voyage, but the quest is existential and it evolves around time, *le temps mort*, that works from within the characters who in becoming aware of themselves lose each other (Deleuze, *The Time-Image*, 23). If Rossellini reaches a new level of purity and depth, it is through the dominance of single, atmospheric elements - of the "facts" Bazin discerns as the unit of narration in *Paisà* (37) and that in *Viaggio in Italia* achieve an autonomous position and a direct relation to the character, forming an essentially "modern" narrative in which "nothing happens" (Bruno, *Atlas*, 397) and where the cinematic city appears both more fragmentary and more complete:

"it is a Naples as filtered as through the consciousness of the heroine. If the landscape is bare and confined, it is because the consciousness of an ordinary bourgeois itself suffers from great spiritual poverty. Nevertheless, the Naples of the film is not false

...It is rather a mental landscape at once as objective as a straight photograph and as subjective as pure personal consciousness. (Bazin, 98)

To judge from the leopard fur coat, the Bentley and the “Blue Guide” with which she arrives, this is not just some “ordinary bourgeoisie” but a representative of the English upper class embarking on this voyage with the entirely practical intention to sell an inherited house she and her husband Alex evidently have no interest in keeping, while also conducting some cultured and detached tourism. If her encounter with Naples instead comes to take on a mental quality, it is because of the impulses of these “facts” which, from the statues and the fossils exposing her to its past, to the ‘flux’ of its present street life, speak to a sense of loss and longing she becomes aware of only in exposure to the inherently foreign.

Bazin’s observation on the importance of Naples itself finds resonance in Ingrid Bergman’s recollections, presented in an 1974 interview with Robin Wood, of Rossellini as being directed towards a story that could incorporate “Pompeii and the museums and Naples and all that Naples stands for [...] for people in Naples are different from the people in Rome and Milan” (“Bergman on Rossellini,” 14). In line with this observation, Bruno observes how the film may be seen as an exploration in “topophilia” and a pretext to visualise the city’s architectonic view as well as its harsh physical features (*Atlas*, 369), and Laura Mulvey similarly writes that the primary function of the stranger’s journey is to lead the film towards the geographical and historical specificity of the Vesuvius: “Through Katherine’s sightseeing, Rossellini leads the film into Neapolitan culture and geology and opens up the story’s present to the presence of the past” (97). Whereas the initially uneasy wandering of this reserved and apparently equilibrated Londoner’s movement in estranging time and space sheds

light, by way of contrast, on the Mediterranean city as a drowsy, arid and scattered entity anchored to long-standing slumber, this noisy and sensually present world on the other hand makes the wanderer aware of her self as it incites reflection and stirs up emotions through immersion in the vast range of its temporal and spatial dimensions. This mutual effect of revelation presents a city where local and collective culture stands in opposition to the materialist individualism of the miracle, presenting a unique instance of the director's own "spiritual vitality" (Bazin, 99) as well as of the "vision, in humanistic or spiritual sense" that he sees lacking in postwar society (Shiel, 104). If this vision, ultimately, may be said to incarnate the film's neorealist legacy, the way it is lived by the troubled stranger who quietly observes and progressively absorbs it indicates the modernist quality of the film and, as an implication, the avant-garde potentials and inherently modern fundamentals of neorealism itself.

What Kathrine soon will realise is that an understanding for the foreign spirit requires solitary proximity to and an unbiased view of what in the exclusive Northern and Eurocentric mind tends to be viewed as a "non-Western Western city" (Bruno, *Atlas*, 373). The first impression she and Alex form as they approach Naples is that of a Dionysian entity of noisy people; crazy drivers and with a potential threat of malaria. The city that Benjamin strolled in the 1930's and saw as providing a locus for the deadly sin of "indolence" (*Naples*, 169) infuses Alex with drowsiness at a 100 km distance and makes him regret the productive time this "business trip" will cost, while he marvels over how well noise and boredom go together. Their starting point is thus very much the fear and aversion that Aschenbach showed towards Venice some 40 years earlier. Whereas the fin-du-siècle artist's intolerance to some extent appears as an appropriate response to what he lives as devilish, plague-ridden city, their

stereotypical preconceptions of the Southern Other show a subconscious need to protect both their Orientalist convictions of superiority over a world where buffalo herds and religious processions have the privilege to block the streets, as well as the idea of living a perfect life – illusions that start to deteriorate when they realise that after 8 years of marriage they still don't know who the other is:

Katherine: I realise for the first time that we are like strangers to each other. At home everything seems so perfect, but now that we are alone [...]

Alex: It's a strange discovery to make [...] Now that we are strangers we can start all over again at the beginning. Might be rather amusing, don't you think?

Rather than taking advantage of the uncanny situation of being on holiday with a stranger, however, they develop a mutual jealousy and detestation as they see each other behave unusually, far away from the metropolitan rhythms of London and ambivalently drawn towards the Southern *dolce far niente*. It is in their different reactions to and ways of engaging with the somnolent ambiance that make them feel equally estranged from each other as from the foreign city.

The impression that a latent distance and incomprehension is brought to the surface by their shared experience with geographical and cultural misplacement is reinforced by their confrontation the following morning. The sequence starts with a panoramic view over Naples' wide and encompassing bay before a cut leads into their apartment. Katherine approaches the window with nervous gestures and an anxious gaze that, instead of focusing on the enchanting atmosphere of the bay, is directed towards the street and to the ocean where the local morning routines are vigorously and audibly alive. Facing the alienating effect of the inscrutable morning quire, she retreats and starts brusquely to wake up Alex who, clearly less bothered by the noise

drifting through his window than what he lives as a poisoning “laziness,” must admit that Naples favours a good night’s sleep. He also recognises a discovery Katherine made in the bar the previous night: his interest for other women, and their tense dialogue stands in opposition to the vivacious off-screen soundtrack of fishermen’s singing in interference with loud local voices from the streets.⁸ The sound of Neapolitan song highlights their unease, worries and deadly silence from the very opening sequence, establishing a and the co-presence between the two modes of interaction – between sarcastic comments or spiteful silence and collective expressivity - that underscores the distance between them. Their audible impressions of Naples recalls Aschenbach’s silent and reluctant reception of the multilingual sound of Venice, with the difference that for them, the defused and physically untraceable “*ambient sound*” becomes a “*territory*” sound that serves to “identify a particular locale”(original emphasis, Chion, 71-3), drawing attention to the spaces from which the native voices emanate (Gelley, 162-3). As an accompanying humming chorus worthy of Puccini, the indexical quality of the constantly permeating urban discourse as originating in a specific time and space dramatises the strangers’ physical constant exposure to external audible and visual impulses they rationally dismiss but which instinctively they cannot resist.

⁸ See Peter Brunette, *Roberto Rossellini*, 161-164; and Ora Gelley, *Ingrid Bergman in Rossellini’s Italy: Stardom and the Politics of Neorealism*, 162-170; for explorations of the film’s use of sound and, in particular, the interaction between on-screen and off-screen voices.

4.6 Bodies of Beauty

Upon their arrival, Katherine and Alex do both face the foreign city in terms of its drowsy collective spirit and what they repeatedly refer to as “boredom” has all the characteristics of what Marcello and Lidia experience as *noia*: a sense of “nothingness” which separates them from each other while associating each of them with completely different manifestations of Mediterranean life. The two couples manifest remarkably similar ways of dealing with a marriage reduced to indifference or uneasy silences. Whereas Alex, like Giovanni, remains inert in relation to the immediate physical surroundings and withdraws from the flux of its streets for the oblivion offered by nocturnal social events and the temptation of an affair, Katherine embarks on an exploratory trajectory towards self-discovery that, like Aschenbach’s, is led by impressions of death and destruction. More than the passing of Uncle Homer whose very name seems to imply immortal afterimage, however, what incites her *flânerie* is the memory of Charles Lewington who used to love her in vain the way Tommaso suffered over Lidia’s ungratefulness. His lasting impact on her is something the sarcastic Alex has occasion to observe when she leaves for the Museo Archeologico Nazionale which Charles had described as a “Temple of the Spirit,” manifesting a poet’s understanding for the enduringly romantic necropolis that the rational and contained Alex certainly does not possess. He fills Katherine with anger, as he often will in the days to come, when she drives out to the museum, and it is her aversion to his insensitivity in combination with the desire to explore spaces invested with Charles’ presence, that initially motivates her confrontation with the city’s most remote and threatening spheres.

The idea of the journey as the overarching motif for an episodic and simultaneously contemplative urban narrative works, as Mulvey has shown, along the lines of a dual trajectory where the tangible movement in time and space dramatises the risks involved in leaving homely safety, while beneath it, there runs a metaphorical trajectory through “the space of transformative experience” (47). *Viaggio in Italia* may, like Fellini’s *La Strada* (1954), be said to reflect the emergence in the 1950’s of leisure as an individualised phenomena, insofar as this tended to be anchored to new commodities such as the Vespa and the Fiat and therefore find its eminent expression in travelling (Torraglia, 118). Even more decisive is however the voice given to shadow-lands of antique as well as lived culture and tradition in a time when official discourses tended to centre around industrialised urban centres in the North. Katherine’s physical journey may as such be said to lead the film’s neorealist legacy towards a modern sensibility, a passage that her mental journey completes when, towards the end, it sees her in unhomely confrontation with Naples’ cycle of life and death. Her *flânerie* moves as closely along Dystopian stimuli and involves just as much of an immersion into the Italian cityscape as that of Aschenbach, but she is able where he is not to turn alienating stimuli into a constructive force with which to critically approach her own present and that of the Other. It is still an anxious stranger who leaves the vivacious, Dionysian “chorus” around the villa to be lead back in time in the museum, but what she there eventually will recognise as Apollonian beauty enables her also to appreciate the languid ways of the “effective” city. A series of sculptures featuring historical and mythological figures from Roman and Greek antiquity, (“MANN”, “*La scultura ...*”), it is the haunting and sensually appealing Farnese collection that initiates the formation of the voyeur.

Both the thematics of estranging physical impressions and the visual construction establish principles for further visualisation of the passage she undergoes from alienated and superior stranger to mentally searching *flâneuse*. Extensive pans locate the cinematic gaze to a source external to and above the character and work to capture her astonished reception of the sculptures' perfection and overwhelming proportions (Mulvey, 103-4). Within these bodily manifestations of mythic presence, "the female tourist [...] discovers something unbearable, beyond the limit of what she can personally bear. This is the cinema of the viewer and no longer of the agent" (Deleuze, *The Time-Image*, 2). If the French nouvelle vague embraced *Viaggio in Italia* as the ultimate modern film, it was precisely for the way this "simple unfolding of images" (*Ibid.*, 2) privileges the wanderer's gaze as an index of her inner re-actions to a foreign world. As the very basis for a series of "time-images," the statues transfix the visitor by encouraging a range of different sensations: some of them incite aversion and make her turn away, whereas others intrigue her sense for the marvellous. When she eventually finds herself right below the gigantic Hercules, the most elevated and anatomically elaborated of them all, she no longer seeks distance or a perspective through which to create a veil of modesty the statue simply does not possess. Rather, looking straight ahead, she cannot but acknowledge the wonder of its physical expressivity.

In contrast to Charles who had perceived of these bodies as "pure ascetic images," to her, the imposingly physical recreations of mad emperors and promiscuous Venuses all have a sensual presence that, at a point when she is still unable to realise the liberating impact they will have on her, threatens and disturbs in their complete lack of modesty. The first of the 5 sites she include in her trajectory, her "pilgrimage" to the museum might be motivated by a desire to trace Charles's steps, but its significance to her

flânerie resides in the way it physically and metaphorically opens her eyes to the spirit of the city and to previously unacknowledged sensual impressions. As alluded to both from her frigid attitude to Alex and her initially restrained approach to sensual manifestations of Mediterranean culture, Katherine's everyday life evolves around Apollonian virtues of balance and resistance, which, albeit less rigidly assimilated than Aschenbach's systematic moral and artistic convictions, nevertheless must be overcome through a form of initiation into what estranges her. It is however not merely the nakedness of the statues that confronts her with the aesthete within her, but also their indexical quality as incarnations of historical and mythical characters who, in return, invest their present physical manifestation with past life and communicative force. There are several crucial affinities between Katherine's encounter with the vitality of "sculpted flesh" (Bruno, 389) and Aschenbach's vision of Tadzio, but her discoveries escape the intensely agonic quality of his illicit passions since the sensual reactions they awake in her are all highly legitimate and in fact encouraged within the culture in which they take place.

Katherine's exposure to and reception of estranging external impulses implies both a potential for a new self-awareness, and an external discovery that embraces Naples's contemporary life along with its history and cultural heritage. Her intensely visual assimilation of the present and "effective" city is largely rendered through fragments from the trajectories she conducts through the city centre in order to arrive at the various archaeological sites. The external perspective of these vignettes reflect her reception of what unfolds as a string of contradictory urban impressions. A priest and some nuns are juxtaposed to political messages, whereas a funeral procession appears in opposition to a continuous swarm of mothers, children, and loving couples, creating, as Mulvey has shown, montage sequences that present the urban flux

through binarisms of religion and politics, birth and death (103). While the recurrent view of pregnant women has an extraordinary immediate impact on her, reminding her of what her life is lacking, the true significance of these impressions lies in their cumulative effect as a materialisation of the omnipresent chorus she has started to familiarise with as an integral part of the apparently unfamiliar and estranging moments when she is torn between frustration over her personal life and satisfaction over her new discoveries may be accompanied by off-screen Neapolitan song, as it happens when she climbs the temple of Apollo, and later, when she sits alone at the terrace waiting for Alex to return from Capri. In this particular moment, the song deals with her very feeling of “gelosia,” but rather than causing despair over what she knows has reached its end, the tender and nostalgic voice incites her to enjoy what the atmosphere offers of lazy indolence.

The association with the romantic Dionysian city in its spaces and voices and inherent contradictions requires solitude and time for introspection and only when the *flâneuse* is left alone can she fully liberate herself from the rhythms of her usual life and from Alex’s rationalism. Bored and frustrated and with no understanding for her contemplation, he prefers to avoid the challenge of confronting both marital troubles and an inscrutable foreign reality. Katherine not only faces these challenges, but she also knows to turn the situation of a cultivated but misplaced foreigner into an act of *flânerie*. Although her discovery of Naples’ street life is conducted by car and thus with less immediacy than what she establishes to Naples’ ground and its ancient past, the unique position this offers for unobserved observation enables her to select and objectify “facts” as they appear, thereby assimilating and reflecting on the city’s particularities and on a modernity so different from her own. Observing the urban flux from the *flâneur*’s position on the margins, the pleasure she draws from it makes her

overcome anxiety and destructive isolation, inspiring instead the antique practice of *otium* - a form of “leisurely existence” that, as Bruno shows, relies on stimuli from the “*genius loci*,” as it allows to “move across the centuries” and let both gaze and thoughts wander (original italics, *Atlas of Emotion*, 387).

If the museum confronted the stranger with physical presences that mobilise her gaze around testimonies of antique Roman grandeur, the cave of the Cumaean Sibyl presents her with myth and the void of human absence. There are no bodily testimonies to the guide’s stories of love and attacks, conveyed matter-of-factly and without concern for what effect they may have on foreign visitors. Instead, the ceiled passageway transforms his voice into an eco that, as it unfolds through the ancient sanctuary, seems to bring forth the absent-presence of the epochs and lives that have traversed it. Evoking a range of cultures, from the oldest of the Greek settlements through the decline of the Empire and the dominance of Christian and subsequently Saracen powers (Mulvey, 105), up to the recent arrival of the Allies among whom was Charles, the cave constitutes in itself a dialectical constellation that now interacts with and reinforces Katherine’s visualisation of a complex and impressionistic city centre. The story of the cave’s women – in particular the Sibyl herself, “a ‘modern’ woman ante litteram, ‘found of travelling’” (Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 379) – becomes therefore the most significant aspect of this particular site, encapsulating the femininity she discerns within the streets with decisive results for her formation as a *flâneuse*. As we have seen in relation to the other female city-walkers, this process of coming-to-awareness implies a new way of seeing and a desire to affirm her gaze vis-à-vis unfamiliar urban impressions, including a liberation from male gazes and forces, whether it is Alex’s arrogance and consistent failure to appreciate her views, or the Southern male gaze that objectifies her Nordic features.

Katharine's claim to subjectivity and to an autonomous interaction with the external world is dramatised when the guide at the Cumaean Sibyl takes a hold of her body to demonstrate, as he expresses it, the Saracens' method of captivating beauties like herself. She sets off in a mixed feeling of surprise, horror and anger and seeks the solitary Temple of Apollo where she quietly scorns the silly old idiot for being just like any other man. Something may however be said for this inappropriate comparison in that it points the juncture she forms between the cave's women and those in the streets. In all of them, she can recognise something of herself, from the Sybil who rejected Apollo but gave him eternal life, to the ones who later would come there to ask the Sybil of the course of their love and the modern women who display the vitality she desires. If it is here that she first faces the end of her marriage, it is also here that she understands the significance of Charles' 'Temple of the Spirit,' and the combination of tracing his steps and of associating with the tragic fate of women from a far-away past create an unhomely sensation of presences that collide within her, in disregard of temporal and cultural boundaries. While the episode of layered discoveries has an immediate disquieting effect on her, it proves crucial in establishing a physical and existential proximity to the spaces she entered as a stranger and that she now realises presents traces of a more universal human and, in particular, female history - including her own.

4.7 Dialectics of *Flânerie*: Unhomely Revitality

The ability to associate with a realm of estranging natural and human forces, both more complex and welcoming than she has not predicted, is conveyed by way of contrast to intercut scenes from Capri where Alex vainly pursues a love affair and

realises that he is just as bored as when he left. In his absence, Katherine learns how to turn solitude into open-minded reflection, and what he dismisses as “love-pilgrimages” and “utter senseless” becomes for her transcultural and transhistoric encounters with a city that by inspiring her senses provokes her participation in the urban discourse. This exchange of stimuli stands at the centre of her expedition to the sulphurous fields where vapours brought to the surface through processes of ionisation speak to her from the very heart of the soil. To photograph the manifestation of boiling ground expresses a voyeuristic reception of stimuli, conveying the function of her gaze in establishing proximity to the estranging territory. However, the volcanic forces also allow a passageway to the core of the city where incomprehensible voices and bodily presences find origin and return, in a circular mode of creation and recreation. That this Dionysian formation and locus of idleness ultimately will be discovered and lived as a place where death is omnipresent and never definite, is anticipated by Uncle Homer and Charles who haunt the wanderer from before she arrives. It is however not until her Neapolitan housekeeper Natalia takes her to the Fontanelle catacombs which houses skeletons from ancient sanctuaries, that she sees the counterpart to the Southern vivacity. This is not a prominent tourist attraction, but a spiritual site where Neapolitans go to care and pray for the skulls of strangers, a practice Katherine finds incomprehensible until she is able to see and hear it for herself. The morbid selection put on unrestrained display demonstrate a spirituality that seems to naturalise the consolation inherent in a deceased stranger and to incite an acceptance, so opposed to her Protestant self, of death as a stage of life’s circle.

This display of a what in Kathrine’s Northern mindset would present the most bizarre of Neapolitan practices emphasise the inner transformations she has undergone to

arrive at the moment in which inscrutable ideas of death and notions of life as endless continuity is met with spiritual intuition and search for further proximity rather than the mode of reasoning she is used to. Beside the impact these impressions have on the voyeur capable of interacting constructively with parallel manifestations of decay and beauty, the episode's cultural significance lies in the portrayal of a practice developed among Neapolitans who during World War II would seek refuge from bombardments in these catacombs. In compensation for sons and brothers lost overseas, leaving behind no grave nor tomb, they would adopt a skull to take care of the way Natalia does. Rossellini in explaining the practice, as foreign to him as it is to Katherine, noted how "Quei crani svolgevano per loro, di fronte a Dio, lo stesso ruolo di intermediari che svolgono attualmente i satelliti nella comunicazione intercontinentale. Erano satelliti d'amore" (Rossellini, 63).⁹ Having identified death as a mode of contact and a source for human and spiritual love, the Dionysian city that opens Katherine's eyes to centuries of life differs radically from the one to which Aschenbach surrenders some forty years earlier. They both engage the strangers by inciting their neglected sensual life and make room for their search for something familiar to hold onto. However, whereas Venice sinks in sand, Naples explodes from volcanic emissions; and where the former conceals its decay, the latter puts it on display, and expands on it and forces to see the value of destruction not as the escape from loss and disintegration, but as something transient and re-creative wherein to search for passageways to the vitality of the *genius loci* itself.

This interaction between the discovering *flâneuse* and the city's volcanic ground culminates in the excursion to Pompeii, her last discovery and the only one that

⁹ "These skulls occupied the same position for them as mediators vis-à-vis God that satellites occupy today in intercontinental communication. They were satellites of love."

engages Alex as well. Far from being a “love pilgrimage,” they have just articulated their mutual intolerance by declaring divorce and none of them would have gone to the notorious city of ruins were it not for the insistence of Toni who has assimilated his wife Natalia’s sense for morbid spectacle. To see the bodily forms of ancient people as they were struck by Vesuvius’ deadly powers is in his view a lifetime occasion. For others, the idea of being mistakenly buried alive might, as Freud noted, in fact present “the most uncanny thing of all”(148). And uncanny this view is, albeit for slightly different reasons, in the view of a wanderer who in the course of a few days away from the homely protection of continuous, predictable stimuli, has started to assimilate the continuous presence of antique and physically manifested vitality. What Katherine sees when the recreations of a male and a female body emerge is more than a testimony of ancient life and of a love that was perhaps more passionate and understanding than her own. A description from Wilhelm Jensen’s *Gradiva: A Pompeiiian Fancy* (1903) proves astonishingly apt to capture her view: the city of Pompeii assumed an entirely changed appearance, but not a living one; it now appeared rather to become completely petrified in dead immobility. Yet out of it stirred a feeling that death was beginning to talk. (qtd. Vidler, 45).

In commenting on this passage, Anthony Vidler shows that what makes Pompeii so particularly unhomely compared to the antique cities of Egypt and Troy is the way the burial not only “buried alive,” but also left intact signs of the city’s everyday life, allowing for future times to observe and live its domesticity (45). It is the unforeseen relation of immediacy to past existence that instantaneously merges with the *flâneuse*’s own life, enabling a sensual participation in century-long love and agony, that makes the view “too much” for the character-viewer. Lived as fleeting

perception, what appears when the deadly talks from the moment of destruction is an “image flashing up in the now of its recognizability” (AP, 473); a “dialectical-image” wherein “what has been comes together with the now to form a constellation:”

For while the relation of the present to the past is purely temporal, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: not temporal in nature, but figural, ‘*bildlich*’. (AP, 462).

The bodily constellation of life caught by death creates the shock of *Erlebnis*; of lived experience which more than imposing Dionysian views of past reality offers sensations of lived time, of the flux of life, which, against the laws of “ephemerality,” finds itself frozen in a technically impossible possibility to feel, and recognise, the moment (Charney, 284). The series of “flashing” impressions Katherine has received and assimilated throughout her journey – alienating, astonishing or intriguing, but ultimately all illuminating – culminate in this final dialectical constellation; “a pure optical image” that opens “up to powerful and direct revelations” (Deleuze, *The Time-Image*, 23) bringing the viewer to a state of crisis as the physical manifestation of life’s continuity inevitably also becomes a testimony to its brevity.

Haunted and profoundly distressed by this immediacy to the ancient city, and its continuous recreation through the enigma of imposing presence and life still to be uncovered, Katherine’s sudden haste to get away is not as much a reaction to sensations of external deterioration, as to internal disruptions; to the breakdown of her marriage which at least provided a social form of a certain mode of life. Alex, who cannot but admit the excavation’s impact on him while emphasising the importance of maintaining social appearance, has clearly not assimilated their profound significance. To her observation that “life is too short” he can only suggest a *carpe diem* mentality,

insensitive to her awareness of having come too late, of having missed out of chances to live and see differently, observing the senses more than the sensible. At this point, the journey towards the very core of the city that more than any is dead seems, metaphorically, to take on the fatality of Aschenbach's. Like him, Katherine finds her counterpart in the aesthete and her journey serves to awaken a hidden sensuality, enabling her to turn the encounter with alienating urban life into a bodily experience and live what we may call the very *flâneur*-gestalt (Kjellen, 85). Their cities are consequently more intensely visualised than those where the city-walker remain more detached, be it as a result of exclusion or alienation. However, as both her voyage and *flânerie* culminate in a death that infuses her own chaotic present with an unknown past that still speaks in its vitality, she also faces Aschenbach's dilemma of seeing no return to her old life, while at the same time being unable to start something new.

It is by pure accident, or by a miracle Alex certainly does not believe in, that Neapolitans gathered around the celebration of their patron saint, San Gennaro, come to their rescue. The gathering blocks the only road available for their return from Pompei; the childish irrationality of the collective call for miracle annoys him; and all Katherine can think of at the end of her journey is to make sure he does not hate her after all. That is when she is caught by the forces of the crowd, the waves of the processes lifts her up and carries her away from him and leaves him no time to reflect, merely to act. If there is a "movement -image" at all in this ultimate modern film this is the one, when he sets off to liberate her from the masses and they embrace without consideration for what they have just determined, nor for what in any effect it will come to have. The moment of reconciliation is embedded within "the transient, the fleeting, the contingent" of the urban flux and of a given urban modernity (Baudelaire, "The Painter ...," 402-3) in a deliberate refusal to provide a resolution to the marital

conflict of the two strangers. Instead, what the film aims to do when the camera finally moves away from the embracing couple to pursue instead the movements of the crowd, is to direct the spectator's attention towards life that unfolds between them as an effect of forces around them, ultimately giving privileged voice and form to the city that she has visualised and that continues to live, in and beyond the powers of her gaze.

“Struggle, indifference, loss of purpose and loss of meaning [...] a common interpretation of the new scientific worldview - have found, in the city, a habitation and a name. For the city is not only [...] a form of modern life; it is the physical embodiment of a decisive modern consciousness.”

Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*

CONCLUSION

As an expression of experiences with urban modernity, the cinematic city that develops and assumes such an omnipresence within Italian postwar cinema as to be considered emblematic, if not equated, with it, rests on a fundamental contradiction with regard to cinema and the modern. Whether it be in the form of the swarming crowd of Antonio's Rome or architectural and technological inventions in Lidia's Milan, or the estranging sounds of the Other in Katherine's Naples, the urban flow of life is constantly within its texture, affirming the idea of a mutual relation of dependences between the moving image and the city. However, if these cinematic cities appear to be founded in part on “physical existence in its endlessness” (Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 71), they are constructed from the type of situations that are lived purely through their visual or audible qualities and that “give rise to a seeing function, at once fantasy and report, criticism and compassion” but that do not extend into or indeed evolve from action (Deleuze, *The Time Image*, 18). The contradiction in the cinematic city between motion and stasis has root in the viewer who in the encounter with the modern flux learns to see but not to act. In fact, none of the city-walkers we have encountered are agents – not even the two detectives who attempt to react to threatening stimuli but are deceived, precisely because of their failing vision –

and what distinguishes them from each other is the degree to which their new way of seeing evolves into reflection with a potential for lasting inner growth.

From the previous analysis of these viewers and city-walkers who each in their own way become carriers of the modern consciousness, several conclusions may be drawn that involve both the analytical applicability of Benjamin's urban theories and some limits associated with it. The fact that the figure of the stranger which escapes his typology is the one who comes closest to activate the classic *flâneur's* physically aesthetic experiences, implies that this form of sensual immersion into the streets does not require an expert's knowledge of the city. Rather, the use even of a given city's most intimate pedestrian speech acts may be incited by the uncertainties of being away from home and of finding oneself ambivalently alienated from and drawn towards the foreign cityscape. On the other hand, the native wanderers all possess characteristics of the stranger, in particular their liminality and their tendency to manifest themselves through "unity of nearness and remoteness" (Simmel, "The Stranger ..." 402), where remoteness, both from spatial and social constituents of the cityscape, often is what limits the scope and vision of their *flânerie*. Displacement, whether physical, existential or cultural, is no less an aspect of Antonio and Marcello's walks than it is of Sam's and Aschenbach's odysseys through foreign city streets. All these wanderers give dramatic form to the sensation Benjamin's *flâneur* increasingly came to develop of being isolated within the crowd and possessed *by* rather than being in possession *of* the city (Ferguson 38).

Remoteness is, however, not necessarily a negative experience, it may on the contrary mobilise the gaze and allow processes of reflection that the distraction involved in an uncritical and conformist immersion into the urban flux would exclude. That the typically modern sensations of alienation and estrangement may be faced as a

source for self awareness and a repositioning of self within the cityscape leads to the other figure systematically excluded in Benjamin - the *flâneuse* – who, as a viewer and projector of the city makes herself considerably more visible than her male counterpart. The one who creates a place from which to look and reflect, on the self and on the Other, is precisely the one who for so long was excluded from the streets. What in particular distinguishes the *flâneuse* from the *flâneur* is the ability to navigate amidst antagonistic stimuli and overcome an initial stage of alienation through acts of recognition. While Cabiria and Nora transgress into exclusive social or gendered spheres, Lidia and Katherine move between the city’s past and present, establishing a relationship of physical and visual proximity to spaces that, as they lead into others’ times and others’ lives, enable them to locate the homely within the unhomely or the Self within the Other.

For Benjamin’s *flâneur*, to see himself forced to privatise and withdraw his wandering into the interiors of the city and of the self constituted a constraint upon his nature and existence (Ferguson 38), whereas for the *flâneuses* who come to life in these films, to establish “a room of her own” opens up the potential for transgressive pedestrian speech acts available but hidden often by the structures and workings of the concept-city (De Certeau, 95-9). The role female characters assume in the diegetic urban discourse and the discursive function they are granted in these urban narratives illustrate what Gian Piero Brunetta observes regarding “le modificazioni strutturali e la centralità della donna e del suo farsi parte integrante del paesaggio italiano nel cinema del dopoguerra” (Brunetta, “Introduzione,” 5).¹ This affinity between character and space shows how postwar film, in foregrounding the city as the locus for radical social and cultural changes, comes to invent a new character and more specifically

¹ “the structural modifications and the centrality of the woman and of her establishment as an integral part of the Italian landscape in postwar cinema.”

how the experience of modernity for women is lived through access to previously forbidden male spheres that become synonymous with the recently conquered right to look and to move. This is arguably the major reason why the female wanderers are able to restore the inherently mental quality of *flânerie*, engaging in *otium* and investing even the most hostile spaces with life in ways that their male counterparts rarely do. Faced with the reality of having to share his habitat without being able to activate any means by which to effectuate a definite separation from the past, the *flâneur* remains inert, unable not only to act, but also to reflect with any consequence and make the exposure to the estranging and alienating have a lasting impact on his inner self. Only one of the male wanderers lets the city have a decisive impact on his inner self as it confronts him with something so familiar as it can no longer be repressed, but Aschenbach fails to merge the Other with the Self in ways that do not ultimately lead to his destruction.

The decaying and decadent artist's trajectory is also the only one that leaves no ambiguities, categorically excluding every possibility for a constructive reconciliation with self and the world into whose decay he submerges himself. The other wanderers all leave the screen without bringing a closure to their walks - this goes for the *flâneuses* as well, for while they have taken a decisive step into and established a relation of affinity with the spaces and ambiances of modernity, they are not exempted from the great ambivalence these spheres present. Contrary to what Pierre Sorlin writes, it seems questionable that Antonio, "will succeed because Rome is changing," (*European Cinemas*, 124), but the final images we are left with of the *flâneuses* are no less disconcerting. Whether Lidia and Katherine will move on or continue to live in their dysfunctional marriages is as unclear as whether Cabiria will undergo a liberation from the *borgata* and whether Nora will be able to re-claim her

inquisitive and objectifying gaze and re-enter the “effective” city. More so than the male characters, the women demonstrate how the urban kaleidoscope offers new and subjective ways of seeing without however providing reassuring modes of interaction in either private or public spheres. Once she has made a claim to subjectivity and to an active presence within the city, the *flâneuse* knows how to make herself visible and becomes more determined in her movements than the irresolute *flâneur*, albeit she fails, like him, in the final result to manifest herself as an agent and act decisively towards the future.

The ambivalent qualities of the city as a *habitus* for searching strollers along streets of modernity are dramatised through a discrepancy between their individual experiences and those of the crowd – an entity that here is understood in the broadest sense as the official, concept-city or the social ambiance with which the characters engage but to which they do not existentially or emotionally belong. At stake would be the loss of communication and an inability in the modern subject to adjust to society, but more disquieting still are the questions that can be raised around the city as civilisation, a connection that in postwar Italy seems to be reduced to its etymological roots. If the city, as the urban architect Aldo Rossi writes, “è il ‘locus’ della memoria collettiva”² (178) so much more disconcerting is it to see and to live the spirit of civilisation as exclusively *memory*; as something that may be *erlebt* dialectically, as shocks, as moments during which the past comes together with the present. For both the *flânerus* and the *flâneuses*, this spirit is experienced as absent, or, as in Katherine’s case, it exists, but it fails to involve the solitary wanderer. The great paradox of the modern city is, as Raymond Williams observes, that “the very place and agency – or so it would seem – of collective consciousness” (215) presents,

² “the locus of collective memory.”

instead, an “excessive subjectivity” (*ibid.*) through which cities are lived and visualised by errant wanderers displaced to the margins.

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